



# **Education, Social Cohesion and Anomie**

**Investigating the Dialectic Twist of Social Cohesion  
in the Sri Lankan Education System**

**Rüdiger Blumör, Malathi de Alwis  
and Stefanie Licht**

**February 2019**

**Study Series No 11- 2019**

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# Foreword

This paper examines Basic Social Services and Social Cohesion from an in-depth perspective of CEPA's own research, advocacy and policy. The services assessed under 'basic services' include education, health, transport, social protection, water, and waste treatment. These are evaluated in terms of access, quality, experience and outcomes. Inequality in accessing essential services is indeed a violation of rights of the people. CEPA defines 'social cohesion' as an essential requisite that keeps society from falling apart, reducing disparities in wealth and income and empowerment of people by creating a sense that they are engaged in a community enterprise as equal members.

The papers compiled in this publication, supported by GIZ, provide insights and lessons learnt in formulating and implementing policy reform especially in education. They demonstrate the intimate link between education, basic services and social cohesion filling a lacuna left unaddressed in this area.

CEPA believes that this publication will help sensitise and enhance the capacity of stakeholders in the service delivery sector to critically engage with issues specific to the region, and to develop a clear grasp of root causes that need to be addressed. It is hoped that this publication will help develop stronger policy prescriptions that will serve the goal of poverty eradication, as a part of the multi-faceted programs of CEPA.

February 2019,  
Centre for Poverty Analysis

# Preface

Since 2005, the German Development Cooperation supported the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka in the development and implementation of the national policy on education for social cohesion and peace. The Education for Social Cohesion Programme is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). In the past four, respective three years, we have assisted in our capacities as team leader (Rüdiger Blumör) and monitoring officer (Stefanie Licht). While trying to find ways to strengthen social cohesion through and within the education system we realised that potential negative aspects have to be considered as well – namely anomie. Malathi de Alwis joined us as a consultant and provided helpful insights. The Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) supported the editing of this publication, as the think tank has been working extensively on social cohesion and the provision of basic services, such as education. Together, we present four papers on school networks, monitoring social cohesion in schools, the relationship between education and suicide, and student wellbeing which are loosely connected by this dialectical twist of social cohesion and anomie. It does not come as a surprise that our perspective is determined by the practical field of development cooperation and informed by its requirements.

In recent years, the term “social cohesion” has become popular within the international development community. Education has been identified as a potentially important policy lever for enhancing social cohesion. In the paper on school development and school networks we argue that school networks can address educational challenges regarding social cohesion. Based on a brief analysis of education in Sri Lanka and the country’s experience with the introduction and abrupt discontinuation of school clusters in the early 1980s, Blumör and Licht review international research on school networks and discuss relevant concepts for stimulating and diffusing social innovations. A conceptual framework for the diffusion of innovative social behaviour based on interventions promoting social cohesion in the education sector in Sri Lanka is presented. Some preliminary experience with school networks illustrate the concept and put social innovation into context. The school networks provide the space for actors to prove and diffuse innovative cooperative behaviours regarding social cohesion.

The second paper brings monitoring education for social cohesion into the focus. Measuring effects of school activities that allegedly enhance social cohesion is a challenging, yet, feasible task. To acknowledge the strong context-dependency and the specific school setting in deeply divided societies Blumör and Licht do not ask which generic features make an activity contributing to social cohesion, as this depends on the way activities are implemented. Instead, they put student’s experiences at the center of the monitoring, by asking: How do students perceive educational interventions which claim to enhance social cohesion in their schools? To answer this question a conceptual framework for a monitoring initiative is introduced and presented: the social cohesion radar. The authors present and discuss findings from the radar, reflect on the applied monitoring method and discuss lessons learned for development cooperation.

A recommendation of the second paper on the investigation of anomie in the education sector leads over to the third paper that serves the purpose of outlining an eligible study on the presumed link between education, schooling, and suicidal behaviour. Twenty years ago, Sri Lanka was among the countries with the highest suicide rates worldwide. Since then, the suicide rates have decreased, but remain at a level that the World Health Organisation still considers “high”. Blumör and Licht explore the trends of suicide rates in Sri Lanka, the patterns of suicidal behaviour and causes for suicides and acts of self-harm. Durkheim’s theory of anomie and suicide and Merton’s theory of anomie and deviant behaviour serve as analytical guides.

Based on this third paper de Alwis analyses the scholarly literature on student wellbeing in Sri Lanka. Interest in student wellbeing has been increasing in light of mounting evidence that a large percentage of Sri Lanka’s adolescent population is self-harming or attempting suicide with a significant proportion of such acts being fatal. The paper begins by exploring some key concepts such as wellbeing, mental health, suicide and self-harm. The analysis will focus on a variety of risk factors unique to students who self-harm as well as certain forms of learned behaviour. A selection of policy measures and their repercussions will be discussed. Further, de Alwis reflects on lessons learned and re-iterates some key-arguments. An extensive bibliography on the topic is also provided.

These four topics indicate that the papers are by no means reports or statement of accounts as they are usually presented by the commissioned agent to the client. Although, we present lessons learned, the papers do not intend to provide justifications of the agreed project purpose. They do not fulfil the requirements of formal reports. Instead, they are reflections on four identified topics with relevance for development cooperation in the education sector in conflict and post-conflict contexts, including flight and migration as these became more and more significant in recent years.

We take Jürgen Osterhammel's advice from his essay "The Altitude of the Eagles"<sup>1</sup> and affirm the eagle as our preferred companion, because of its ability for macro and microscopy. From its altitude, the eagle is able to keep an overview, while at the same time, spotting details on the ground. Nevertheless, Icarus' fate makes us cautious. We entrust the reader to decide if we do justice to our model and balance oversight and insight without high spirits. If colleagues who are engaged in development cooperation are inspired in their work, and if readers are stimulated for continued thinking the papers' purpose is served.

The opinions expressed in this paper are the authors' own and do not reflect the view of GIZ. We thank Shanthi Thambiah and Monica Alfred for the administration of the questionnaire as well as conducting, recording and translating the interviews (see paper two on monitoring). Lennart Bendfeldt-Huthmann, Lynn Davies, Rainer Lehmann, Angela W. Little and Alan Smith provided helpful comments on first drafts of some of the papers, for which they deserve our particular gratitude. Thanks are due to CEPA and its director, Udan Fernando for publishing the papers.

Colombo, February 2019  
Rüdiger Blumör, Malathi de Alwis and Stefanie Licht

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1 Jürgen Osterhammel (2017), Die Flughöhe der Adler. Historische Essays zur Globalen Gegenwart, C.H. Beck München



# පෙරවදන

සමාජ ඒකාබද්ධතාව හා සාමය සඳහා අධ්‍යාපනය පිළිබඳ ජාතික ප්‍රතිපත්තිය වර්ධනය කිරීමට හා ක්‍රියාත්මක කිරීමට 2005 වසරේ සිට ජර්මානු සංවර්ධන සහයෝගීතා ආයතනය ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ අධ්‍යාපන අමාත්‍යාංශයට සහාය වෙයි. සමාජ ඒකාබද්ධතාව සඳහා අධ්‍යාපනය වැඩසටහන ක්‍රියාත්මක කරනු ලබන්නේ ජර්මානු ගෙඩරල් ආර්ථික සහයෝගීතා හා සංවර්ධන අමාත්‍යාංශය වෙනුවෙන් Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) විසිනි. අප කණ්ඩායම් නායක රුඩ්ගර් බ්ලොමර් හා නිරීක්ෂණ නිලධාරී ස්ටෙෆානි ලයිට් පසුගිය වසර හතර ඇතුළතදී එම ක්‍රියාවලියට අවශ්‍ය සහයෝගය ලබාදී ඇත. මාලනී ද අල්විස් ඉතා වැදගත් හා අර්ථනාමික අදහස් ඉදිරිපත් කරමින් මෙහි දී උපදේශකවරයක ලෙස කටයුතු කළා ය. සමාජ ඒකාබද්ධතාව සම්බන්ධයෙන් සහ අධ්‍යාපනය වැනි මූලික සේවාවන් සම්පාදනය කිරීම සම්බන්ධයෙන් ද පුළුල් මට්ටමකින් කටයුතු කරන බුද්ධිමතුන් කණ්ඩායමක් වන දරිද්‍රතා විශ්ලේෂණ කේන්ද්‍රය (CEPA) මෙම ප්‍රකාශනය සංස්කරණය කිරීමටත් මුද්‍රණය කිරීමටත් සහාය විය.

මෑත වසරවල දී “සමාජ ඒකාබද්ධතාව” යන යෙදුම ජාත්‍යන්තර සංවර්ධන ප්‍රජාව අතර ජනප්‍රිය විය. අධ්‍යාපනය සමාජ ඒකාබද්ධතාව වැඩි දියුණු කිරීම සඳහා වැදගත් විය හැකි වැදගත් ප්‍රතිපත්තිමය කරුණක් ලෙස හඳුනා ගෙන ඇත. පාසල් සංවර්ධනය හා පාසල් ජාල පිළිබඳ ලියවිල්ලේ දී අපි පාසල් ජාලවලට සමාජ ඒකාබද්ධතාව ආශ්‍රිත අධ්‍යාපන අභියෝගයන්ට විසඳුම් ලබා දිය හැකි බවට තර්ක කරමු. ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ අධ්‍යාපනය සහ 1980 ගණන් මුල දී පොකුරු පාසල් හඳුන්වා දීමත් ඒවා අනපේක්ෂිත ලෙස අත්හිටුවනු ලැබීමත් සම්බන්ධයෙන් රට ලබා ඇති අත්දැකීම් පිළිබඳව කරනු ලබන කෙටි විශ්ලේෂණයක් පදනම් කර ගන්නා බ්ලොමර් සහ ලයිට් පාසල් ජාල පිළිබඳ ජාත්‍යන්තර පර්යේෂණ සමාලෝචනය කරන අතර සමාජ නවෝත්පාදනයන් උනන්දු කිරීම හා පැතිරවීම සඳහා යොදා ගත හැකි සංකල්ප සාකච්ඡාවට ලක් කරයි. ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ අධ්‍යාපන අංශය තුළ සමාජ ඒකාබද්ධතාව ප්‍රවර්ධනය කරන මැදිහත් වීම් පදනම් කර ගෙන නවෝත්පාදන සමාජ වර්ගය වැඩිවීම සඳහා යොදා ගත හැකි සංකල්පමය රාමුවක් ඉදිරිපත් කරනු ලැබේ. පාසල් ජාල සම්බන්ධයෙන් ලද ප්‍රාරම්භක අත්දැකීම් සමහරක් ඇසුරින් මෙම සංකල්පය පැහැදිලි කෙරෙන අතර සමාජ නවෝත්පාදනය අදාළ ව්‍යාපාරයන්ගේ පිහිටුවනු ලැබේ. පාසල් ජාල සමාජ ඒකාබද්ධතාව ආශ්‍රිත නවෝත්පාදන සහයෝගීතා වර්ගයන් අත්හදා බැලීම හා පැතිරවීම සඳහා ක්‍රියාකාරකයන්ට අවශ්‍ය කරන අවකාශය සම්පාදනය කරයි.

දෙවන ලියවිල්ල සමාජ ඒකාබද්ධතාව සඳහා අධ්‍යාපනය නිරීක්ෂණය කිරීම කෙරෙහි අවධානය යොමු කරයි. සමාජ ඒකාබද්ධතාව වැඩි දියුණු කරන්නේ යැයි කියනු ලබන පාසල් ක්‍රියාකාරකම්වල බලපෑම මැනීම අභියෝගාත්මක වුවත් කළ හැකි කටයුත්තකි. තම පාසල් තුළ සමාජ ඒකාබද්ධතාව වැඩි දියුණු කරන්නේ යැයි කියනු ලබන අධ්‍යාපන මැදිහත් වීම් සිසුන් විසින් දැක ගනු ලබන්නේ කෙසේ ද? මෙම ප්‍රශ්නයට පිළිතුරු දීම පිණිස නිරීක්ෂණ මූල පිරිමකට අදාළව සමාජ ඒකාබද්ධතා රේඛාරය නමින් සංකල්පමය රාමුවක් හඳුන්වා දී ඉදිරිපත් කරනු ලැබේ. කතුවරු එම ක්‍රමය යොදා ගනිමින් කළ සොයා ගැනීම් ඉදිරිපත් කර සාකච්ඡාවට ලක් කරයි, ව්‍යවහාරික නිරීක්ෂණ විධික්‍රමය ගැඹුරින් සලකා බලයි, සංවර්ධන සහයෝගීතාව සම්බන්ධයෙන් උගත් පාඩම් සාකච්ඡාවට ලක් කරයි.

අධ්‍යාපන අංශය තුළ පවත්නා ඉවිච්ඡා හංගත්වය විමර්ශනය කිරීමට සම්බන්ධතාව දෙවන ලියවිල්ලේ දී ඉදිරිපත් කරන ලද නිර්දේශයක් තුන් වන ලියවිල්ල කරා ද විහිද යන අතර එම ලියවිල්ල අධ්‍යාපනය, පාසල් අධ්‍යාපනය ලැබීම හා සිය දිවි නසා ගැනීමේ වර්ගය අතර පවත්නා බවට අනුමාන කෙරෙන සම්බන්ධය පිළිබඳව නිසි අධ්‍යයනයක් කිරීමට සුදුසු සාරාංශයක් ඉදිරිපත් කිරීමේ අභිමතාර්ථය ඉටු කර ගැනීමට ප්‍රයෝජනවත් වේ. විසි වසරකට පෙර ශ්‍රී ලංකාව ලෝක පරිමාණව ඉහළ ම සිය දිවි නසා ගැනීමේ අනුපාතික සහිත රටවල් අතර විය. එතැන් සිට සිය දිවි නසා ගැනීමේ අනුපාතික පහත වැටුණු නමුත් ලෝක සෞඛ්‍ය සංවිධානය විසින් “ඉහළ” මට්ටමක පවතී යැයි තව මත් සලකනු ලබන මට්ටමක පවතී. බ්ලොමර් සහ ලයිට් ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ සිය දිවි නසා ගැනීමේ අනුපාතික ආශ්‍රිත ප්‍රවණතා, සිය දිවි නසා ගැනීමේ වර්ගයේ රටා සහ සිය දිවි නසා ගැනීමේ වලට හා තමන්ට ම හානි කර ගැනීමේ ක්‍රියාවන්ට තුඩු දෙන හේතු විමසා බලති. ඉවිච්ඡා හංගත්වය හා සිය දිවි නසා ගැනීම පිළිබඳ ඩර්ක්නයිට්ගේ න්‍යාය සහ ඉවිච්ඡා හංගත්වය හා අපගාමී වර්ගයට පිළිබඳ මර්ටන්ගේ න්‍යාය විශ්ලේෂණ මාර්ගෝපදේශ ලෙස ප්‍රයෝජනවත් වේ.

තුන් වන ලියවිල්ල තුන්වන ලියවිල්ල මගින් මාලනී ද අල්විස් ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ සිසුන්ගේ යහපැවැත්ම පිළිබඳව ලියැවී ඇති ශාස්ත්‍රීය ලේඛන විශ්ලේෂණය කරයි. ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ යෞවන ජනගහනයෙන් විශාල ප්‍රතිශතයක් තමන්ට හානි කර ගන්නා බවට හෝ සිය දිවි නසා ගැනීම සඳහා ප්‍රයත්න දරන බවට ද එවැනි ක්‍රියාවන්ගෙන් සැලකිය යුතු ප්‍රමාණයක් බරපතල බවට ද පවත්නා සාක්ෂි වර්ධනය වෙමින් පවතින තත්ත්වය තුළ සිසුන්ගේ යහපැවැත්ම පිළිබඳ උනන්දුව වැඩි වී ඇත. ලියවිල්ල ආරම්භ වන්නේ යහපැවැත්ම, මානසික සෞඛ්‍යය, සිය දිවි නසා ගැනීම සහ තමන්ට ම හානි කර ගැනීම වැනි ප්‍රධාන සංකල්ප විමසා බලමිනි. විශ්ලේෂණය මගින් තමන්ට ම හානි කර ගන්නා සිසුන්ට පොදු විවිධ අවදානම් සාධක සහ උගත් වර්ගයේ සමහර ස්වරූප කෙරෙහි අවධානය යොමු කරනු ඇත. ප්‍රතිපත්තිමය පියවරයන් තෝරා ගැනීම සහ ඒවායේ වක්‍ර ප්‍රතිඵල සාකච්ඡාවට ලක් වනු ඇත. එපමණක් නොව ද අල්විස් උගත් පාඩම් ගැඹුරින් සලකා බලන අතර සමහර ප්‍රධාන තර්ක නැවත නැවතත් ඉදිරිපත් කරයි. මෙම මාතෘකාවට අදාළව විස්තීර්ණ ග්‍රන්ථ නාමාවලියක් ද සම්පාදනය කරනු ලැබේ.

සාමාන්‍යයෙන් ඉදිරිපත් කරනු ලබන්නේ සේවාදායකයා වෙනුවෙන් පත් කරන ලද නියෝජිතයා විසින් නිසා මෙම ලියවිලි කිසි සේත් ම වාර්තා හෝ ගිණුම් ප්‍රකාශ නොවන බව මෙම මාතෘකා හතර විසින් පෙන්වා දෙනු ලැබේ. අප උගත් පාඩම් ඉදිරිපත් කරන නමුත් ගිවිස ගත් ව්‍යාපෘති අභිමතාර්ථය යුක්ති සහගත කිරීම සඳහා මෙම ලියවිලි මගින් කරුණු ඉදිරිපත් කිරීමට අදහස් නොකෙරේ. ඒවා විධිමත් වාර්තාවල අවශ්‍යතා සම්පූර්ණ නොකරයි. ඒ වෙනුවට මෙම ලියවිලි වනාහි ද මෑත වසරවල දී වඩ වඩාත් සැලකිය යුතු තත්ත්වයට පත්ව ඇති නිසා පලා යාම හා සංක්‍රමණය ද ඇතුළු ගැටුම් හා පශ්චාත්

ගැටුම් වාතාවරණයන්හි දී අධ්‍යාපන අංශය තුළ සංවර්ධන සහයෝගිතාවට අදාළ වන හඳුනා ගත් මාතෘකා හතරක් පිළිබඳව කරනු ලබන සලකා බැලීමකි.

ජර්මන් ඔස්ටර්හැමල් "The Altritude of Eagles"<sup>1</sup> නමින් ලියූ සිය රචනයේ දී දෙන උපදෙස පිළිගන්නා අපි සාර්ව හා ක්ෂුද්‍ර යන දෙයාකාරයෙන් ම දැකීමට තිබෙන හැකියාව නිසා රාජාලියා අප වඩාත් කැමති සගයා බව තහවුරු කරන්නෙමු. තමන් පියාසර කරන උන්නතාංශය නිසා රාජාලියාට සමස්තයක් ලෙස සලකා බලන අතර ම භූමිය මත පවත්නා සුළු විස්තර සොයා ගැනීමේ හැකියාව ද ඇත. එහෙත් ඉකාරස්ගේ ඉරණම පරිස්සම් සහගතව කටයුතු කිරීමට අප පොලඹවයි. අප අපගේ මොඩලයට සාධාරණය ඉටු කරමින් ප්‍රමෝදයකින් තොරව අධීක්ෂණය හා අවබෝධය තුලනය කරන්නේ ද යන්න තීරණය කිරීමේ වගකීම අපි පාඨකයාට භාර කරමු. සංවර්ධන සහයෝගිතාවේ නිරතව සිටින සගයන් ඔවුන් කරන වැඩ කටයුතුවලින් අනුප්‍රාණයක් ලබන්නේ නම් සහ අඛණ්ඩව සිතා බැලීමට පාඨකයන් උනන්දු කරනු ලබන්නේ නම් ලියවිල්ලේ අභිමතාර්ථය ඉටු වුණා වේ.

මෙම ලියවිල්ල තුළ ප්‍රකාශිත අදහස් කතුවරුන්ගේ වන අතර GIZ සංවිධානයේ දැක්ම පිළිබිඹු නොකරයි. ප්‍රශ්නාවලිය සකස් කර දීම සහ සම්මුඛ සාකච්ඡා මෙහෙයවීම, පටිගත කිරීම හා පරිවර්තනය කිරීම සම්බන්ධයෙන් අපි ශාන්ති තම්බයියාටත් මොනිකා ඇල්ග්‍රඩ්ටත් ස්තූතිවන්ත වන්නෙමු (නිරීක්ෂණය පිළිබඳ දෙවන ලියවිල්ල බලන්න). ලෙනාට් බෙන්ඩ්ෆෙල්ට්-හව්මාන්, ලින් ඩේවිස්, රේනර් ලේමාන්, ඇන්ජලා ඩබ්ලිව්. ලිට්ල් සහ ඇලන් ස්මිත් සමඟ ලියවිලිවල පළමු කෙටුම්පත් පිළිබඳව ප්‍රයෝජනවත් අදහස් ඉදිරිපත් කළ අතර ඒ වෙනුවෙන් ඔවුන්ට අපගේ කෘතඥතාව හිමි විය යුතු ය. ලියවිලි ප්‍රකාශයට පත් කිරීම සම්බන්ධයෙන් CEPA ආයතනයට සහ එහි අධ්‍යක්ෂ ආචාර්ය උදන් ප්‍රනාන්දුට ද ස්තූතිය හිමි විය යුතු ය.

කොළඹ, 2019 ජනවාරි  
රුඩිගර් බ්ලෆෝර්, මාලකී ද අල්විස් සහ ස්ටෙෆානී ලයිට්

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1 Jürgen Osterhammel (2017), Die Flughöhe der Adler. Historische Essays zur Globalen Gegenwart, C.H. Beck München

## முன்னுரை

2005 ஆம் ஆண்டிலிருந்து, சமூக ஒற்றுமை மற்றும் சமாதானத்திற்கான கல்வி தொடர்பான தேசிய கொள்கையின் அபிவிருத்தியிலும், நடைமுறைப்படுத்துவதிலும் இலங்கை கல்வி அமைச்சிற்கு ஜேர்மன் அபிவிருத்தி ஒத்துழைப்பானது தனது ஆதரவை வழங்கி வருகின்றது. பொருளாதார அபிவிருத்தி மற்றும் மேம்பாட்டிற்கான ஜேர்மன் மத்திய அமைச்சின் (BMZ) சார்பாக சர்வதேச ஒத்துழைப்பிற்கான ஜேர்மன் சங்கத்தினால் (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit - GIZ) சமூக ஒத்துழைப்பிற்கான கற்கை செயற்படுத்தப்படுகின்றது. கடந்த மூன்று வருடங்களில், குழுத்தலைவராகவும் இ ருடிகர் பிளூமோர், கண்காணிப்பு உத்தியோகத்தராகவும் ஸ்டபனி லைச்ட் இருந்து எமது திறமையை நாங்கள் மேம்படுத்தியுள்ளோம். கல்வி முறையினூடாகவும், கல்வி முறைக்குள்ளேயும் சமூக ஒற்றுமையை வலுப்படுத்துவதற்கான வழியை கண்டறிய முயற்சிக்கின்ற வேளை, அனோமி போன்ற எதிர்மறையான அம்சங்களையும் கருத்தில் கொள்ளவேண்டும். மாலதி டி அல்விஸ் அவர்கள் பயனுள்ள உள்ளார்ந்த கருத்துக்களை வழங்கும் ஆலோசனையாளராக செயற்பட்டிருந்தார். **சமூக ஒற்றுமை மற்றும் கல்வி போன்ற விரிவான அடிப்படை சேவைகளை வழங்குதல் தொடர்பாக கவனம் செலுத்தும் வகையில், வறுமை ஆராய்ச்சி நிலையமானது (CEPA), இவ்வெளியீட்டினை திருத்தியமைத்து அச்சிடுவதற்கு உதவியது.** பாடசாலை வலையமைப்புகள். பாடசாலைகளில் சமூக ஒற்றுமையை கண்காணித்தல், கல்விக்கும் தற்கொலைக்கும் இடையிலான தொடர்பு, சமூக ஒற்றுமை மற்றும் அனோமி போன்றவற்றின் தர்க்கரீதியான திருப்பத்தினால் மாணவர்களின் நலனானது தளர்வாக பிணைக்கப்பட்டுள்ளமை தொடர்பான நான்கு விடயங்களை நாங்கள் முன்வைக்கின்றோம். அபிவிருத்தி ஒத்துழைப்பின் நடைமுறை துறையினாலும், அதன் தேவைகளினாலும் எமது கண்ணோட்டம் தீர்மானிக்கப்படுவது ஒன்றும் ஆச்சரியமான விடயமல்ல.

அண்மை காலமாக, “சமூக ஒற்றுமை” எனும் சொல்லானது சர்வதேச அபிவிருத்தி சமூகத்தில் பிரபலமடைந்துள்ளது. சமூக ஒற்றுமையை மேம்படுத்துவதற்கான முக்கியமான கொள்கை உந்து சக்தியாக கல்வி அடையாளம் காணப்படுகின்றது. பாடசாலை அமைப்புகளால் சமூக ஒற்றுமை குறித்த கல்வி சவால்களை அடையாளங்காண முடியும் என்பதை பாடசாலை அபிவிருத்தி மற்றும் வலையமைப்பு தொடர்பான முதலாவது விடயத்தில் நாம் வாதிடுகின்றோம். இலங்கை கல்வி முறையின் சுருக்கமான பகுப்பாய்வையும், 1980 ஆம் ஆண்டுகளின் ஆரம்பத்தில், அதிகமான பாடசாலைகளை அறிமுகப்படுத்தி திடீரென நிறுத்தியதின் விளைவாக ஏற்பட்ட அனுபவத்தையும் அடிப்படையாகக் கொண்டு, சமூக புதுமைகளை தூண்டுவதற்காகவும், விரிவுப்படுத்துவதற்காகவும் பாடசாலை வலையமைப்புகள் மற்றும் அதனோடு தொடர்புடைய கருத்துக்கள் பற்றிய கலந்துரையாடல் தொடர்பாக மேற்கொள்ளப்பட்ட சர்வதேச ஆய்வினை பிளூமோர் மற்றும் லைச்ட் ஆகியோர் மீளாய்வு செய்துள்ளனர். இலங்கை கல்வித் துறையில் சமூக ஒற்றுமையை மேம்படுத்துகின்ற தலையீடுகளை அடிப்படையாகக்கொண்டு புதுமையான சமூக நடத்தைகளின் விரிவாக்கத்திற்கான கருத்தியல் ரீதியான கட்டமைப்பொன்று வழங்கப்பட்டுள்ளது. பாடசாலை வலையமைப்புகளுடனான சில ஆரம்பகட்ட அனுபவமானது இவ்வெண்ணக்கருவை விளக்குவதோடு, சமூக புதுமைகளை ஒரு சூழ்நிலைக்குள்ளடக்குகின்றது. பாடசாலை அமைப்புகள் சமூக ஒற்றுமை குறித்த புதுமையான கூட்டுறவு நடத்தைகளை உறுதிப்படுத்தி விரிவுப்படுத்துவதற்கு, நடிப்பங்காளர்களுக்கு இடமளிக்கின்றன.

சமூக ஒற்றுமை தொடர்பாக கவனம் செலுத்துவதற்கான கல்வி கண்காணிப்பினை இரண்டாவது விடயமானது வழங்குகின்றது. சமூக ஒற்றுமையை மேம்படுத்துகின்ற பாடசாலை நடவடிக்கைகளின் விளைவுகளை அளவிடுவது ஒரு சவாலான மற்றும் சாத்தியமான பணியாக அமைகின்றது. ஆழமாக பிளவுபட்ட சமூகங்களுக்கிடையில் வலுவான சூழல் சார்பினையும், குறிப்பிட்ட பாடசாலை அமைப்பினையும் உறுதிப்படுத்துவதற்கு பிளூமோர் மற்றும் லைச்ட் ஆகியோர் சமூக ஒற்றுமைக்கு பங்களிப்புச் செய்கின்ற நடவடிக்கையினை உருவாக்குகின்ற பொதுவான அம்சங்கள் தொடர்பாக கவனம் செலுத்தவில்லை ஏனெனில், இது பெரும்பாலும் நடவடிக்கைகளை நடைமுறைப்படுத்தும் முறையை சார்ந்துள்ளது. இதற்கு பதிலாக, மாணவர்கள் கல்வி கற்கும் பாடசாலைகளில் சமூக ஒற்றுமையை மேம்படுத்தக்கூடிய கல்வி தலையீடுகளை மாணவர்கள் எவ்வாறு உணர்கிறார்கள்? என்ற கேள்வியை கேட்பதன் மூலம் கண்காணிப்பின் மையத்தில் மாணவர்களின் அனுபவங்களை உள்ளடக்குகின்றனர். இக்கேள்விக்கு பதிலளிக்க, “சமூக ஒற்றுமை தொலைநிலை இயக்கமுறை” எனும் ஒரு கருத்தியல் கட்டமைப்பானது, கண்காணிப்பு முயற்சிக்காக அறிமுகப்படுத்தப்பட்டு முன்வைக்கப்பட்டது. நூலாசிரியர்களால் முன்வைக்கப்பட்டு, கலந்துரையாடப்பட்ட தொலைநிலை இயக்க முறையில் இருந்து பெறப்பட்ட கண்டறிவுகளானவை, கண்காணிப்பு முறை மற்றும் அபிவிருத்தி ஒத்துழைப்பிற்காக கற்றுக்கொண்ட விடயங்கள் தொடர்பான கலந்துரையாடல் போன்றவற்றில் பிரதிபலிக்கின்றன.

கல்வி துறையில் உள்ள அனோமி முறை குறித்த ஆய்வு தொடர்பான இரண்டாவது விடயத்தில் உள்ள பரிந்துரையானது கல்வி, பாடசாலைக்கல்வி, மற்றும் தற்கொலை போன்றவற்றுக்கிடையிலான தொடர்பு பற்றிய தகுதியான ஆய்வொன்றினை வடிவமைக்க உதவும் வகையில் மூன்றாவது விடயத்தை முன்வைக்க வழிவகுத்தது. இருபது வருடங்களுக்கு முன்பு அதிகளவான தற்கொலை வீதங்களை கொண்ட நாடுகளில் ஒன்றாக இலங்கையும் காணப்பட்டது. அதன் பின்னர் தற்கொலை வீதம் குறைவடைந்தாலும், உலக சுகாதார அமைப்பினால் இந்நிலை “உயர்வானதாகவே” கருதப்படுகின்றது. புளூமோர் மற்றும் லைச்ட் ஆகியோர் இலங்கையில் தற்கொலை வீதங்களின் போக்கு, தற்கொலையின் வடிவங்கள், தற்கொலைக்கான காரணங்கள் மற்றும் தன்னைத்தானே காயப்படுத்திக்கொள்ளும் நடவடிக்கைகள் போன்றவற்றை ஆராய்கின்றனர். தற்கொலை மற்றும் அனோமி தொடர்பான டேர்கைமின் கொள்கை, அனோமி மற்றும் மாறுபட்ட நடத்தை தொடர்பான மேர்டனின் கொள்கை போன்றன பகுப்பாய்வு வழிகாட்டிகளாக செயற்படுகின்றன.

இந்த மூன்றாவது விடயத்தை அடிப்படையாகக்கொண்டு, டி அல்விஸ் அவர்கள் இலங்கையில் மாணவர் நலன் தொடர்பாக ஏற்கனவே மேற்கொள்ளப்பட்ட ஆய்வினை பகுப்பாய்வு செய்துள்ளார். இலங்கையில் அதிகளவான இளம்பருவத்தினர் தன்னைத்தானே காயப்படுத்திக்கொள்ளுதல் அல்லது உயிருக்கு ஆபத்தான நடவடிக்கைகளில் கணிசமானளவு ஈடுபடுதல் போன்றவற்றை வெளிப்படையாக காணக்கூடியதாக இருப்பதால் மாணவர் நலன் குறித்த ஆர்வம் அதிகரித்து வருகின்றது. நலன், உள ஆரோக்கியம், தற்கொலை மற்றும் தன்னைத்தானே காயப்படுத்துதல் போன்ற சில முக்கிய கருத்துக்களை ஆராய்வதன் மூலம் இம்மூன்றாவது விடயமானது ஆரம்பமாகின்றது. தன்னைத்தானே காயப்படுத்திக்கொள்ளும் மாணவர்களுக்கு இடர்விளைவிக்கின்ற வேறுப்பட்ட காரணிகள் தொடர்பாகவும், கற்றல் நடவடிக்கைகளின் குறிப்பிட்ட வடிவங்கள் தொடர்பாகவும் பகுப்பாய்வானது கவனம் செலுத்துகின்றது. கொள்கை நடவடிக்கைகளின் தெரிவு மற்றும் அவற்றின் எதிர்விளைவுகள் குறித்து விவாதிக்கப்படும். மேலும், டி அல்விஸ் அவர்கள் கற்றுக்கொண்ட பாடங்கள் தொடர்பாக கவனம்செலுத்துவதோடு சில முக்கிய விவாதங்களை மீண்டும் மீண்டும் வலியுறுத்துகின்றார். அத்தோடு, தலைப்பு குறித்த விரிவான நூற்பட்டியல் ஒன்றும் தரப்பட்டுள்ளது.

வாடிக்கையாளர்களுக்கு வழக்கமாக முகவர்களால் வழங்கப்படுகின்ற கணக்குகள் தொடர்பான அறிக்கைகளையோ, கூற்றுக்களையோ மேற்குறிப்பிட்ட நான்கு விடயங்களும் சுட்டிக்காட்டவில்லை. கூற்றுக்கொண்ட பாடங்களை நாங்கள் வழங்கியிருந்தாலும், ஏற்றுக்கொள்ளப்பட்ட திட்டத்தினை நியாயப்படுத்தும் கருத்துக்களை இந்நான்கு விடயங்களும் வழங்கவில்லை என்பதோடு முறையான அறிக்கைக்கான தேவைகளை அவை பூர்த்தி செய்யவில்லை. மாறாக, அண்மை காலங்களில் மிகவும் முக்கியமானதாக மாறிவிட்ட குடியகல்வு உள்ளடங்கலாக மோதல் மற்றும் மோதலுக்கு பின்னரான சூழ்நிலையில் கல்வி துறையில் அபிவிருத்தி ஒத்துழைப்பு தொடர்பாக அடையாளப்படுத்தப்பட்ட நான்கு விடயங்கள் தொடர்பாக அவை பிரதிபலிக்கின்றன.

ஜேர்கன் ஒஸ்டாமெல் அவர்களுடைய “கழுகுகளின் உயரம்”<sup>1</sup> என்ற கட்டுரையிலிருந்து பெறப்பட்ட ஆலோசனையினை நாங்கள் பயன்படுத்தியுள்ளதோடு பாரிய மற்றும் நுண்ணிய பார்வைக்கான திறனைக் கொண்டிருப்பதால் எமது விருப்பத்துக்குரிய துணையாகவும் கழுகினை உறுதிப்படுத்துகிறோம். உயரத்திலிருந்து பார்ப்பதால் கழுகினால் ஒரு தரைக் குறித்து முழுமையான கண்ணோட்டத்தை கொண்டிருக்க முடிகின்ற அதேநேரம், தரையில் உள்ளவற்றை மிகத்தெளிவாக கண்டறிய முடிகின்றது. இருப்பினும், இக்காரஸ் அவர்களின் விதி எமக்கு எச்சரிக்கையாக அமைகின்றது. நாம் எமது மாதிரியினை நியாயப்படுத்தியிருந்தாலோ, மேற்பார்வை மற்றும் மெய்யான கருத்துக்களற்ற நுண்ணறிவு போன்றவற்றினை சமநிலைப்படுத்தியிருந்தாலோ அதுதொடர்பான தீர்மானத்தை எடுக்கும் பொறுப்பை நாங்கள் வாசகர்களிடம் ஒப்படைக்கின்றோம். அபிவிருத்தி தொடர்பான ஒத்துழைப்பில் ஈடுபடுகின்ற சக ஊழியர்கள் அவர்களின் பணிக்காக ஊக்கப்படுத்தப்பட்டிருந்தாலோ, வாசகர்கள் தொடர்ந்து சிந்திப்பதற்கு தூண்டப்பட்டிருந்தாலோ இவ்வாய்வின் நோக்கம் நிறைவேற்றப்படும்.

இந்த ஆய்வில் ஆசிரியர்களின் சொந்தக் கருத்துக்களே வெளிப்படுத்தப்பட்டுள்ளதே தவிர GIZ இன் கருத்துக்கள் பிரதிபலிக்கப்படவில்லை. இந்த ஆய்விற்கான வினாக்கொத்தினை நிர்வகித்தமைக்காகவும், நேர்காணல்களை மேற்கொண்டு, அவற்றை பதிவுசெய்து மொழிபெயர்த்தமைக்காகவும் (கண்காணிப்பு தொடர்பான இரண்டாவது விடயத்தை தயவுசெய்து பார்க்கவும்) சாந்தி தம்பையா மற்றும் மோனிகா அவர்களுக்கு எமது நன்றியை தெரிவித்துக்கொள்கிறோம். அதேபோல, லெனார்ட் பெண்ட் /பெல்ட்-ஹதமன், லின் டேவிஸ், ரெய்னர் லேமன், ஏஞ்சலா டபிள்யூ. லிட்டில் மற்றும் அலன் ஸ்மித் ஆகியோர் இந்த ஆய்வின் சில பகுதிகளை வடிவமைப்பது தொடர்பாக தமது பயனுள்ள கருத்துக்களை வழங்கியமைக்காகவும் எமது நன்றியை தெரிவித்துக்கொள்கிறோம். இந்த ஆய்வினை வெளியிட உதவிய வறுமை ஆராய்ச்சி நிலையத்திற்கும், அதன் பணிப்பாளரான திரு. உதான் பெர்னான்டோ அவர்களுக்கும் எமது நன்றிகள்.

கொழும்பு, ஜனவரி 2019

ருடிகர் புளூமர், மாலதி டி அல்விஸ் மற்றும் ஸ்டபனி லைச்ட்

1 Jürgen Osterhammel (2017), Die Flughöhe der Adler. Historische Essays zur Globalen Gegenwart, C.H. Beck München



# School Networks and Education for Social Cohesion in Sri Lanka

## A Strategy for the Diffusion of a Social Innovation

by Rüdiger Blumör and Stefanie Licht

### Introduction

After decades of violent conflicts in Sri Lanka, a public consensus has emerged that schools should provide opportunities for children and youth to learn to live together peacefully. As part of its socialisation function schools organise the acquisition of civic knowledge and the development of democratic attitudes and social behaviour. In recent years, schools have increasingly implemented education measures which are assumed to promote peace and social cohesion. Yet, their impact remains uncertain. A fraction of these education interventions are recommended by the Ministry of Education for wider dissemination.

This paper presents a conceptual framework for the diffusion of a social innovation in the education sector in Sri Lanka. Our argument is that schools need to go beyond the transfer of knowledge if they want to promote social cohesion. Most importantly for Sri Lanka, they have to provide opportunities for students from different social backgrounds (especially ethnicity, language and religion) to establish and sustain constructive and trustful relationships. These relationships between students and between other actors matter as much as their competencies and attitudes.

Therefore, we propose the establishment of school networks with the purpose of enhancing social cohesion. These school networks provide the institutional framework within which the social innovation will be diffused. The social practices of actors within the school networks is the social innovation. The proved and tested education interventions form the content framework in order to ensure that the school networks address school related challenges regarding social cohesion. It is assumed that through innovative social practices like cooperation and exchange within the school networks the education interventions are adapted to the local school context and thereby are more relevant and effective in enhancing social cohesion in schools.

In the next section, we begin with a brief analysis of education in Sri Lanka. Our reasoning is that school networks can address educational challenges regarding social cohesion. Thereafter, Sri Lanka's experience with the introduction and abrupt discontinuation of school clusters in the early 1980s is discussed. Then, we review international research on school networks and discuss relevant concepts of diffusing social innovations. Finally, a conceptual framework for the diffusion of a social innovation based on interventions promoting social cohesion in the education sector in Sri Lanka is presented. Some preliminary experience with school networks

illustrate the concept and put the social innovation into context. We conclude with an outlook on essential future work.

### Understanding education in Sri Lanka: framing the challenge

In the following we briefly discuss the segregation, competitiveness and exam-orientation in schools as well as the centralised management structure and widespread patronage in the education sector in order to demonstrate our reasoning for introducing school networks as an entry-point for enhancing social cohesion. However, this does not substitute for a comprehensive analysis of the education sector.<sup>2</sup>

In the past, the education system in Sri Lanka has failed to build a sense of national identity and social cohesion. More than 95 percent of public schools are segregated by ethnicity, language, religion and gender. These schools have fostered strong group-based identities with limited opportunities for interaction and exchange. As a result, stereotypes, resentment and mistrust among different ethno-linguistic groups have been generated, reinforced and perpetuated. Recognising and respecting cultural and religious diversity in schools which are homogeneous with respect to language, ethnicity and religion remains a challenge. Even symbolic acts of celebrating diversity such as singing the national anthem in Tamil or hoisting the national flag can become controversial.

The segregated schools are a legacy of the colonial past when, in the nineteenth century, the formation of ethnic identities became a constitutive part of divide and rule strategies. In response to the domination of the colonial education system by Christian missions which had established highly valued English-medium schools, non-Christian elites, in particular Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims founded their own schools with Sinhala and Tamil as medium of instruction and strong religious bias. The separation of the medium of instruction into Sinhala and Tamil led to an ethno-lingual segregation within the education system. In turn, the segregated schools helped to reproduce mutually exclusive ethnic constituencies with exclusive and deeply divided ethnic identities. At the same time, the segregated schools advanced the rising of distinct, yet interrelated ethno-nationalisms among the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority in the North and East (Sri Lankan Tamils) of

the country. The ethno-lingual and religious affiliations of the schools due to their location, medium of instruction and denomination raised early concerns about divisions between the different communities. However, initiatives by the colonial administration that allowed children belonging to different ethno-religious communities to learn together in English-medium schools failed at the resistance of the already well established, prestigious and privileged Sinhala- and Tamil-medium schools. The experiments were abandoned, and, as a result, education had become a major factor in reinforcing ethno-religious divisions in the country (Little and Hettige 2016).

The introduction of policies on the medium of instruction in education reproduced not only the segregation of schools, it has also been decisive factor for the ethnic cleavage to become increasingly pronounced. The language policy of the 1950s is a root cause of the violent conflicts in Sri Lanka. The implementation of the Sinhala Only Act of 1956 in the education and other sectors promoted a chauvinist Buddhist-Sinhalese nationalism among the Sinhalese majority group to the disadvantage of the minority Tamil and Muslim groups (Little and Hettige 2013). Furthermore, a distinct divide between urban and rural schools regarding the allocation of financial and human resources causes disparities of education opportunities which translate - due to the geographical distribution of the ethnic groups across the island - into strong horizontal (group-based) inequalities (Neff and de Silva 2017).

After independence, the segregation of schools became a structural element of an "ethnocratic regime" (Yiftachel and Ghanem 2004) that is a result of the Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism emerging during British colonial rule and being continuously adapted and refined after independence. This ethnocratic regime facilitates the expansion, ethnicisation and control of the state by the dominant Sinhalese-Buddhist majority. Yet, the dynamics and complexity of state building in Sri Lanka is not entirely dominated by the much debated cleavage between the ethnic communities. State building also takes place at the intra-ethnic level of communities and captures the entire society<sup>3</sup>. As education plays a critical role in this state building process it is embedded in the power dynamics of domination, resistance and change that define the rule of the game with the perpetuated segregation of schools as a consolidated outcome.

The limited opportunities for higher education causes high competition in the school system starting as early as kindergarten and pre-school. The competition intensifies the excessive focus of teaching and learning on examinations with extensive effects on knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. When students are required to compete with each other, they perceive that they can obtain their goals and be rewarded if the other students

fail to obtain their goals and are less likely to be rewarded. This "negative interdependence among goal achievements" (Deutsch 2006) allows schools to grade students on a norm-referenced basis that require them to work better, faster and more accurately than their peers. In doing so, students deprive others of success, celebrate their failures, view resources such as grades as limited, recognise their negatively lined fate and believe that only the strong prosper. This competitive process has far-reaching effects on individual and group relationships, for example, regarding communication, helpfulness, coordination of efforts and conflict resolution. In fact, competitive processes and destructive processes of conflict resolution are similar. The competitive process stimulates the view that the solution of a conflict can only be imposed by one side on the other, which in turn leads to using coercive strategies such as psychological as well as physical threats and violence. The conflict becomes a power struggle or a matter of moral principle and is no longer confined to a specific issue at a given time and place. The practice of physical and psychological violence in schools has disastrous impact on students learning and wellbeing. The sensational media reports about ragging in popular schools are just the visible tip of the iceberg. Also, gender violence is wide-spread and students and teachers have to cope with the aftermath of the war and recurring natural disasters.

In addition, the competitive and exam-oriented school system has created a shadow system of uncontrolled private tuition classes at high cost for parents. The extreme competition for higher education continues in the job market and is played out along ethnic lines.

In summary, Sri Lanka is deeply divided along ethno-linguistic and religious lines. A toehold for change is the segregated school system. However, the persistent Sinhalese-Buddhist dominance does not allow the assumption that segregated schools will be contested and replaced by more inclusive schools. Instead, it is presumed that the rigid form of ethnic segregation in schools will continue to survive for quite some time. Similarly, it can be expected that the learning environment which is shaped by extreme competition and excessive exam-orientation will not change soon, either, because it is closely linked to the high expectations and aspirations of parents regarding the social upward mobility of their children.

The socialisation in school and in the family corresponds in various ways. The school builds upon and reinforces a hierarchical model that is the outcome of a socialisation process within the Sri Lankan family. Chapin (2014) describes a model of ranked relationships in childhood<sup>4</sup> with key cognitive and emotional characteristics which are summarised briefly. The parent identifies and provides for the child's needs without solicit verbal input from the child and without justification and explanations of actions. Thereby, the parent's emotional orientation is

supposed to be sensitive and responsive, kind, caring and committed, confident and powerful as well as restrained and judicious. The child is expected to offer compliance, passivity, service and respectful behaviour, not to question or offer opinion, not to discuss thoughts and experiences. The child's emotional orientation is supposed to be acquiescent, expectant and patient as well as shy, properly ashamed and a little afraid. If the child violates the role expectation, the parent may ignore, tolerate or indulge a behaviour, physically control, threaten or promise, chastise or physically punish. The parent, however, may avoid shaming the child in public. The parent-child relationship and the interdependent role expectations find a close match and an extension in the teacher-student relationship and the organisational structure of schools. We do not expect a complete concordance of roles and relationships. However, the more the roles of parents and teachers are in accordance with the better, the children will understand their role as students and their relationships with adults and peers in school.

In order to obtain a better understanding of the Sri Lankan school context, now, we broaden our view and include education governance within state building and state reform processes. At present, at least four ministries with a multitude of subordinate state institutions are in charge of education, from early childhood development and pre-schools to primary and secondary education, teacher education, vocational and skills training and finally higher education. This breakup provides strategic options for the political elite to access state resources at the expense of administrative efficiency and effectiveness. The education administration is institutionally subservient to the political leadership in power and exerts a rigid institutional culture of centralism. This institutional subservience has, in turn, produced a bureaucratic culture of conservatism, accompanied by a passive resistance to any shift away from centralised state structures (Uyangoda 2010). Consequently, the institutional outlook is mainly supply-driven with a strong top-down management structure and circulars of the Ministry of Education as a more or less effective management tool. The key decision-making power remains with a few top positions. Usually, mainly administrative tasks and only minor responsibilities are delegated. The scope for educational reform and institutional change is limited by political interests outside the sector and by the interests of the administrative elite itself as well as confined by deficiencies of the institutional and organisational capacities within the education administration.

Apart from the centralised management structure, the patronage system has to be considered when assessing the Sri Lankan context. Next to the armed forces, education is the second largest public sector employer. The public sector is deeply entrenched in a widespread patronage system and dynastic rule. Based on colonial patron-client relationships

a "dynastic democracy" (Jayawardena 2015, 349) emerged after independence. Power and political rule was shared among few family dynasties. National and local dynasties were closely connected in political networks. Dynastic democracy and a patronage system became the perfect amalgamation for power protection<sup>5</sup>. The repeatedly declaimed pleas in public for the elimination of political interference in the education sector do not compromise the patronage system, rather they lead to a situation in which the bureaucrats become patrons as well. The political and administrative environment is not conducive for an education officer to comply with the ideal of an autonomous Weberian bureaucrat making rule-based and predictable decisions and resisting political influence and interests. Yet, it is expected from the state administration that it should step in as a supreme regulatory agency and mediate political interference which has created tension within the state administration itself. Instead of neutral regulators, bureaucrats themselves have become patrons if they have access to state resources. So, the citizens' need for access to the state resources created networks of patron-client relationships in which the political and the administrative elites constantly compete over power to control state resources. As a result of frequent interventions by the state administration, the post-independent state in Sri Lanka has become intensely paternalistic and interventionist (Uyangoda 2010). McCourt (2005) offers a useful concept to understand the Sri Lankan mode of patronage. He distinguishes between the traditional patron and the modern "patronage broker", who can be either a politician or a bureaucrat. Brokerage can be understood as a mode of exchange. The patron or broker seeks material or moral return. Favours are granted in exchange for loyalty. A place at a popular school, a job as a teacher in a preferred school or as a clerk in the education administration, and inside knowledge and information are valid patronage currency. Broking became a parallel though illicit track alongside often sclerotic "official" channels for managing the relationship between the state and its citizens. To understand the severity of the phenomena it is worth considering Wickramasinghe's account that "patronage and clientelism have existed in all spheres of public life in modern Sri Lanka" (Wickramasinghe 2014 : 383)<sup>5</sup>. The patronage system has survived several attempts of public sector reform (De Alwis 2009). So far, an institutional reform to recover or establish the independence of the civil service has not been successful.

As the discussion shows, segregation, competition and exam-orientation, and centralised education governance and patronage are key features of schooling in Sri Lanka. The social practices and thinking of the actors in the education sector penetrate, represent and reproduce these features, so that changing segregated schooling, competitions and exam-orientation as well as decentralising education governance appear almost impossible. These features have become an uncontroversial



convention and almost an incontrovertible social fact. The shared conventions explain “how things are and how they are done” and create a high degree of homogeneity. However, the shared conventions do not serve as bridge between different social groups in Sri Lanka. They do not create a common “we” beyond the in-groups. Students spend their time off school in private tuition classes with no complaint, schools collect trophies which their students win in competitions of all sorts with pride, and education officers write circulars as bees produce honey. Parents expect their children to succeed in school as well as later in life as they expect air for breathing and brightness for seeing. These examples catch a glimpse of the formation of common sense that, consequently, becomes the hallmark of hegemonic rule. The hegemonic ambition determines the way society and state create and maintain distinct ways of restructuring day-to-day life and the rules that govern behaviour. Importantly, they also determine who benefits and is disadvantaged by the rules, and what rules divide and unite the society. At the individual level, they also reveal the shared meaning that people hold about their relations with others. As we tried to indicate, education is a critical element of these hegemonic dynamics.

Considering this context, what is a promising strategic entry point for education to contribute to a more social cohesive society? Our guiding question is: How can students learn to live together peacefully under the prevailing circumstances of schooling and education governance?

Pondering this question, we resort to a well consolidated finding that educational policy that seeks to provide the same educational opportunities for all ethnic and social groups can help to reduce conflict. As outlined above, a comprehensive integration of schools is unrealistic to expect, because it would require a complete reorganisation of the school system with far reaching and unpredictable political and administrative implications. Such an affirmative action has a high risk of discontent and conflict. Moreover, because of its allocation function schooling produces “winners” and “losers” and injustice to individuals is an inescapable consequence. This injustice of individuals may be perceived and construed by groups as collective injustice and inequality of educational opportunities towards their group. Such resentments can be exploited and politicised which may result in conflict (Stewart 2010). An analysis of the role of education in deeply divided countries allows Hanf (2011) to conclude that neither domination of one group nor forced assimilation of minority groups provide a suitable political framework for an educational policy that intentionally and effectively mitigates conflict. Instead, an educational policy can help to reduce the potential for conflict if it “creates the same educational opportunities for members of all groups, effectively guarantees freedom of choice between schools with different cultural options,

and allocates decision-making authority according to the principle of subsidiarity, ...” (Hanf 2011 : 335). It is assumed that school development and school networks, which are introduced here, are conducive for applying this principle of subsidiarity. Through reallocating power and decision-making to the school level the local actors get the opportunity to decide themselves what is useful for their school context. We assume that more relevant and context-specific solutions for school specific challenges (in general and especially in regard to social cohesion) can be tailored by local actors instead of higher level administration. In order to encourage actors to use these decision-making powers the school networks will be established to create a “safe space” which may give rise to innovative social practices like cooperation, learning from others and exchange.

## School clusters: the experience in Sri Lanka

The conditions of rural schools in South America, Asia and Africa provided the impetus for many early cluster programmes which began a process of reflecting on how to improve the conditions and quality of education through inter-school exchange and cooperation (Giordano 2008). Emerging in the 1960s in Latin America, school clusters became popular on the agenda for educational reform worldwide at least for some time. A widely accepted and often used definition was provided by Bray (1987: 7) “A cluster is a grouping of schools for administrative and educational purposes.” Bray assumes that school effectiveness and improvement can be achieved through a combination of administrative procedures and pedagogical support thereby addressing and providing solutions to equity in education, access to school, participation and continuance in school and quality of education.

In 1981, a school cluster scheme was introduced by the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka and then launched in a set of pilot projects. By 1983, 21 pilot clusters were in operation with 225 schools and more than 105,000 students representing three percent of the student population at the time (Samaranayake 1985). We will reflect on this reform initiative to understand what worked and what has proven difficult before introducing the school network concept in the following chapter.

Table 1 summarises the economic, pedagogical, administrative and political purposes pursued by the school clusters. Although Sri Lanka addressed national integration (ethnic harmony) as a goal for introducing school clusters, the education administration was more concerned with management improvements than with broader issues of political change.

**Table 1: Purposes of School Clusters**

Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sharing of facilities and staff</li> </ul>
Pedagogical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• allowing schools to gain access to extra resources</li> <li>• encouraging teacher development</li> <li>• promoting curriculum development</li> <li>• providing an environment for innovation</li> <li>• encouraging cooperation in school projects</li> <li>• encouraging student competition (e.g. sports)</li> <li>• integrating of different levels of schooling</li> <li>• integration of schools with non-formal education</li> </ul>
Administrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• acting as a focal point to which instructions from higher levels in the hierarchy may be sent</li> <li>• forwarding data</li> <li>• staff deployment</li> <li>• improved planning</li> <li>• providing a better framework for teacher inspection</li> </ul>
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduced regional and social inequalities</li> <li>• ethnic harmony</li> </ul>

Firstly, only six out of the 21 school clusters had an ethno-linguistic and religious diversity. Four clusters combined Sinhala medium and Muslim schools and two clusters included Sinhala and Tamil medium schools. The other clusters were homogeneous regarding ethnicity, language and religion. Yet, Samaranyake (1985) mentions sports meets as opportunities for bringing students from the various schools in a cluster together. Such co-curricular activities were highly appreciated by participating schools and recommended by the education administration even though national integration and ethnic harmony was not explicitly conceptualised due to the mostly homogeneous composition of the clusters. If students had experiences of “ethnic harmony”, these situations emerged spontaneously and more or less by coincidence. In spite of this, Bray (1987: 52) concludes with reference to the Sri Lankan case that “clusters formed with schools serving different racial, religious and language groups have promoted a slow but healthy process of integration” although, the effects of students’ encounters on social integration were not evaluated comprehensively. Hence, school clusters in Sri Lanka were highly overestimated in their function on enhancing social integration. It seems that promoting cooperation, encouraging competition and enhancing ethnic harmony were not recognised as potentially contradictory goals.

Secondly, the clusters were created by the Ministry of Education rather than by local initiatives. Therefore, administrative and managerial issues were the dominant concerns right from the beginning. Giordano (2008: 88)

identifies school clusters in Sri Lanka as a typical example for a “top-down approach”. The “need for decentralisation” (Samaranyake 1985: 68) became a recommendation only after the pilot scheme, only. Decentralisation of education through school clusters as part of the reform agenda in other countries (e.g. Namibia) was neither postulated as a political goal nor pursued on purpose in the implementation process at all.

Thirdly, despite the identified potentials on school effectiveness and school improvement, the school clusters in Sri Lanka faced several severe challenges. Bray (1987) summarises the need for capacity development at individual and organisational levels: the need for highly qualified and experienced cluster heads, the clarity and articulateness of responsibilities, especially of principals within the cluster and education administrators, the acceptance, support and tolerance by key actors especially the senior administration, and the clarity about communication structures within the school cluster and the education administration with the school clusters.

Moreover, even though the school clusters were established on a pilot basis they were never adopted country-wide as “the human and logistical issues in this new form of management of resources were never resolved” (Little and Hettige 2016: 38). For example, the position and authority of the cluster principals became a major controversy. The empowerment of the cluster head, usually the principal of the largest school, became a cause for complaints by various actors. In addition, the school

clusters faced considerable political opposition regarding the allocation of resources as well as the appointment and deployment of teachers. Wanasinghe (1983) reports that the introduction of the school clusters created resistance among principals, teachers and parents. They feared increased inequalities through an unfair allocation and distribution of resources and a “loss of identity and individuality of small schools within the cluster” (250). According to Wanasinghe (1983) the Tamil and Muslim minorities suspected that their schools were neglected or marginalised in the cluster and therefore, preferred a separate operation of their schools. With such resistance, the intended political goal on the reduction of inequalities could not be achieved.

Lastly, the goals may indicate the strongly advocated potentials and putative good intentions of school clusters. However, the multitude of goals was overcharged with expectations and the implicit contradictions were ignored. The implementation process was overregulated by the education administration which tended to be overburdened with expectations and tasks for which the officers were not competent and did not have the necessary resources. The institutional logics and working habits within the centralised education system with a strong hierarchical structure were not adapted to the requirements of the school clusters. The resistance to the introduction of the school clusters became an additional unforeseen strain. In Sri Lanka, the school cluster scheme did not unlock its potential and therefore was never disseminated and institutionalised.

In conclusion, the introduction of school clusters did not include a shift in education administration towards decentralisation and devolution of education services, teacher recruitment and the autonomy over budgets at school-level. The education administration did not deviate from the dominant top-down paradigm in managing schooling and did not open up for a school reform process. The responsibility for educational management continues to be kept in a tri-level structure of central agencies (e.g. Ministry of Education), regional authorities (Provincial and Zonal Education Departments, PED/ZED) and individual schools. The centre makes policies, sets rules of accountability and allocates funding. A layer of regional authorities conducts planning and coordination and individual schools operate according to their own capacities and resources within the prevailing environment. This bureaucratic model is not impervious to change. It offers a particular kind of flexibility which makes adaptation manageable as long as the changes can be accommodated within its centralised organisational structures. The bureaucracy was able to introduce and accommodate the school clusters on a pilot basis without compromising the integrity of its usual way of functioning. The preferred traditional governance structure was maintained after the school clusters discontinued.

But if school clusters failed, why should school networks work? Since piloting the school clusters in Sri Lanka a new form of cooperation between schools has been emerging in several other countries based on voluntary participation, peer exchange and reduced hierarchical relationships. In networks, schools meet to share knowledge and experiences in pursuit of a common goal. Advocates of school networks consider them to be an alternative to hierarchical reform which is steered by a central ministry. Instead of being initiated from the top down like the school clusters in Sri Lanka, school networks are believed to get initiated by a small group of innovators. While in some cases the impetus for establishing school networks comes from the school themselves, the motor behind creating school networks in the United States, Great Britain and Germany was the additional funding available for a group of schools to encourage cooperation between schools (Berkemeyer et al. 2009, Chapman and Hadfield 2010). We now turn to this second wave of school networks. With reference to social network theory we propose a definition of the school network, elaborate on cooperation as an essential concept for understanding school networks, and present key findings from international research on school networks.

## **School networks: definition and findings from international research**

The systematic analysis of social networks is typically seen as beginning in the 1930s with the work of Jacob Moreno. His 1934 book *Who Shall Survive?* contains some of the earliest graphical depictions of social networks (sociograms). In this book, he introduced a famous explanation, why a pandemic of runaways emerged at a girl's school in New York. By studying the interpersonal relationships between the girls he observed that the relationships served as channels for the flow of ideas, and that the girls' position in the network determined whether and when they ran away. From the network perspective, relationships between the actors are the central focus.

Usually, we explain the difference in the performance of schools by highlighting the distinguishing characteristics of the most successful schools. According to this view the best schools have the best technology, or teachers, or organisational structure and so on. The explanatory mechanism puts emphasis on the qualities or attributes of the school that allow them to outperform others. Similarly, at the individual level, students' performances are explained as a function of his or her capabilities and competencies. In contrast, the network perspective takes into account the web of relationships in which schools and actors are embedded that both constrain and provide opportunities. Hence, when explaining organisational performances, network analysis would not only examine characteristics of the organisation (school), but also the relationships they

have with other organisations. In explaining individual achievement of students, teachers, principals and others network analysis would not only examine attributes of the individuals, but also the relationships that constrain their actions or provide opportunities for achievement. We find this relational orientation relevant and extremely helpful for the Sri Lankan context of deep social divides and a segregated school system.

## Defining school networks

Schools are social networks with their actors such as students, teachers, principals and others being connected in one way or the other. If schools work together then their actors establish relationships and the schools potentially form a network. Muijs et al. (2010: 6) define a school network “as at least two organisations working together for a common purpose for at least some of the time”. This definition comprises four key components of school networks:

(1) “*At least two organisations*” refers first to the number of schools in the network (network size). In addition, the schools have certain connections with other organisations, e.g. school administration. Our focus will be on schools working together as well as on the collaboration of the school network with the school administration and may be other organisations such as religious institutions or commercial sponsors of schools, depending on circumstances.

(2) “*Working together*” or collaboration can be described as “joint activities between actors from different organisations within the network” (Muijs et al 2010: 6). Our major interest is on the joint activities in regard to social cohesion of schools in the network. We assume that schools which collaborate in networks and implement education interventions together respond to a specific need (regarding social cohesion). An interesting special case may be a self-contained implementation of an intervention by schools after a common deliberation in the network, an identification of such a need and a common reflection and exchange of experience during or after the implementation. The collaboration would then, not manifest itself only in the joint activity but in the collaborative efforts of common planning, monitoring and reflection.

(3) As “*common purpose*” of school networks; usually school improvement (organisational development), professional development and sharing resources have been identified. Berkemeyer et al. (2009) distinguish affiliation from professional networks as two distinct and promising purposes of school cooperation. We propose another purpose for school networks, that is, enhancing social

cohesion. According to the OECD’s (2011) definition of social cohesion this includes the strengthening of (1) social inclusion through the reduction of disparities, inequalities and social exclusion, (2) social relations, interactions and ties (social capital) and (3) social mobility which means the degree to which people can or believe they can change their position in society. As a working definition, we follow Dragolov et al (2016) who define social cohesion as “the quality of social cooperation and togetherness of a collective, defined in geopolitical terms, that is expressed in the attitudes and behaviours of its members. A cohesive society is characterised by resilient social relations, a positive emotional connectedness between members and the community and a pronounced focus on the common good.” (Dragolov et al. 2016: 6).<sup>7</sup>

(4) “*For at least some of the time*” indicates the frequency of working together. A single event such as a sport meet or the celebration of a cultural or religious festival may contribute to social cohesion and therefore can be considered helpful for establishing or strengthening a relationship between schools, but as a single event it does not make a network functional.

## School networks and cooperation

Establishing school networks is about the relationships between schools. As the school networks emerge as a result of interactions between the school network actors the question arises how cooperative behaviour evolves and can be maintained. At this point social network theory and game theory share similar research interests. Game theory provides theoretical and experimental evidence, that dynamic social networks promote cooperation (Skyrmes and Pentale 2000: Rand et al. 2011). A social network is meant to be dynamic, if actors have the opportunity to make or break relationships with others. For example, in an experimental study (Fehr et al. 2011) people played the iterated prisoner’s dilemma game<sup>7</sup> with multiple partners simultaneously in a dynamic social network. The participants had the opportunity to break existing social links which lead to higher cooperation. Through self-organisation from local interactions clusters of cooperators emerged and these changes in the network structure provided feedback on how participants choose their behaviour. This research result, however, only indicates the complexity of cooperation. How cooperative behaviour evolves and can be maintained in social groups is still an unanswered question in social sciences. A clarification would require the consideration of a multitude of perspectives because the puzzle of cooperation attracts researchers from various domains such as political and social sciences, economics, social-psychology, biology and neuroscience, behavioural sciences and anthropology as well as mathematics and

game theory. Doing so would go far beyond the scope of this concept note. Therefore, we restrict ourselves to seven comments regarding (1) cooperation and social learning, (2) cooperation and shared intentionality, (3) coercive and voluntary cooperation, (4) natural cooperation, helping and social norms, (5) cooperation and punishment, (6) cooperation and trust, and (7) cooperation and competition. These comments illustrate the complexity of the concept and serve as a reflection on relevant issues for establishing and maintaining school networks.

**(1) Cooperation and social learning:** Muijs' definition (see above) is remarkably pragmatic as it reduces collaboration to joint activities and it does not connect collaboration with social learning (learning from others). Since at least John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916) we know that social learning arises from active interaction between people in the context of a social network. If teaching of "collective action" (Ostrom 1998) is assigned to a subject such as civic education, learning is reduced to individual knowledge acquisition and the learning about collective action. Rather, social learning must include opportunities for students to actively engage in cooperative activities so that learning with and from others can take place. School networks can provide such opportunities for cooperative and social learning.

**(2) Cooperation and shared intentionality:** In addition, Muijs' definition corresponds well with the meaning of the original Latin term "cooperor" as working together to a common good. This idea includes an agreed goal which is either the outcome of a mutual deliberation of individuals involved or prior set by a third party. It is assumed that in cooperative activities individuals have a joint goal. This goal creates an interdependence among them and involves the ability to create with others joint intentions and joint commitments in cooperative activities. According to Tomasello (2009) this "shared intentionality" provides the foundation for creating a group identity which evolves out of cooperative behaviour. Again, school networks can provide for the formation of a common "we" through shared intentionality, especially relevant in heterogeneous settings.

**(3) Coercive and voluntary cooperation:** Cooperation only tells us that a group of individuals is working together. It keeps silent about the individuals doing so voluntarily or by force. It is tempting to say that this is irrelevant, if the outcomes of cooperation are what matter, whether being forced into it or not. From an economic perspective, the argument on coercive cooperation seems to be in accordance with the prediction of collective action theory that self-interested individuals will have extreme difficulty to cooperate in certain settings, even when such

cooperative behaviour would be to their mutual benefit, unless rules are externally enforced on them (Ostrom 2000). In consequence, the cost for coordination and enforcement of cooperation become a concern and eventually a burden for an external centralised authority. If resources are not sufficiently spent for coordination efforts (e.g. monitoring) coerced cooperation becomes less effective and less efficient or cooperation does not take place at all as intended. The costs for coerced cooperation may exceed the benefits of cooperative efforts. Nevertheless, coercion is widely practiced as a means to ensure cooperation, in its extreme form, to ensure submission and compliance. Coercion exercised over unwilling subjects introduces an asymmetry and promotes power and resentment. Thereby the risk cooperative activities being undermined and becoming ineffective increases. Similarly, voluntary cooperation can have negative effects, too, for example, if it is induced by financial incentives. Incentivised cooperation is less effective and less efficient compared with cooperation without incentive contracts (see Gillison 2004). The school clusters are a case in point.

**(4) Natural cooperation, helping and social norms:** Adults (e.g. parents and teachers) who assume that children are not naturally helpful and cooperative and, therefore, attempt to make them so through external reinforcements and punishments will face great difficulties in creating children who internalise social norms and use them to regulate their own behaviour. Based on extensive experimental data comparing great apes and human children, Tomasello (2009) shows that young children (as young as 12 to 36 months) are able to be helpful, informative and generous in specific situations (though selfish in others). Children's early helping is not a behaviour created by culture or socialisation (within the family or other institutions), rather, it is an "outward expression of children's natural inclination to sympathise with others in strife" (Tomasello 2009: 13).

This altruism of young children is confirmed by research findings on early social-cognitive development across cultures. Callaghan et al. (2011) assess the social-cognitive skills of one-year-old children in three diverse cultural settings: rural Canada, rural Peru and rural India. In their interactive skills involving cooperation and joint attention children in the three settings are highly similar. All children develop their most basic social-cognitive skills for interacting with others and participating in their culture at around the same age. But then, from around three years of age, children learn to be selective about whom to help, inform and share with, and they also recognise their public reputation and self as a way of influencing the actions of those others towards themselves. In

addition, they learn the social norms that characterise the cultural world in which they live. Children do not only respect social norms due to the benefits of reciprocity and threat of punishment. Instead, they are sensitive from a young age to their own interdependence with others in cooperative activities. They value conformity to the group as a marker of group identity which becomes an important source of own respect for social norms and their reinforcement of social norms on others. A reasonable conclusion is that cultural influence on cooperative behaviour comes from the prevailing social norms in distinct cultures. School networks can build on the children's altruism when bringing them together in cooperative activities. Their cooperative behaviour will be framed by the social norms of their culture. The observable individual differences in cooperation can be expected to be in correspondence with the norms and values of their cultural practices, and they are outcomes of social-cognitive learning.

- (5) **Cooperation and punishment:** From an economic perspective, game theory has challenged the basic assumption that all players in a game are acting fully rationally and are interested only in their own immediate financial payoff, that they are “rational egoists” (Ostrom 2000). A player tends only to cooperate until the other players defect, thereby becoming a “conditional coordinator”. In addition, exploiting free-riding opportunities is a common social phenomenon that happens in games as well. The question, therefore, arises how to treat defectors, or non-cooperators and free-riders.

Fehr and Gächter (2002) introduce a theory of strong reciprocity incorporating the “altruistic punishment” of non-cooperators or free-riders. According to the theory, cooperation is necessary for the provision of public goods, and the punishment of free-riders is itself a public good – a service provided for the benefit of the whole community. Such punishment is altruistic because it is costly to those who administer it, as it takes time and energy and invites retaliation. Fehr and Gächter have provided persuasive experimental evidence that cooperation flourishes when punishment is possible and breaks down when it is not. However, altruistic punishment creates a dilemma of higher order free-riders. An infinite regress arises if free-riders are not punished who must presumably be treated as second-order free-rider, itself subject to sanction from other group members. Consequently, what about sanctions against third-order free-rider, who neglect to punish second order free-riders and so on.

Sigmund et al. (2010) suggest a form of punishment that facilitates the sanctioning of second-order free-riders. In experiments on public good games<sup>9</sup> players

decide whether to contribute to a “punishment pool” (Sigmund et al. 2010) before contributing to the public goods. The authors compare the punishment pool with paying towards a police force rather than taking law enforcement into their own hands (peer punishment). They claim that such a punishment pool can be viewed as a first step towards an institutionalised mechanism for punishing free-riders. Other forms of punishment let the free-riders suffer the cost of punishment instead of the punisher. For example, Bowles and Gintis (2004) explore ostracism and shunning and Cant and Johnstone (2006) discuss the termination of an interaction as a response to free-riding.

Sasaki and Uchida (2012) provide experimental evidence that punishment does not need to be costly, and provides a reward for the punisher, if social exclusion is used as a punishment. The authors describe social exclusion as a “self-serving punishment” (Sasaki and Uchida 2012: 2), and those excluded suffer the cost. The exclusion of free-riders can decrease the number of beneficiaries, especially when it does not affect the contribution, thereby increasing the share of the group benefit. For example, the fewer people sharing the available resources, the more of them everyone gets. But it is not possible to deny people a share of the resources for no reason. There needs to be a justification, for example, that someone did not contribute to the resources, a free-rider. If free-riders are punished with social exclusion it increases the payoff for the punisher. Social exclusion or the threat of it also promotes cooperation, claim Sasaki and Uchida, because people will be more likely to cooperate, contribute to the resources and ensure they get to share the reward. In their experimental study on cooperation and punishment in six different world cultures Gächter et al. (2010) observe a substantial variation in the presence of punishment opportunities due to large cultural differences in punishment practices.

As Ostrom (2000) concludes, apart from rational egoists, conditional cooperators and willing punishers, both from within the group, together create a more robust opening for cooperation and a mechanism for helping it grow. From a psychological and anthropological perspective, individuals can be seen as possessing tendencies for being a rational egoist, a conditional cooperator and a punisher. The context will decide which role they play. Dealing with free-riders and non-cooperative behaviour arises as a challenging task in school networks. Constructive conflict resolution becomes a necessity. A promising finding for school networks, eventually, comes from game theory. Under the condition that players have the possibility of repeated interaction in a public good

game, Rand et al. (2009) report that players who find positive interactions to maintain cooperation outperform players who use costly punishment.

- (6) **Cooperation and trust:** The developmental pattern of children aiming their altruistic acts (helping, informing, sharing) towards others who will not take advantage of them and who might even reciprocate can be described as “reciprocal altruism” (Trivers 1971). It may be seen as a reflection of the famous tit-for-tat strategy for cooperation, especially effective in maintaining cooperation in groups over time. In two computer tournaments participants were invited to find a good strategy for the iterated prisoner’s dilemma. Axelrod (1984) discovered that the ‘winner’ was the simplest of all strategies submitted called tit-for-tat. It is a strategy of direct reciprocity which cooperates on the first move and then does whatever the other player did on the previous move: a cooperation for a cooperation, and a defection for a defection.

Axelrod (1984) describes a concrete demonstration of the tit-for-tat strategy in the real world. During the trench warfare of the western front in World War I the “live and let live” system emerged. In the midst of this bitter conflict, the frontline soldiers often refrained from shooting to kill, provided their restraint was reciprocated by the soldier on the other side. The soldiers of these opposing units actually violate orders from their own high commands in order to achieve tacit cooperation with each other. Axelrod claims that this case illustrates the point that cooperation can get started, evolve, and prove stable in situations which otherwise appear extraordinarily unpromising. The “live and let live” system demonstrates that friendship is hardly necessary for the development of cooperation. Under suitable conditions, cooperation based on reciprocity can develop even between antagonists. As the tit-for-tat strategy and the live and let live system suggest, trust would be better understood as a result rather than a precondition of cooperation. School networks provide opportunities for trust building among actors through their active engagement in constructive cooperative activities. Many empirical and theoretical studies were inspired by Axelrod’s groundbreaking work.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, the tit-for-tat strategy got adopted according to its deficiencies and modifications of the prisoner’s dilemma game. For example, the tit-for-tat strategy is prone to error and if an accidental defection happens, it leads to a long sequence of retaliation. The introduction of a generous tit-for-tat, that is, the cooperation to be continued after one single (erroneous) defection, in fact, promotes forgiveness (Nowak 2006). In addition, if indirect reciprocity is introduced to the prisoner’s dilemma game, reputation is built

which is a strong promoter of cooperation (Nowak and Sigmund 2005; Milinski 2012). Indirective reciprocity, in brief ‘give and you shall receive’, means that players and others are informed about the interaction of the players in previous games. When deciding how to act, the players take into account the possible consequences for their reputation. The game becomes fairly complex. Not only must the players remember their own interactions, the players must also monitor the interaction of the other players and the information provided about previous interactions. If prisoner’s dilemma games (or variations such as public good games) are played in the presence of an audience that informs about the interactions of the players, a good strategy for maintaining it is the observed-tit-for-tat: the players are following the standard tit-for-tat, except that in the first round they defect, if they know their co-player, in previous repeated games against another player, has defected. This shows the strong relationship between reciprocity, trust and reputation. Social behaviour can thus be rather unsocial conferring a negative reputation to the actor. Not considering reputation Press and Dyson (2012) describe an extortionate strategy that beats any adaptive strategy including tit-for-tat. In an iterated prisoner’s dilemma game the opponent can only gain most by maximum cooperation. However, their extortionate partner always gains more with the opponent’s increasing cooperation. The bad reputation of being an extortioner might spread quickly, probably preventing the strategy from becoming frequent (Milinski 2012).

- (7) **Cooperation and competition:** Following Deusch (2006), cooperation and competition are characterised by their two basic types of goal interdependence. The students’ engagement in a competitive win-lose struggle indicates a more negative goal interdependence (see above) as compared with cooperative relations in which the goals of the students involved are predominantly positively interdependent. Nevertheless, cooperation and competition are not necessarily alternatives; they coexist in the Sri Lankan school. The issue seems to be one of finding the optimal mixture of cooperation and competition rather than deciding at which extreme to converge (Gambetta 1988). Consequently, it would be a fallacy to assume that cooperation cannot be destructive, for example, for those outside the group who are not part of the “contract”. For example, collusion and corruption are also types of cooperation, the purpose of which is to gain benefit at others expense. There are instances of cooperation, e.g. among robbers and murderers, that we may want to dispose of rather than improve. We may want less cooperation rather than more, especially among those who are threatening us and whose cooperation is a hindrance to ours. Cooperation may not even be desirable for those within the group, for example, if

not only free-riders, but pro-social cooperators become the target of punishers. Herrmann et al. (2008) document widespread “antisocial punishment, that is, the sanctioning of people who behave prosocially” (Herrmann et al. 2008: 1362) in public good experiments which they conducted in 15 countries around the world. The authors offer revenge (for not accepting punishment), shame (for being punished for low contributions), and normative conformity (for punishing all deviators, cooperators and free-riders alike) as explanations for antisocial punishment. We, therefore, cannot always say whether more cooperation in social networks is in fact desirable. The detrimental effects on cooperation may be suffered by insiders through antisocial punishment or social exclusion, and outsiders as well.

Finally, we like to conclude this section with a broader definition of cooperation because we have already discussed some of its elements in our comments above. Gambetta (1988: 213-4) defines cooperation as “agents, such as individuals, firms, and governments, agreeing on any set of rules – a ‘contract’ – which is then to be observed in the course of their interaction.” In our case, the agents are schools with their actors such as principals, teachers, students and school administrators. Gambetta points out that such agreements can emerge implicitly in the course of interaction itself, and rules can be established as a result of habit, prior successful experience or trial and error. The contract-like agreement specifies the rules of cooperation within the school network, and it does not need to be written down or formally stipulated. A formally introduced set of rules by the Ministry of Education runs the risk of coerced cooperation and coerced school networks as well with negative consequences described above. We should set our sights on promoting the right conditions for constructive cooperation of schools, and thereby, encouraging students to engage in cooperative activities within an overall segregated school system and within a highly competitive school environment. A game-theoretical perspective may provide a deeper insight into the evolution and maintenance of cooperation in school networks. In summary, we put record on seven statements as follows:

- What counts in social learning is students’ active engagement in constructive cooperative action within school networks.
- Through “shared intentionality” school networks can foster the formation of a common “we” among school network actors.
- Coercive cooperation has (mostly unintended) negative effects on teaching and learning in schools and needs to be avoided.

- Children are altruistic by nature, a predisposition that adults need to nurture. The assumption that adults need external reinforcement and punishment in order for children to behave cooperatively is counterproductive. Rather, children need time and space to make constructive cooperative experiences.
- Voluntary actors coming together in school networks will most likely encounter conflicts with non-cooperators, or free-riders. Conflict resolution becomes part of the social learning process.
- Constructive cooperation in schools and in school networks is necessary in order to produce valuable “social goods” such as trust.
- Being aware about potentially destructive cooperation, finding a balance between cooperation and competition is the great challenge of school networks.

These statements on cooperation complement the characteristics of school networks to follow.

## Characteristics of school networks

We now turn to the effects of school networks on students, teachers and schools. Table 2 presents key findings from the research synthesis by Berkemeyer et al. (2009) and Chapman and Hadfield (2010). Although these findings derive from Western contexts, the reviews allow us to identify several conditions of success with relevance to Sri Lanka. At the same time, they are the challenges for establishing effective school networks in the Sri Lankan context of segregated schools and rigid hierarchical education governance. We describe eight characteristics.

- (1) Context:** The ways in which the structure of the school networks are designed demonstrate responsiveness to the diversity of contexts. It certainly will make a difference if the schools in a network are homogeneous or heterogeneous with regard to ethno-linguistic and religious student backgrounds. Above all, how can it be ensured that school networks do not reinforce existing inequalities as the school networks are not formed in an “empty space” but within a given social structure? At the core of the constitution of networks is the dilemma between conscription and volunteerism. When individuals or schools are coerced into networks, e.g. by an administrative directive, they tend to be hollow or empty with little chance of sustaining themselves beyond any incentives or inducements. Therefore, the common goal matters to satisfy a common need or interest of the network schools as a motivation for their participation.



**Table 2: Effects of School Networks on Students, Teachers and Schools**

Effects on Students	Effects on Teachers	Effects on Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved student attainment, academic achievement and engagement</li> <li>• Narrowed gap between minority and non-minority students and between economically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students</li> <li>• Increased students’ reflection and responsibility for their work</li> <li>• Greater students’ involvement in co-curricular activities (e.g. clubs)</li> <li>• Increased students’ self-confidence and self esteem</li> <li>• Improved attitude towards school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved professional development through increased knowledge regarding subject content and methodology, classroom management and school development</li> <li>• Increased teacher reflection and readiness for innovation</li> <li>• Increased motivation collaboration with other schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beneficial for disadvantaged schools</li> <li>• Increased parents’ interest and support</li> </ul>

(2) **Common goal:** In general, the goal serves as a necessary precondition for creating, building and deepening communities of practice for learning, development and achievement. In our case in Sri Lanka, the common goal for school networks is the enhancement of social cohesion. Strengthening school networks has the potential for achieving the goal because diverse and resilient social relations, in form of a social network, are a key dimension of social cohesion. Enhancing social cohesion is assumed essential for schools in heterogeneous as well as in homogeneous environments. As, for example, a school in a homogeneous social environment with trustful relationships among students and teachers may still have deficits regarding other dimensions of social cohesion such as acceptance of diversity. We must keep in mind that not only the social relationships among individuals of the same group (bonding social capital) but especially social relationships between individuals of different groups (bridging social capital) are a characteristic of a cohesive society. Moreover, we point to Portes’ (1998) who identifies four potential negative consequences of social capital which are of high relevance in the Sri Lankan context, as we assume that in groups in a deeply divided country these forces are at work. First, exclusion of outsiders; second, excess claims on group members if less successful members enforce on the more successful members all kinds of demands that are backed by shared norms; third, restrictions on individual freedoms as group participation creates demands for conformity and enforcement of norm observation; and fourth, downward levelling norms as group solidarity can be cemented by keeping a member in place through blocking his or her upward mobility.

(3) Subsequently, **relationship and trust** matter: Social relations among schools and individuals (students, teachers, principals and others) play a fundamental role in developing and deepening a collaborative culture that facilitates cooperation, knowledge and practice transfer both within and across schools. The trust is based on the relationships between the network members and its strength is the most important influence on collective capacity for collaboration. After all, trust in institutions as well as trust in people are two key dimensions of social cohesion (see Dragolov et al. 2016).

(4) **Leadership:** Since there is no prescription for effective collaboration, a dedicated leadership support for managing the development of the school network is important for success. The active engagement and support needs to come from the school administration as well as the school principal. From a social network perspective, we assume that the principal needs to have strong ties within his or her school. In addition, the principal is connected to the school administration with either strong or weak ties to various officers. Within the school network, however, even weak ties<sup>11</sup> may be sufficient for establishing a school network and keeping it functioning. The principal will serve as a bridge between school and administration or in network terminology, the principal spans the structural hole between the two network clusters (school and administration). Though the principals occupy a similar hierarchical position their relationships with the actors in the school network (e.g. school administration) differ which may create resistance against the school network and implementing joint activities. The question remains how resistance against school networks by the leadership, especially the principal and the

school administration can be avoided or reduced.

A well-informed school administration and its awareness about the purpose of the school networks reduces uncertainty and potential resistance. Some connection to the school networks is essential. In a hierarchical structure a top down directive is needed to allow schools to start working together. On the other hand, excessive administrative procedures may limit the space for interaction or put forward obstacles which may even prevent network formation in the first place. For example, the prevailing professional development of principals and school administrators includes leadership training with the main purpose of introducing the principal and the officers to their respective administrative functions in the existing educational hierarchy. Similarly, in popular leadership training, selected students are prepared for possible leadership positions to be taken over in the future. If the focus of such training is on the transfer of rigid and hierarchical structures, barriers for the emergence of school networks are created.

- (5) Therefore, **capacity development** matters: Regarding the professional development of school network actors, initially, school development and school networks as well as education for social cohesion interventions will become the new content area for the acquisition of knowledge and skills. The school network actors need to acquire relevant competencies for introducing and establishing school networks and implementing education interventions. This includes the capacities for self-organisation. It requires less learning about facts than applying and practicing critical thinking skills, more so if the school networks are geared to social cohesion. Without attempting to define critical thinking we restrict ourselves to pointing out two components which are (i) a set of information and belief generating and processing skills, and (ii) the habit of using those skills to guide behaviour. This understanding is thus to be contrasted with (a) the mere acquisition and retention of information alone, because it involves a particular way in which information is sought and treated, (b) the mere possession of a set of skills, because it involves the continual use of them, and (c) the mere use of those skills as an “exercise” without acceptance of their results. If curiosity is not encouraged and questioning and doubting are treated as disobedient and undisciplined behaviour it is less likely that self-organisation and innovative forms of cooperation and exchange will emerge. Doubt creates disturbance and turbulence which in turn need adequate skills to be handled with care. For example, facilitation skills are helpful to foster exchange and collaboration when preparing and conducting an exchange meeting

of school network actors. Whereas these skills are usually not needed if the main purpose of the meeting is to send out messages and to distribute tasks. Consequently, the presence of participants is required, but not their active participation, e.g. exchange of experience and ideas that contribute to a decision making process. Efforts in preparing and conducting meetings, workshops etc. will more focus on ensuring the presence of participants rather than providing opportunities for their active participation. Even the provision of such opportunities may not be considered relevant by participants who are convinced that their presence is more important than their contribution. The reflection on the purpose of the meeting may already trigger important issues regarding the school network or education for social cohesion that need to be addressed. The self-organisation requires skills that can be provided by professional development programmes. It may be as simple as introducing facilitation skills which have the potential for triggering a debate on self-organisation.

Therefore, the service providers of the professional development themselves, within or outside the support system, can become a barrier for school networks and education for social cohesion if their performance complies in principle with a sender-receiver model. As long as the providers do not adjust the capacity development to the school network actors’ needs, such as assisted self-learning, peer support mechanisms and self-organisation, functioning school networks are less likely to emerge.

- (6) For this reason, **support** matters: Developing the capacities for an effective support structure at school and local levels is a pre-condition for an effective school network because the schools need the financial and organisational support from the local school administration to realise their joint interventions. This implies a reverse of the current school support mechanism, as the local authorities have to respond to the needs of the schools (bottom-up demand) instead of unitarily supplying services to the schools regardless of their needs (top-down supply driven). For example, in-service teacher training will be provided according to the needs of the teachers and on demand of schools rather than being supplied by the education administration. Raising awareness about the potential for changing the education governance from top-down supply to a bottom-up demand, already requires plenty of effective examples to be followed and imitated and adapted according to local needs.
- (7) Hence, **communication** matters: Effective communication is vital in every aspect of how school networks work. The effective flow of information within the network keeps it together. At the same time

the network depends on the diffusion of innovations through weak ties. In the present hierarchical education structure, the bottom-up flow of information from schools and within the networks is crucial. Without an uninterrupted communication channel from schools through the entire school administration it will be unlikely that the education administration will respond to school network demands.

Communication refers also to language issues which can become highly controversial in the Sri Lankan case. An appreciation of the national languages does not necessarily imply the acceptance of lingual diversity and the support for multi-lingualism. In addition, despite its promotion, English cannot always and everywhere serve as a link language due to limited linguistic proficiency. Therefore, it is important that, if necessary, several languages are used in the school networks and during the implementation of the education interventions in order to ensure inclusion of all actors.

- (8) Finally, **ownership** matters: The active participation of teachers is described as a key factor of success by Berkemeyer et al. (2009). When teachers can see an intervention operating in situations akin to their own they are reassured about its feasibility, instead of being put off as the intervention is imposed from outside. A feeling of ownership at the school level increases the chance for mutual aspirations that form the basis of teachers' abilities and motivation to actively participate in the school network.

## Diffusion of social innovations

So far, we described the Sri Lankan school context and reasoned why school networks can be an entry point for gearing schooling more towards social cohesion. After reflecting on Sri Lanka's experience with school clusters we identified several possible success factors for functional school networks that allow for innovative social practices to emerge. Our argument is that these innovative social practices may counter-balance the top-down management structure through adopting the principle of subsidiarity. The social practices are the constituent parts of the social innovation as we will explain in the following. Our focus will be on the diffusion of the social innovation which we turn to next.

The terms of scaling-up, dissemination and diffusion seem to be used interchangeably with each other. We carefully try to follow the terminology which authors or organisations use. However, a lack of clarity does not derive from different terminology. A fundamental controversy pertains to the question if and to what extent the underlying processes which the terms describe

are projectable and manageable. Some argue that scaling-up, dissemination or diffusion of an innovation describe directed and planned management processes, otherwise they are pointless. Their critics counter that this understanding is a result of reductionist thinking of linear cause and effect and consequently, the diffusion of innovation needs to be considered as a spontaneous and unplanned process. Simply, a retrospective analysis helps to identify characteristics of the diffusion process which then may provide guidelines for planning and management if at all.

From GIZ perspective, scaling-up of innovations has to be strategically included in programme planning and implementation. According to the GIZ guidelines "scaling-up is a managed process designed to mainstream an innovation through a project and generate broad impact" (GIZ 2016: 7). Broad impact is supposed to share four characteristics: relevance, quality, quantity and sustainability. Another document describes broad impact as "a need-oriented and a qualitatively appropriate improvement for a significantly large target group of beneficiaries which continues beyond the end of project term" (GIZ 2015: 2, our translation). In order to "ensure the best-possible 'fit' with the social realities of the partner system" (GIZ 2016: 8) the guidelines suggest different scaling-up strategies which can be used separately or together: (i) Functional scaling-up describes the transfer of successful approaches to another context, sector or service, (ii) horizontal scaling-up means an approach through standardisation and a measurable process, and (iii) vertical scaling-up uses tried-and-tested strategies at the micro level and implements them systematically on a broad scale through institutionalisation. In addition, the guidelines identify eight success factors for scaling up.<sup>11</sup> In fact, these success factors and the scaling-up strategies are the findings of an evaluation on how successful scaling-up is achieved in projects in the water sector implemented by GIZ. The success factors are linked to the GIZ management model (Capacity Works) and its tools in order to systematically integrate scaling-up and broad impact into project planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting. According to the guidelines the scaling-up of an innovation "involves changes within organisations and cooperation systems and in the way they deliver their services... Significant changes need to be made to established routines within an area of social concern if innovations are to be mainstreamed" (GIZ 2016: 7). However, this statement on social implications of scaling-up an innovation is not elaborated and pursued further. Instead, the guidelines claim the proposed strategies and steering mechanisms for scaling-up innovations to be valid for all sectors world-wide. Apart from this bizarre claim of universal validity the guidelines seem to underestimate or lose sight of the underlying social practices in scaling up innovations. The scaling up process is determined by social practices which are embedded in local cultures

and socio-economic conditions. The presumption is not fallacious that the guidelines have been shaped by a technology-oriented understanding of innovation, thereby neglecting the social aspects in the emergence and dissemination of technological innovations as well as the insights of social innovation research (see Howaldt et al. 2014).

According to the GIZ guidelines we are supposed to use the success factors and apply the management tools (Capacity Works) for designing the scaling up strategy. Not surprisingly, we abstain from doing so, because we expect the context to be extremely relevant for the scaling-up or diffusion of innovative social practices of actors within the school networks (see below). Therefore, we prefer to resort to another definition of diffusion of social innovation in order to design the conceptual framework. We assume that this conceptual framework needs to be embedded into the specific context we have briefly described above.

Rogers (2003) defines diffusion as “the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (5). An innovation is described as an idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other units of adoption. The communication channels to diffuse innovations would be the relations between the network actors and the schools. Rogers claims that diffusion is a social process that requires interpersonal communicative relationships. Thus, interpersonal channels are more powerful to create or change strong attitudes held by an individual. The social system in the definition refers to the school network. Roger’s definition of a social system as “a set of interrelated units engaged in joint problem solving to accomplish a common goal” (Rogers 2003: 23) is compatible with Muijs’ et al. (2010) definition of a school network on ‘*defining school networks*’.

We differentiate a technological from a social innovation because the diffusion of technological innovations tends to be much faster than the diffusion of social innovations. The difference is usually explained with the significance of underlying social practices. According to Howaldt and Schwartz (2010) “a social innovation is a new combination and/or new configuration of social practices in certain areas of action in an intentional targeted manner with the goal of better satisfying or answering needs and problems than is possible on the basis of established practices” (26). An innovation is therefore social to the extent that it manifests itself in social practices. These social practices can become socially accepted and diffused in society – be it throughout society or in certain societal sub-areas such as education and schools. “New” means socially desirable in a normative sense. This depends on circumstances of social change, interests, policies and power. Social innovations may be established in a wider societal context

and ultimately institutionalised as regular social practice or made routine.

In our case, the social innovation constitutes the social practices of actors in the school network. These social practices are a novel set of behaviours, routines and ways of working within the school network. Hence, what is in essence innovative occurs on the level of social behavioural patterns, routines, practices and settings. We expect observable cooperative behaviour to evolve among school network actors in contrast to competitive interaction. This cooperation will be maintained, at least over a certain period of time, through entering into contract-like agreements which may emerge implicitly in the course of cooperation (see Gambetta’s definition of cooperation above). These agreements are the manifestations of normative attitudes about acceptable cooperative behaviour including sanctions about behaviour that is not acceptable.

The school networks can be seen as the institutional framework in which the cooperative behaviour evolves and social practices take place, and eventually the social innovation occurs. The potential effects of the social practices appear in and through school networks. In cooperative learning situations school network actors perceive that they can reach their goals if and only if the other actors also reach their goals. This experience of positive interdependence is critical for promotive interactions such as helpfulness, assistance, encouragement and support. The emerging social learning is more than an instructional procedure. It creates the basis for a shift in the organisational structure of schools and school administrations from competition to cooperation. To find the optimal mixture between competition and cooperation (see Gambetta above) still remains an open question.

In order to ensure that the school networks are geared towards social cohesion the content is defined by the well-established interventions which the ESC programme implemented over the past ten years. These interventions consist of a bundle of measures in three content areas: peace and value education, second national language education and school-based psycho-social care (see Table 3). The proven and tested interventions are not the social innovation but the way the school network actors adopt them according to their needs. Interventions do not become innovative by definition, even though they have been successfully piloted and considered “good”, “best” or otherwise specified by mistake.

**Table 3: Key Education for Social Cohesion Interventions**

Peace and Value Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student exchange programme</li> <li>• Student parliament</li> <li>• Cultural and religious event</li> <li>• Sport for development and social cohesion</li> <li>• Project based learning</li> <li>• Qualification of trainers and teachers</li> <li>• Introduction of relevant instructional material (e.g. student parliament and civic education handbooks)</li> </ul>
Second National Language Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of language clubs in schools and NCoE</li> <li>• Qualification of NCoE lecturers, trainers and teachers based on second language methodology</li> <li>• Introduction of relevant instructional material based on second language methodology (e.g. textbooks, teacher guides, CDs)</li> </ul>
Psycho-social Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualification of trainers and school counselors</li> <li>• Provision of school based psycho-social services</li> <li>• Introduction of relevant instructional material (e.g. training modules)</li> </ul>

Through adequate institutional and content setting we envision to stimulate a culture of collaboration and exchange that goes beyond mere reception and implementation of top-down orders. Thereby, more relevant interventions to address specific school related challenges regarding social cohesion can be designed and implemented by the school network actors. This provides them opportunities to exercise the principle of subsidiarity. Reflecting on the planning and implementation process implies an assessment of the education interventions, the purpose of the school network and the collaborative efforts within the network as well. The social practices become a matter of the common reflection process. First and foremost, the innovative social practices challenge the segregation of schools, satisfy the needs of students to learn to live together peacefully and exercise the principle of subsidiarity in the school system.

Decisive for our case is that the purpose of the collaboration within school networks is to enhance social cohesion. Certainly, other purposes for school networks are possible but are not considered here. For example, if schools jointly prepare their students for examinations and share their resources for extra tuition classes we will not consider these interventions, because they are not intentionally directed at enhancing social cohesion.

Certainly, many education interventions (like student parliaments) are not new, however, if introduced in a school for the first time, they may be perceived as novel by the actors involved. An interesting case will be an intervention which is implemented by a school outside the network without collaborating with other schools. For example, a school decides to introduce a student parliament because of

a ministerial circular, without consulting other schools or the education administration. We would consider such an initiative only if the school adapts the student parliament to its specific needs and if the social practices necessary for collaboration become recognisable in the adoption process. For example, the introduction of a student parliament because of the ministerial circular and the appointment of its members by the principal would certainly disqualify the initiative. If the school committee decides to set a quota for the composition of the student parliament to boost female participation we would have a different case. Even though this is not demanded in the circular and guidelines the school would have adopted the intervention according to its needs. The social practices required for this adoption process can be considered innovative.

The school networks need to have specific features in order to allow for the diffusion of the social innovation. In the diffusion process the social innovation will be adopted or rejected. A successful adoption can result in its institutionalisation usually through planned and coordinated social action. The Institutionalisation can occur also through countless acts of imitation which are spontaneous rather than planned. In the adoption-diffusion process the focus is on the related behaviour of rejection and acceptance. Diffusion is a process centred on changing patterns of behaviour that sets social learning processes in motion which are triggered by new social innovation (see Howaldt et al. 2014).

Since the diffusion of innovation takes place in the school network, it is influenced by the structure of the network and the behavioural patterns, routines and practices of its actors. Rogers describes the diffusion process as “an information-seeking and information-processing activity,

in which an individual is motivated to reduce uncertainty about the advantages and disadvantages of an innovation” (Rogers 2003, 172). According to Rogers the diffusion process has five stages which are described briefly in Box 2. The social learning of school network actors is but one mechanism of diffusion. Similar to social learning, the process of diffusion takes time, is often under-estimated or sometimes even ignored. If time for social learning or diffusion is missing, disorganisation and confusion may be the result.

In the process of diffusion, social innovations and social practices often come into conflict with prior practices and routines. Therefore, opposition or resistance to social innovations is seen as part of the diffusion process. Rogers (2003) describes the innovation-diffusion process as “an uncertainty reduction process” (232). He proposes attributes of the innovation that help in decreasing the uncertainty. These attributes include relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability. They are briefly described in Box 2 as well. Rogers states that the individual’s perception of these attributes or characteristics predict the rate of adoption of innovations.

Initiatives which are not accepted, supported or tolerated by the school system may face failure or become victims of circumstances of power relations. The school clusters in Sri Lanka during the 1980s are a case in point. By assisting schools to find their own solutions the social innovation most likely will generate “creative tension” (Schröder and Kuschmierz 2017: 105) to the school system. Social innovation can push the school system to necessary improvements and thereby strain the school administration. It remains an open question if the change of institutional logics and working management structures is a pre-condition for adopting a social practice or a possible outcome of the introduction and diffusion of the social innovation. Chicken-and-egg problems abound in social network analysis as Kadushin (2012) convincingly claims.

Decisive for successful diffusion is the compatibility with the practical rationale and their utility in terms of their adopters. The “early adopters” who are the opinion leaders for mainstreaming the innovation follow the few “innovators” who believe and are willing to experiment and assume risk. As the innovators are the gatekeepers, the early adopters take a leadership role in adopting the innovation and decreasing uncertainty about the innovation in the diffusion process. Their subjective evaluation about the innovation reaches other members of the social system through their interpersonal network. “Early adopters put their stamp of approval on a new idea by adopting it” (Rogers 2003: 283). The “early majority” does not have the leadership role of the early adopters. Their interpersonal networks are still important in the process of diffusion. The “late majority” is reluctant with regard to

the innovation. To reduce the uncertainty of innovation, interpersonal networks of close peers should persuade the late majority to adopt it. Finally, the “stragglers” follow. This group is most skeptical about the innovation and becoming a change agent. This marks the completion of the diffusion process and the innovation has taken hold.

However, there are clear limitations with regard to steering the adoption-diffusion process and the reduction of uncertainties. Adoption or rejection of the social innovation occurs in the school networks which is a complex field of micro-politics. All the actors bring their relationships and positions to the field which differ tremendously with regard to power and influence within and between groups of actors (principal, teachers, students, school administration). These relationships and positions affect the diffusion of innovation process and its outcome. While following the principle of subsidiarity the outcome regarding the adoption of the social innovation is open even if uncertainties are reduced. In the adoption-diffusion process a certain extent of ambiguity and uncertainty will remain. In fact, the school networks need space for self-organisation. The space and opportunities for self-organisation can be created and planned for. This implies negotiating rules, regulations and boundaries for interaction because self-organisation can be misused by school network actors themselves. The question arises how network actors can be safeguarded within the school network as well as from outside interference. The diffusion process requires confidence in the network actors’ competencies and patience from network actors themselves as well as from outsiders. The outcome of the self-organisation is not projectable.

The diffusion process, therefore, may be less sequential or orderly and more complex and unpredictable than Rogers assumes. With reference to Gabriel Tarde imitation is seen as essential for social innovation. The concept of imitation underpins an understanding of social innovation which focuses on social practices. According to Howaldt et al (2014) only social practices can be imitated. Since imitation always involves variations as well, imitations simultaneously transform innovations into social practices. The key question in the process of diffusion is how new social practices come into being from the imitation of social practices. Diffusion and institutionalisation are viewed as parallel processes which determine the stability or instability of a social practice such as, first and foremost, cooperation and social learning. We assume that such social practices have relevance with regard to the promotion of social cohesion, e.g. inter-personal trust between students from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, acceptance of diversity and non-discrimination.

Consequently, Howaldt et al. (2014) suggest the development of new and less rigid conceptual models (in comparison to Rogers’ adoption-diffusion process)

describing actors' relations and positions in social innovation. Addressing drivers and barriers of social innovation becomes immediately obvious. "Drivers can be understood as factors that stimulate and facilitate the emergence and diffusion of social innovation; barriers as factors that hamper or impede the emergence and diffusion of social innovation." (Howaldt et al. 2014: 156)

In addition, Howaldt and Schwartz (2010) point to the relationship between social innovations and social change. They claim that social innovations "are the most important general cause of social change" (32). With reference to Wolfgang Zapf social change is described as "the process of change in the social structure of a society in its underlying institutions, cultural patterns, corresponding social actions and conscious awareness" (Zapf, cited in Howaldt and Schwarz 2010: 33).<sup>13</sup> Social innovation concerns the creation and structuring of institutions as well as behavioural change and thus the empowerment of actors in a specific group to have the necessary cognitive, relational and organisational skills. Howaldt and Schwarz (2010) claim that the diffusion of social innovations occurs through social networking, the medium of living experience, a diverse array of forms of communication and cooperation, and a change-oriented capacity development.

Therefore, as school networks are complex systems, they need "a degree of turbulence" (Davies 2014) for actors to apply social practices which in turn potentially become the drivers for social change. Neither can it be expected that the adoption-diffusion occurs in a linear cause and effect process nor can it be anticipated that social change emerges without creating conflict. As Davies (2014) convincingly reminds us, turbulence, security and peace are not in contradiction. We borrow her argument and state that complex systems such as school networks will foster the turbulence needed for the diffusion of a social innovation, while safeguarding the network actors. Precaution needs to be properly planned and managed because the existing balance and stability in schools will be challenged and disturbed by the social innovation. As a consequence, deviant behaviour of network actors may occur or outside actors may interfere and disrupt or frustrate the diffusion of the social innovation. As a protective measure of self-control, peaceful conflict resolution together with risk-taking and tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty will become indispensable competencies of network actors.

The amplifying of uncertainties with deteriorating effects on social practices points out to the potential unintended and unwanted effects of school networks and the social innovation. At the same time, it highlights the importance of an early detection of signs of social

instability and factors that may contribute to instability. The need for a social impact assessment arises that includes a pre-estimate of potential effects and risks of the social innovation, especially for the school network actors. Monitoring and research play an essential role in the diffusion of an innovation, especially as safeguards for school network actors.

Nevertheless, "creative tension" (Schröder and Kuschmierz 2017) or "turbulence" (Davies 2014) allow school network actors a new freedom of thinking and cooperative behaviour, and a new independence from former determinants of (competitive) behaviour and convictions. The necessity for school network actors arises to acquire new knowledge, to experience new behaviour, and to explore new norms enabling them and the school network to reach the common goal. New arrangements of relationships become possible and need to evolve, if the social innovation, that is the social practice, is supposed to take root. An intense phase of social-cognitive learning starts until a new balance and stability in the school network has emerged. Two important questions arise: What degree of instability is necessary for the social innovation to diffuse, and what is the threshold beyond which such instability may prevent the diffusion of the social innovation?

## The conceptual framework

So far, the discussion of the limitations for educational change has enabled us to suggest school networks as the institutional framework for the implementation of education interventions in order to enable schools to address the challenges in enhancing social cohesion as well as the students' needs to learn to live together. We identified the need for collaborative efforts within school networks thereby creating the necessary space for the school network actors to engage in various social practices. Some of these social practices may constitute what we have defined as social innovation. The actors' social practices are in essence the foundation of a social innovation that can drive educational change. We discussed requirements of the school networks and the diffusion of such a social innovation from the perspective of theories on social networks and social innovations. Before we re-examine the conceptual considerations of our approach, from a social network perspective, we turn to a brief introduction of the Education for Social Cohesion (ESC) programme and some important achievements.

The ESC programme supports the Ministry of Education in the implementation of the National Policy on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace, developed in 2008 with the support of the ESC programme. It outlines the framework for the interventions in peace and value education, second national language education and psycho-social care. Since then, in five of nine provinces (Central, Eastern, Northern, Sabaragamuwa, Uva) 200 pilot schools have been supported. In the past three years, 314 trainers, 2,904 teachers, 1,306 principals, and 512 lecturers at the National Colleges of Education have been qualified. Peace and value education has become an integral part of the curriculum and the school text books for grades 6 to 10. Student exchange programmes between Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim schools are recognised as a component of peace and value education and have been rising in demand from the schools and the education administration. Further, student theatres bring together students of different ethnic, religious and social background. Student parliaments have largely been introduced in the pilot schools which intend to increase the shared responsibility of the students and allow them to experience and apply democratic rules. The pilot schools have qualified teachers and instructional materials for the second national language education, and the local education administration has qualified trainers (in-service advisors) for second national language education. The pilot schools in the former conflict areas and in the plantation area have qualified teachers for school-based psycho-social care. These counsellors together with the 125 trainers form a network which enables them to exchange experience, mutually support each other and organise training.

Since 2016, the ESC programme has addressed the improvement and expansion of education services with respect to peace and value education, second language education and psycho-social care through support for school development. Proved and tested education interventions in these three content areas are integrated into the school development plans or annual implementation plans (AIP) and implemented thereafter (see Table 3). The parents were encouraged to actively participate and be involved in the school activities using existing structures and mechanisms such as Parent Teacher Associations or School Development Committees. A support system has been established at the Zonal and Provincial Education Departments (ZED, PED) comprising of in-service advisers, trainers, senior teachers and other education officers with the objective of being a local level support for schools when implementing their planned activities. All pilot schools have appointed a senior teacher or a vice principal as ESC Coordinators who coordinate and organise all activities regarding education for social

cohesion in the pilot schools. They are encouraged to collaborate with neighbouring schools to initiate a school network. Advisory services will be provided to develop the capacities of the ESC support system at provincial and zonal levels. This will include the qualification of ESC trainers and education officers (ESC Coordinators) in ZED and PED. The in-service teacher training will be conducted by the trainers, and steered and financed by the PED and ZED. In principle, the ESC support works with and through existing structures and mechanisms at school, zonal and provincial levels, and it does not establish parallel structures. Thus, the responsibility of the education administration at the local level is strengthened and the schools are encouraged to make use of the extended education services.

The guiding questions are: First, how relationships between actors (students, teachers, principals, administrators and others) in and across schools can be created in the first place and sustained over time. Second, under what circumstances are the schools and the actors more likely to interact? From a social network point of view we may ask: how infectious is the school network? How likely is it to influence nodes (individuals and schools) with the idea of being open to innovative social practices?

## How school networks operate

The ESC Coordinators at provincial, zonal and school levels play a critical role in establishing and sustaining school networks. ESC Coordinators within the pilot schools serve as well experienced contact points with regard to education for social cohesion. In the initial stage of establishing school networks other non-pilot schools have appointed ESC Coordinators as contact persons in schools. These ESC coordinators within the schools are encouraged to meet and exchange their ideas and experience regarding education for social cohesion. They are supposed to identify the needs of their schools, decide on strategies and thereby start building trust in their professional relationship. At the same time, PED and ZED have appointed ESC Coordinators as contact persons in their respective departments. At regular meetings with school principals, ZED can put ESC on the agenda and ESC Coordinators function as facilitators and resource persons to these meetings. The roles and responsibilities of Provincial and Zonal ESC Coordinators have been clarified and agreed upon (see Table 4).



**Table 4: Roles and Responsibilities of Zonal ESC Coordinators**

<p>Coordination and Facilitation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure ESC activities are included in Zonal AIP</li> <li>• Collaborate with ESC Coordinators in schools and principals to include ESC activities in AIP of schools and encourage school networking</li> <li>• Collaborate with Planning Director and Accountant to obtain funds for the implementation of ESC activities</li> <li>• Assist in the selection and release of trainers and participants for ESC training and coordinate implementation</li> <li>• Coordinate with Provincial ESC Coordinator</li> <li>• Share best practices on ESC with principals, schools and ZED at appropriate and regular meetings</li> <li>• Prepare and conduct ESC awareness presentations at principals' meetings</li> </ul>
<p>Monitoring and Reporting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure data is collected from principals meetings and ESC monitoring instruments are applied</li> <li>• Ensure that ESC monitoring instruments are collected</li> <li>• Assist ISP/ISA/ADE to collect, analyse and report data on ESC from schools</li> <li>• Review SEQI reports of schools and Zonal Administrative Reports on ESC activities</li> <li>• Ensure documentation and reporting on ESC activities in Zones and schools</li> <li>• Analyse Zonal AIP for review and revision of actual plan and planning of the following year</li> <li>• Assist in Zonal and Divisional external evaluations</li> </ul>

In most cases the ESC Coordinators in ZED and PED are Deputy Directors Planning with the main task to coordinating the networks' needs with the support systems' services. Their responsibilities are compatible with their routine tasks and responsibilities. Their role multiplexity (see Box 1) increases, but it will not overstrain them. Even though located within the PED and ZED, the ESC Coordinators span the structural holes between ZED/PED and the school networks, and act as brokers of information and new ideas (see Figure 1). Their function and position as officers within the education system is essential for the school networks. For example, the relationship between a school network and the ESC Coordinator at the ZED will ensure such a flow of information in both directions. The ESC Coordinator's role includes at least two levels of brokerage: first, to make individuals on both sides of the structural hole (network, ZED) aware of interests and difficulties in the other cluster, and second, to transfer knowledge about experience with the implementation of education interventions and joint activities.

Apart from the ESC Coordinators on various levels, the trainers (second national language education, peace and value education, psycho-social care) are an essential part of the support system at the local level, especially regarding capacity development. Hence, both, the ESC Coordinators and trainers establish relationships with the school networks and facilitate collaboration, joint activities and capacity development.

Figure 1: How school networks operate

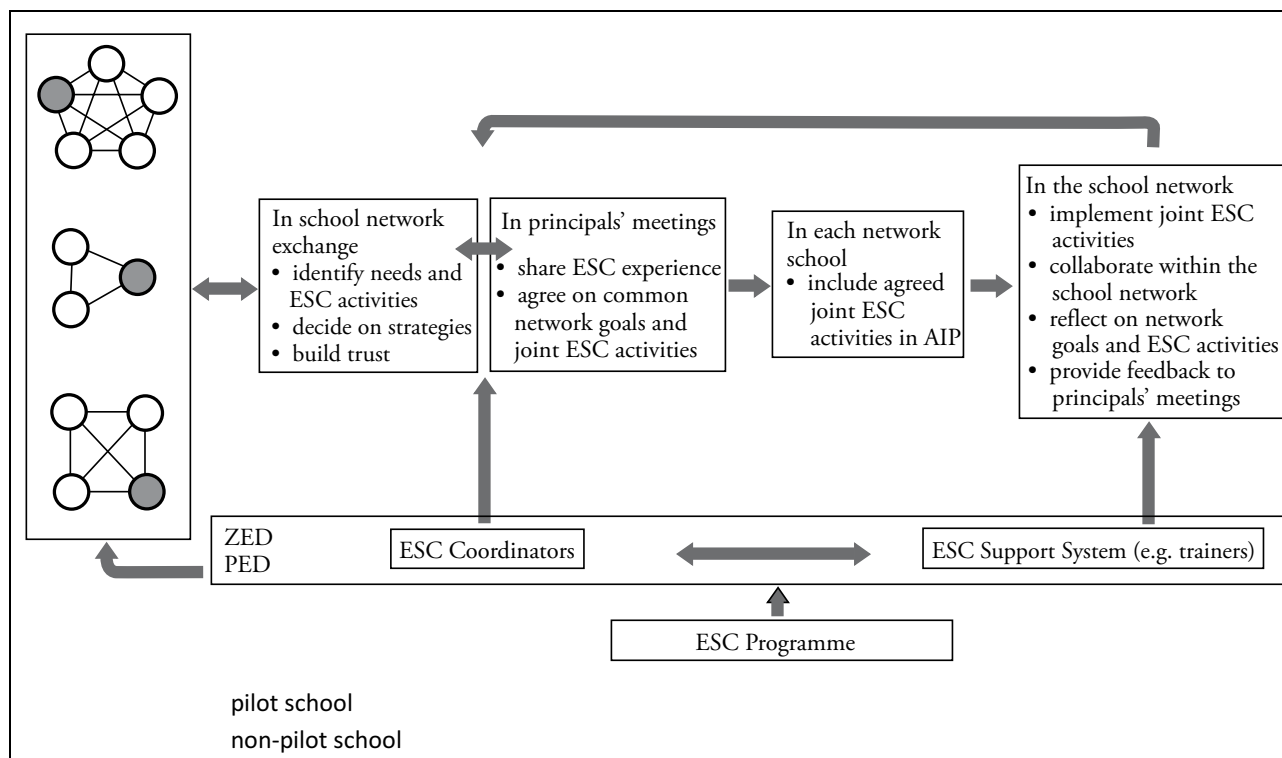


Figure 1 summarises the model of how school networks operate. In principle, the decision about a joint activity can be taken in exchange meetings of school network actors or in principals' meetings with the ZED. If Zonal ESC Coordinators of the network schools or other actors come together in exchange meetings and identify education for social cohesion activities, they decide on implementation strategies and build trust. They take their decisions forward to the principals of the network schools. The principals come together in regular meetings organised by the ZED. ESC Coordinators at the ZED help in organising and facilitating these meetings. Principals share experiences on education for social cohesion and agree on suggested common activities which will be implemented in their respective school networks. If the principals decide on joint activities in meetings with the ZED in the first place, they will then consult with their teachers and students in order for them to prepare for joint collaborative activities in collaborative efforts with the other network schools. Afterwards, each network school includes the agreed joint ESC activities in their AIPs respectively.

ESC Coordinators in schools together with other teachers are assigned for organising and implementing the joint activities. In the school network, the joint activities will be implemented in a collaborative effort. The participants are encouraged to reflect about the implementation process, especially with regard to the purpose of enhancing social cohesion. The principals are responsible for providing feedback about the joint activities of the school network to the ZED. This feedback loop ensures a constant communication about social cohesion issues. The exchange meetings of network actors

(ESC Coordinators from schools, teachers, and possibly even students) and the principals' meetings provide the forums for education for social cohesion. The support system, especially the trainers placed within ZED and PED, becomes active on demand from schools and school networks. For example, if a school network requests the ZED or PED to conduct a professional development programme for second national language teachers or school counsellors: after approval, the ZED or PED provides the necessary funding and organises the in-service training programme for teachers by requesting the trainers to prepare and conduct the programme. ESC Coordinators in ZED and PED assist in obtaining the funds in time and getting the programme organised. They, therefore, keep contact with the support system (e.g. trainers), the local administration and the school networks. The GIZ/ESC programme provides capacity development for ZED and PED through professional development of ESC Coordinators and trainers (training of trainers programme).

### Coercion and freedom of choice

Based on the experiences with the pilot schools, school networks have begun operation. In the beginning it was assumed that schools voluntarily come together to form a network. Until now, decisions about membership in school networks have been taken by the five PEDs which grouped the schools, mainly according to administrative and geographical considerations. This means the schools are not free to choose with whom to network. This also leads to often homogeneous networks (regarding language,

religion, ethnicity), due to locality and homogeneous communities. The implications for enhancing social cohesion across heterogeneous communities need careful consideration.

Therefore, initially, school networks are largely a local affair. The school networks are set up according to purely practical reasons. Yet, student exchange programmes between schools beyond the school network are a well-established practice in Sri Lanka. The challenge is to sustain the relationships between students and schools after such one-time events. An option is to organise the student exchange programmes in such a way that students from two different school networks can participate. After the encounter each school network can follow up and conduct other joint activities. Cross-local and regional networks may occur as technological advances (such as social media) make this type of networking ever easier.

Schools may reject and decide not to participate in a joint activity. How resistant are nodes (schools) towards the network purpose (enhancing social cohesion) and the joint activities? Do joint activities constrain the relationships within the network? For example, Muslim parents may not allow their girls to participate in a student exchange programme. If the programme cannot be adjusted to make it acceptable for the parents and peer groups are not able to persuade the parents, their rejection has to be accepted by the other schools. As domination and forced assimilation by one group is not an option, the offer of joint activities and freedom of choice are critical. With the recognition of diversity and the promotion of peaceful coexistence, the school system would have already made a significant achievement.

## Network size and density

Networks differ in terms of the number of schools involved. While high density may appear desirable in terms of deepening the collaboration and maximising opportunities for collaborative learning, overly dense collaboration can be problematic, due to the increased complexity of managing them. There is, therefore, a balance that needs to be struck between the desirability of high levels of connectivity and the increased complexity of managing these. At present, the average network size varies from three to five schools in the five provinces.

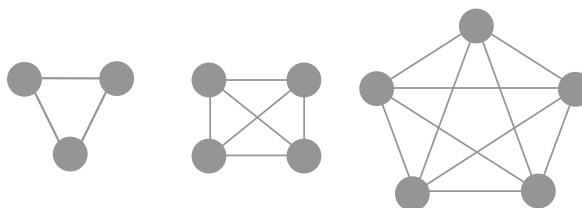
What is the best network structure for the diffusion of the innovation? How can this structure emerge? How can nodes strategically be affected? What is the threshold of relationships that keeps the school network active and effective? School networks can differ substantially with regard to their density. One way in which this can manifest itself, is in the involvement of different groups in the process. As such, collaboration within the network can

be largely a matter of principals and senior management with little involvement of other staff groups. On the other hand, collaboration could involve specific groups of school staff such as second national language teachers, civic education teachers and school counsellors. The extent to which students are directly impacted by joint activities within the network can similarly vary, from a direct impact through student and teacher exchanges or project based learning followed in other network schools to indirect impact resulting from good practices developed in network activities.

## Network cohesiveness

At present, school networks operate in cliques. Joint activities link the school in a complete network (see Figure 2). It implies that all schools collaborate for the common purpose of enhancing social cohesion at least for some time. Because of the dense structure of cliques, they are highly redundant. In order to gain from information benefits, the question arises as to how cliques can be unsealed and be connected to the outside for new ideas.

**Figure 2: School networks: cliques**



Schools can make their external relationships accessible to the network thereby enlarging the network. The extension of the network becomes critical for the flow of information and new ideas. Interacting in cliques is regardless of ethnicity or religion, especially in heterogeneous school networks. Disconnecting schools change the network's cohesiveness. Consequently, the school network faces the risk of disintegration.

Because of their positions ESC Coordinators and trainers are critical for the cohesiveness of the school network. If their relationships with the school networks do not get established in the first place or are disconnected, the cohesiveness of the school network gets affected. This may happen when teachers, principals, trainers or ESC Coordinators are transferred. In addition, it becomes important that the ESC Coordinators and trainers become the "early adopters" of the social innovation, e.g. through the encouragement of actors to exchange ideas on education for social cohesion within a school network forum (exchange meetings, principals' meetings).

## Multiplexity and unionisation

Joint activities provide the opportunity for establishing relationships between students from schools in the network. Similarly, teachers' relationships can be established and strengthened. Principals usually attend regular meetings at the ZED and can strengthen their relationships through exchange of experiences and further collaboration. The network does not depend on the relationships of all its members (students, teachers, principals). If, for example, two teachers are not connected other teachers may have a relationship or students or principals do so. A network does not need to aim for its closure. Structural holes are an opportunity to broker the flow of information between individuals and control the joint activities that bring together the individuals from opposite sides of the hole. The multiplexity of relationships can be a strength and a risk of the school network depending on the social composition of the network. If schools with homogeneous backgrounds are connected then the common characteristics (language, ethnicity, religion) get reinforced, while at the same time only inter-group relations are strengthened which in turn can increase the perception of differences between the in-group and outsiders (e.g. increasing the perception of differences between Sinhalese and Tamils rather than addressing the acceptance of diversity and keeping the focus on the common good). At the individual level, persons with common characteristics (language, ethnicity, religion) get connected and homophily (see Box 1 in Annex) in social networks is strengthened. Thus, homophily makes segregation and prejudice more difficult for school networks to overcome. Learning together with the other will require extra effort to make happen.

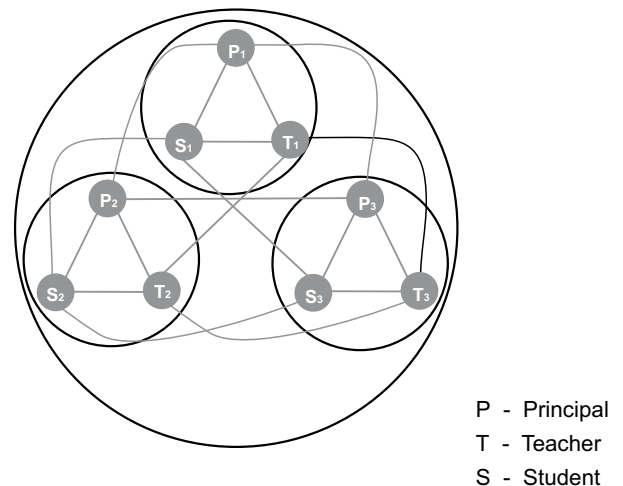
In case heterogeneous schools are connected, the chance for learning together and establishing trustful relationships across group boundaries increases. But at the same time, risks of negative encounters which may reinforce resentment and prejudice exist. Interaction may lead to greater understanding, but not necessarily to an elimination of tension or conflict around ethnicity and religion. In a given situation, the question remains as to which activities will be selected to be salient candidates for creating homophily in a school network. How can "birds of different feathers flock together"? (see Box 1 in Annex). In a school network (regarding language, ethnicity, religion), for example, the extent to which the common activities value ethnicity or religion will affect whether common characteristics or attributes will be related to students' relationships and interpersonal trust.

From the perspective of game theory, homophily is seen as in-group favoritism (Fu et al. 2012). In-group bias is common, yet the implementation of that bias is dynamic and flexible. Experimental evidence indicates that although people exhibit more in-group cooperation

than out-group cooperation, cooperation with out-group members happens. It may be promising to shift the focus on finding ways to define the group and encourage new relationships to emerge. School networks allow for such heterogeneous group formation.

Single schools are bound together by ties and converted into a single node (see Figure 3). Functioning as a single node, school networks can demand better education services to be supplied by ZED and PED as they are representing the needs of various schools. In close collaboration with ZED and PED school networks can utilise the available resources in time and ensure the supply of the needed support. Schools and school networks decide on their needs. ZED and PED become service providers and act on the demands of schools.

**Figure 3: School networks: unionisation**



From a network point of view we can summarise that in establishing and strengthening school networks it is essential to create multiplex relations. The network members have to encounter one another in a number of different settings to form a learning community. Structural holes serve as brokers between the otherwise barely connected regions and they are necessary for the diffusion of the social innovation. School networks are also held together by weak ties – relationships that are infrequent, less close and less intimate, but for that very reason very important. Flows of information through networks are critical and can take place through redundant dense ties or through weak ties. Finally, we turn to monitoring and quality assurance.

## Monitoring and quality assurance

Monitoring and quality assurance will become an essential task of the ESC support system. It will be the responsibility of the ESC Coordinators at school as well as at zonal and provincial levels. Depending on the ESC Coordinators, monitoring can have far-reaching implications. For example, a successful implementation of joint activities does not necessarily imply that an innovative social practice occurred. In the first instance, success refers here to the ESC Coordinators or actors' perceptions (e.g. teachers, school administrators and others). Presumably, their primary attention will be more on the implementation of the education intervention and less on their social practices, which usually becomes a subject matter of a separate reflection process.

With regard to the diffusion process, network relationships play a decisive role. By taking school networks as a point of departure we might also be able to get insight into mechanisms through which the social innovation is diffused. The actors' performance and their relationships provide relevant information on the adoption-diffusion process apart from recording the outcome as it is usually done in impact monitoring. The monitoring will focus on the social practices. In addition, it will include individuals' understanding, attitudes and perceptions of social cohesion. With regard to students their civic competencies and attitudes, their communication skills in Sinhala and Tamil as second language and their perceptions of school based psycho-social care will be surveyed. The monitoring challenge is the multitude of interventions and the identification and coverage of the social innovation. Moreover, school networks can be further studied by concretizing the way actors cooperate and the kind of relationships they have. Hence, we point not only to the monitoring of the diffusion of the education innovation but also to the steering and governance of the framework conditions of the social innovation. The ESC programme is just one player in this field of action.

Often, the focus on monitoring an intervention is on the achievement of or adherence to technical and sector-specific standards, which are established in guidelines. A successful implementation of an intervention then means a compliance with these standards. Guidelines usually explain how standards can be achieved. If clear and user friendly the guidelines may reduce the uncertainty in adopting the intervention. Setting standards, however, does not always decrease this uncertainty and may result in rejection in the first place or after implementation not according to standards. In a command driven bureaucracy guidelines and standards tend towards strict compliance rather than providing the space for trial testing and application of new ideas. Implementers of the intervention often feel obliged to strictly follow the guidelines, not feeling encouraged to discover variations and to learn by mistake. Therefore,

if guidelines are seen as an administrative order of steps to be followed in the implementation of an education intervention, then the need for addressing social practices does not even arise. The intervention can be implemented within established practices and routines. Innovative social practices are less likely to emerge.

Furthermore, and almost unintentionally, we may have detected a reason for a social innovation not to be diffused at all. The confusion that an intervention already is a social innovation lets implementers of the intervention believe and claim that they acted in an innovative manner, have introduced the social innovation, and became "adopters" of the social innovation. However, if the intervention can be integrated into existing social practices and power structures then new social practices do not emerge, and an intervention is not considered to be a social innovation. Also, it is very unlikely that the established social practices become drivers of social change. May-be triggering social change through the intervention was purposefully or unconsciously not intended in the first place. For example, the guidelines on student parliaments in Sri Lanka do not address or provide space for new social practices and do not consider them as relevant for introducing the intervention. If this space is created in a school network and actors obtain opportunities to apply innovative social practices it will happen by default. Similar, the reluctance of the GIZ guidelines on scaling-up (2016) to define innovation indicates the neglect to identify social practices that are important for scaling-up. How can "broad impact" be claimed if the necessary social practices are ignored? While emphasising the significance of social practices we point to the relationship between social innovation and social change.

Regarding monitoring and evaluation a shift from the claimed "broad impact" (GIZ guidelines) towards a retrospective analysis of change processes may become necessary. Social network analysis looks promising in exploring the micro-politics of social practices and the adoption, imitation and rejection of a social innovation. With regard to education for social cohesion we have to go beyond cognitive and affective attributes of individuals such as the students' competencies and attitudes. If we strive for the diffusion of a social innovation, we need to understand the micro-politics of social practices better. As we better understand the positions of individuals in schools and in the education administration and patterns of their relationships, we will be in a better position to effect social change. A reasonable understanding of the context is essential.

Nevertheless, there are clear limits to the micro-politics of school networks. Schools provide space for collaboration and competition. Once students leave their schools in Sri Lanka competition for jobs, privilege and power will continue and exacerbate which will cause dissent and

conflict with strong ethnic and religious dimensions. As Hanf (2011) points out, the only effective regulation of these conflicts is a political regulation, either through power-sharing or through open democracy. Schools cannot create or replace democratic conflict regulation, only facilitate or hamper it. Doing the former is already a great achievement. Our conceptual framework for school networks rests on the assumption that it can contribute to the creation of an enabling environment for enhancing social cohesion in the school system.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we summarise where we stand: We have described three key features of schooling in Sri Lanka that are segregation, competition and exam-orientation, and centralised education governance. We have identified school development and school networks as a strategic entry point for the application of the principle of subsidiarity in order to challenge these features. Our argument is that schools need to go beyond the transfer of knowledge if they want to promote social cohesion. Apart from competencies and attitudes the relationships between students and other actors matter. To ensure that the school networks are geared towards social cohesion, the content framework is defined by proven and tested education interventions which have been implemented over the past years. We keep in mind that these education innovations do not necessarily foster social cohesion. The school networks provide the institutional framework and the space in which the social innovation occurs. Through imitation and adoption, innovative social practices get diffused in school networks. These social practices comprehend presumable cooperative behaviour of school network actors, and constitute the social innovation as the basis for educational change to emerge eventually. The innovative social practices cannot be planned and will occur spontaneously, mainly through self-organisation by the actors of the school network. Yet, the education interventions and school networks can be purposefully planned and managed in order to provide space for new forms of social practices. Uncertainties and turbulences are necessary ingredients of this process. The emergence and diffusion of the social innovation can only be assessed retrospectively. Based on these insights further strategies to diffuse the social innovation can be considered.

No doubt, this concept note is a work in progress and not final. For example, apart from Rogers' general attributes of innovations, neither did we clarify innovative social practices in detail, nor did we identify relevant drivers and barriers of the diffusion of the social innovation, yet. On the basis that humans have evolved specialised social-cognitive skills such as learning from others for living together and exchanging knowledge in cultural groups, we assume to

gain from more insights into the interdependence between cooperation and social-cognitive learning. Moreover, we expect drivers to be factors that enhance social cohesion in schools in Sri Lanka, and barriers to be such factors that constrain social cohesion. While highlighting segregation, competition and exam-orientation and centralised education governance, in a complementary intention, we will have to explore more on the disruptive social forces and disintegrative dimensions of schooling in Sri Lanka. In short, we have to contrast social cohesion with anomie. It may be promising that these and related issues are elaborated as an extension of this concept note.

# Endnotes

- 2 Recently, the National Education Commission (NEC) of Sri Lanka has conducted such a sector analysis and presented recommendations for an education sector reform (NEC 2016). Based on these recommendations the Ministry of Education has formulated a policy reform for general education (Ministry of Education 2016). At the same time, the World Bank has assessed the state of the education sector, analysed the most critical constraints on performance and identified priorities and policy options (Dunder et al. 2017).
- 3 Migdal's (2001) "state-in-society" model allows a view of society not as a monolithic and fixed entity but as a mixture of social organisations. The state is but one such organisation that is highly specific to the current historical context. According to Migdal, the state is another field of power within the society, and state and society, both constantly influence and reshape one another. Migdal draws attention to the role of individuals, social groups and organisations in figuring out rules and patterns of domination, and in constantly challenging them.
- 4 Chapin (2014) conducted her ethnographic study on childhood in a Sinhalese dominated community in the Central Province of Sri Lanka. She claims that the described model and its application are "likely to differ across groups in Sri Lanka... However, many of the basic ideas about hierarchy and desire do resonate with similar models that people connected with this region hold" (176). As the model derives from the cultural context that Chapin studies, the meanings of the model's terminology are also culture-specific. For example, the term 'lajja-baya' describes an emotion and motive that regulates behaviour and is translated by Chapin as 'shame-fear'. In her Sinhala village, 'lajja-baya' is strongly associated with self-discipline, self-control and respectful self-restraint. 'Lajja-baya' is highly valued by the villagers because behaviour that is controlled by 'lajja-baya' is considered good and trustworthy. In contrast to a western perspective, that would raise concern about the trustworthiness of a behaviour controlled by fear. According to Shweder (2003) such an understanding of 'lajja-baya' (shame-fear) is a specific cultural manifestation of what he identifies as the abstract idea of shame as being "the fear of being judged defective" (1115).
- 5 Mahinda Rajapaksa's (former President) rule is the latest example of "family politics" (Wickramasinghe 2014 : 386) in Sri Lanka.
- 6 It comes as little surprise that international development cooperation was pushed into the patronage system because of its additional resources and its connections to the political and administrative elites. The international organisations play the role of brokers themselves or mediate brokerage. In Sri Lanka, they operate in a "field of power" in which the symbolic is just as important as the material. Those political and administrative elites which are able to include international organisations in their networks, may have increased their symbolic capital (legitimation, status, prestige) as a result of the cooperation with the international agencies. The mode of exchange can be symbolic, therefore, the international organisations are not forced to violate their compliance regulations.
- 7 The paper on monitoring social cohesion in schools (in this volume) elaborates on Dragolov's et al. definition and its implications for measuring social cohesion in schools in Sri Lanka.
- 8 The standard prisoner's dilemma game involves two players, each of whom chose cooperation or defection (non-cooperation). If both players cooperate, they both receive a payoff. If one cooperates and the other does not, the cooperating player receives the smallest possible payoff, and the defecting player the largest. If both players do not cooperate, they both receive a payoff, but it is less than what they would gain if both had cooperated. In short, for an individual it pays to cooperate, but it can pay even more to be selfish.
- 9 In a standard public good game each participant chooses how much to contribute to a common pool which returns benefit all participants equally. The ideal outcome is if everybody contributes the maximum amount, but the self-interested strategy is not to contribute anything.
- 10 From the perspective of game theory, ethno-religious conflicts have been explored as a prisoner's dilemma game (see, for example, Lumsden (1973) on Cyprus, and Luo et al. (2011) on former Yugoslavia). In Sri Lanka, the prisoner's dilemma is sometimes used to study party politics and stalemates between the government and the opposition (Jayasuriya 2017) or minority parties (Lecamwasam and Lecamwasam 2013) respectively. The authors, independently from each other, construct models for politicians' behaviour that are based on an anonymous single-shot prisoner's dilemma game which provides the highest payoffs for defectors or non-cooperators. The models are then used to criticise the political shortsightedness of politicians for being self-interested and to demand their cooperative efforts to dissolve the stalemates. However, the artificiality of such models needs to be kept in mind when interpreting the results, more so, if prisoner's dilemma is used as a metaphor. The models may describe, but do not explain politicians' behaviour and political stalemates.

The models themselves contribute to the environment in which the politicians' behaviour and political stalemates can evolve. Unintentionally, the models are useful because of what it reveals about the dynamics produced by the outside world, rather than themselves being a good representation of that world. The models become part of a pattern that allows politicians to be repeatedly blamed for their self-interest.

- 11 The term "weak tie" refers to social network theory. Together with other key terms it is explained in Box 1.
- 12 These eight success factors are (i) incorporate scaling-up into programme planning, (ii) ownership by the key actors, (iii) multi-level approach, (iv) verification of results, (v) standards and manuals, (vi) replication structures and incentive mechanisms, (vii) communication and networking, and (viii) scheduling and budgeting (GIZ 2016).
- 13 Zapf (1994) connects social innovation with social change. He defines social innovation as "new ways in achieving goals, especially new forms of organisation, new regulations, new lifestyles which shift the direction of social change, solve problems better as previous practices, and hence, are worth to be imitated and institutionalised." (Zapf 1994, 33, our translation).



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## Box 1: School Networks as Social Networks

From the perspective of social network theory some features can be highlighted which we assume to be relevant in the Sri Lankan school context.

### Nodes and social ties

In the terminology of network theory the schools are the nodes which are connected with a set of ties. According to Kadushin (2012) networks are defined as “a set of relationships” (14). A network contains a set of nodes and a description of relations between the nodes. In a school network the ties are the relationships between schools. In fact, the relationships between schools are the relationships of the actors in schools such as students, teachers, principals, parents and others. Therefore, the individual actors become nodes, too. The focus of network analysis is more on the relationships rather than on the attributes of the nodes (individuals or schools). It is assumed that the relationships develop during joint activities which aim at enhancing social cohesion.

Further, these actors within a school network are usually connected to other individuals in organisations such as the school administration. By examining these relationships we enlarge the network by making the school administration another node. The school network itself becomes a subsystem or cluster.

### Propinquity and homophily

Propinquity is defined as being in the same place at the same time. Many schools in Sri Lanka are located in a socially heterogeneous environment and they are segregated by ethno-linguistic, religious and gender backgrounds of their students. Here, the power of propinquity almost demands to connect the segregated schools. However, simply putting students and teachers within range of each other together (co-location) does not necessarily imply the establishment of a relationship that serves the purpose of enhancing social cohesion (co-presence). For example, students from different schools may come together for a friendly cricket match and depart thereafter without having used this opportunity for establishing longer lasting relationships.

Homophily refers to a folk proposition: “birds of a feather flock together”. If two people have characteristics that match in a proportion greater than expected in the network of which they are part then they are more likely to be connected. The converse is also true: if two people are connected, then they are more likely to have common characteristics or attributes. In other words, opinion and behaviour are more homogeneous within than between groups. Regarding the causes of tie formation homophily

has an inbuilt transitivity. If A and B are connected and B and C are connected then it is very likely that A and C get connected, too. In a segregated environment, homophily is a risk and a chance.

From a social network point of view, four processes are involved if people come together: (1) the same kind of people come together; (2) people influence one another and in the process become more alike; (3) people can end up in the same place; (4) and once they are in the same place, the very place influences them to become more alike. The famous experiment on conformity by Asch (1955) is a convincing point in case. He found that subjects were more likely to make an incorrect judgement on a simple task if everyone in their group made the same incorrect judgement first. Hence, the behaviour of the individual was affected by the apparent views of others. Through interaction individuals share ideas, beliefs and experiences that tend to make them more similar with respect to how they perceive the world. Similarity of the majority causes ties. In a variation of the original experiment Asch broke up the unanimity of the group by introducing a dissenting confederate. Asch found that even the presence of just one confederate that goes against the majority can reduce conformity drastically. The presence of an ally decreases conformity. Similarity of the dissenters causes ties, too.

Ethnicity is the most salient dimension of homophily and together with religion they both play a major part in structuring networks (McPherson et al 2001). Due to the geographical distribution of the ethno-religious communities in Sri Lanka, the most basic source of homophily is place, and the segregated schools provide the great majority of ties that are not kin. Schools help not only to breed ties, but also to maintain them. These ties induced in segregated schools often survive into adulthood and are the basis for homogeneity in personal networks

### The balance hypothesis

In a triad – a network with three nodes – a balanced state exists if all three relationships are positive in all respects, or if two are negative and one is positive. For example, if A is a friend of B and B is a friend of C then it follows by the balance hypothesis that A and C are friends, too. A friend of my friend is a friend of mine. But if A and B are friends and B and C are enemies, then A and C are enemies according to the balance hypothesis. An enemy of my friend is my enemy.

In case of A and B being enemies and B and C being friends it might be a counterbalancing strategy for A not to become an enemy of C, but making friends with B's friend C and all B's friends instead, thus putting pressure on the relationship between A and B to change it and become

more friendly in order to get a more preferable state of balance. Even in an apparently simple network (triad) the structure matters and can be more complicated than it seems. An analysis of the network structure may indicate unconventional strategic options.

## Density and redundancy

The density of a network facilitates the transmission of ideas. The greater the density, the more likely is a network to be considered a cohesive community, a source of social support and an effective transmitter of new ideas. In network theory, density is defined as the number of direct actual connections divided by the number of possible direct connections in a network.

The distance between two nodes in a network is defined as the length of the shortest path via binary connections between nodes. Shortest paths are efficient, but there are also consequences to inefficient or redundant paths. Redundancy makes sense in diffusion of innovations with implications on norms, attitudes and values. One might have to hear the same thing from several different sources until it takes root.

## Cohesiveness and cliques

The principle of cohesiveness is a “master idea” (Kadushin 2012: 47) in social network theory. A network is described as structurally cohesive to the extent that the social relations of its members hold together. The strongest cohesive networks are those in which every member is directly connected to every other member (clique). In clique interaction, since all members interact with one another, the members cannot be distinguished from one another. They are mathematically equivalent to one another. While a neat and clear definition, this imposes a high standard which we will assume in school networks for schools being the nodes. It is neither feasible nor desirable for the individuals (students, teachers, principals and others) to become equivalent in the social network sense. The key challenge in network (clique) formation is to sustain the involvement through joint activities. The school network cannot afford the disconnection of a school. The school network has to keep its robustness at the clique standard. However, social isolation may occur when cliques set themselves apart from other groups. This risk of isolation increases in case the cliques are homogeneous and their interaction serves as a bonding force which may result in conflict with other cliques.

A clique can also involve a high degree of social commitment to a specific group. A stronger level of commitment results in a member having a reduced

amount of interaction with other social groups. Cliquish behaviour often involves repetition in regards to activities, vernacular, preferences and manner, which can result in social isolation within the clique which becomes especially challenging in heterogeneous school cliques.

Network analysis looks at two processes to determine the cohesiveness of a network. First, a group is cohesive to the extent that the members are pulled together when confronted with disruptive forces. Second, cohesiveness can be estimated by observing what happens to the disconnectedness of a network when one or more members (nodes) are removed or, keeping the same number of nodes, when one or more connections between members or nodes are removed. It becomes important when we look at “structural holes” next.

## Structural holes and weak ties

Density is based on the idea of relationships. This idea can be turned upside down by focusing on the lack of connections and relationships. Burt’s theory on structural holes (Burt 2004) focus on the cloud of nodes surrounding a given node along with all the ties among them. In Figure 4, “Ego” is the members’ only link to one another in the network. Without the presence of Ego the nodes in the two clusters would have no connection with one another. With its relations Ego spans the “structural hole” between the two clusters. Ego functions as a broker of the flow of information and therefore becomes important in the diffusion of innovation. Brokerage is critical to learning and creativity.

Figure 4: Structural Holes

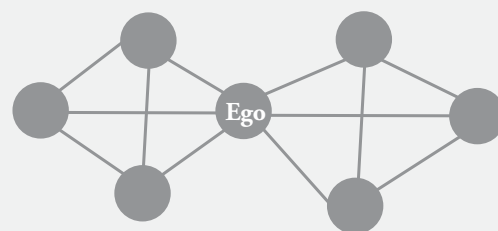
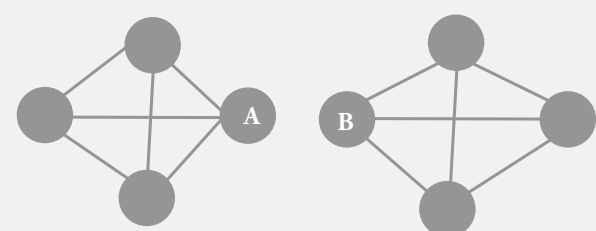


Figure 5: Weak Ties





Granovetter's idea of weak ties in networks are important, too and have at least two important features (Granovetter 1973). In Figure 5, Ego has been separated into two nodes A and B. The connection between A and B is considered to be a weak tie. This weak tie facilitates the flow of information from otherwise distant parts of the network as a whole. It has the potential to function as a bridge for infusing new ideas. The weak ties are considered to be the best potential source of novel information. Moreover, weak ties help to integrate the social network to become more cohesive as a whole. According to Borgati and Halgin (2011) networks with many strong ties have pockets of strong local cohesion but weak network-wide cohesion, whereas networks with many weak ties have weak local cohesion but strong network-wide cohesion. It is claimed that a weak tie-structure has the potential for groups to work together and achieve common goals.

## Multiplexity

In most situations, there are multiple connections between nodes. The multiplexity in networks can be used in two related senses: role multiplexity refers to the possibility that two nodes occupy more than one position that ties them together. A teacher relates to students, parents, the school administration and so on. This is the role set that goes with the status of the teacher. The content multiplexity refers to the possibility that there are a number of different relationships between a pair of persons, for example advice or work on a common task. Further, the same tie can have a number of different kinds of ideas flowing through it: a solution to a problem or a reformulation of a problem. In theory, there can be two opposite consequences of multiplexity. Multiple flows between positions as well as multiple simultaneous positions can enhance a relationship and build trust. On the other hand, depending on the circumstances, the same relationship can create a conflict of interest or even the possibility of fraud. Obviously much depends on the cultural and structural context. Therefore, it is key in network formation to identify a process of complex contagion in which multiple sources of exposure encourage individuals to adopt a change of social practices.

## Flows and bonding

The pattern of relationships in a network yield a particular structure and nodes occupy positions within this structure. Much of the wealth of network analysis consists of characterising network structures and node positions. Borgati and Halgin (2011) describe two key network functions which we find extremely helpful in the Sri Lankan context. One is the flow or pipe model because the ties act as conduits for information flow. Weak ties can be useful because of their structural role in networks as bridges of network clusters. The second function is called bonding and illustrates the power of networks by the principle of unionisation. If schools are bound together by ties and converted into a single node, the network is in a better position to negotiate with an external actor. By working together they can accomplish more than they could alone. The network tie serves as a bond that aligns and coordinates action, enabling groups of nodes to act as a single node often with greater capabilities.

## Safety, effectance motivation and status

Kadushin (2012) points out psychological foundations of social networks which are both motivational and cognitive. Two basic human motivations, safety and effectance, correspond to essential aspects of social networks: the connections between elements of a network and the holes between elements. One motivation, to stay between people and social units leads to feelings of safety: "Safety is the motivation to derive support from one's social environment. Safety corresponds to dense, cohesive networks." (Kadushin 2012, 72) The other motivation is to reach out and make connections where there were none. "Effectance is the motivation to reach beyond one's current situation and comfort zone. Effectance corresponds to networks with structural holes." (Kadushin 2012: 72) In addition to these primary motivations, the network creates another one itself. Status or rank seeking is generated as members of a social network compare themselves with others in comparable positions. The cultural differences in safety, effectance and status are under-researched (Kadushin 2012: 73).

## Box 2: Rogers' Adoption-Diffusion Process

In the first stage (knowledge stage) the individual learns about the innovation. The individual attempts to determine what the innovation is and how and why it works. This stage includes “awareness knowledge” which represents the knowledge of the innovation’s existence. The second type of knowledge (know-how knowledge) contains operational information about how to use the innovation. This knowledge is an essential variable in the diffusion process and becomes critical for complex innovations. The third type of knowledge (principles-knowledge) serves as safeguard to the diffusion process. The innovation can be adopted without this knowledge, but the misuse of the innovation may cause its discontinuation.

An individual may have all the necessary knowledge, but this does not mean that the individual will adopt the innovation because the individual’s attitude also shapes the adoption or rejection of the innovation. Therefore, in the second stage (persuasion) the individual shapes his or her attitude towards the innovation. The persuasion-stage is more affective-centered. Thus, the degree of uncertainty about the innovation’s functioning and the social reinforcement from others (e.g. colleagues, peers) affect the individual’s opinion and beliefs about the innovation.

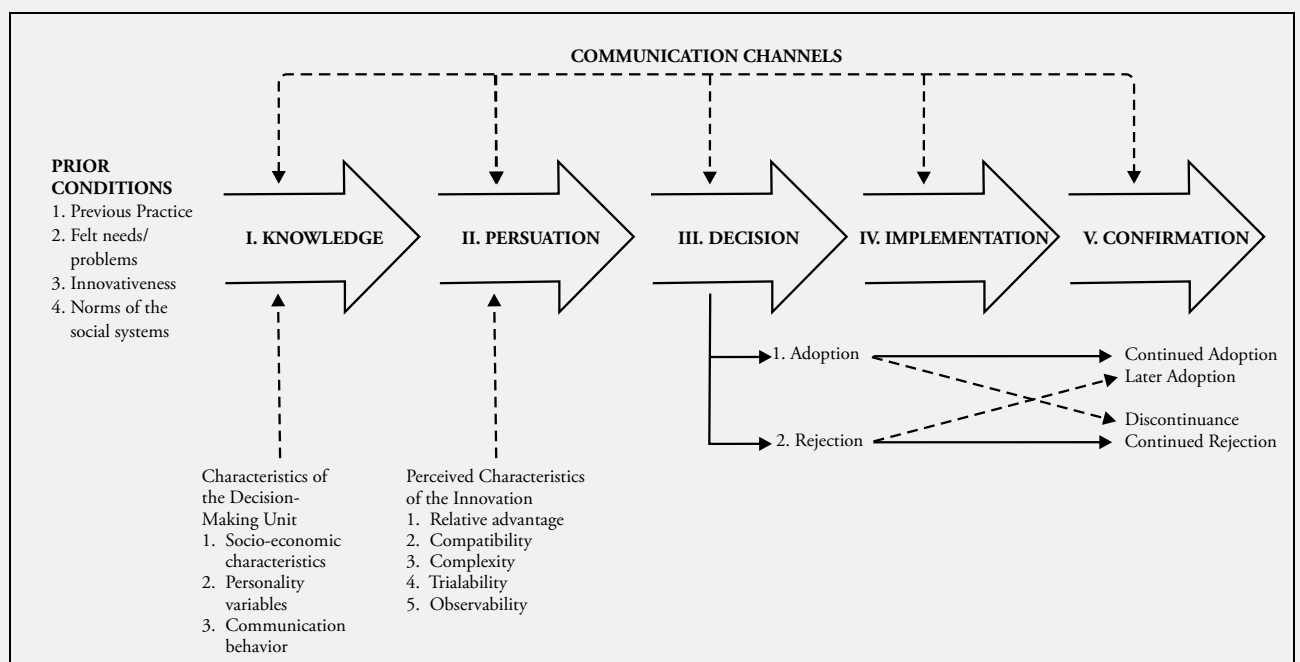
At the next stage (decision stage) the individual chooses to adopt or reject the innovation. A rejection can mean an active and open refusal to adopt the innovation or the decision to mimic adoption due to reasons for not openly rejecting it. The mimicry becomes apparent in the next stage.

At the implementation stage an innovation is put into practice. Reinvention usually happens and is an important part of this stage. According to Rogers (2003) reinvention is “the degree to which an innovation is changed or modified by a user in the process of its adoption and implementation” (180). If the purpose of the innovation gets perverted in the implementation stage mimicry happens. It is up to the monitoring of the diffusion process to detect mimicry strategies.

During the final stage (confirmation) the individual looks for support for his or her decision. The decision can be reversed if the individual is exposed to conflicting messages about the innovation. Depending on the support for adoption of the innovation and the attitude of the individual, later adoption or discontinuance happens during this stage.

In Figure 6 the five stages are summarised. The Communication Channels at the top can be seen as a support system which has to address the various individual needs in the five stages. Often capacity development focuses exclusively on the knowledge stage and here mainly in the cognitive domain neglecting the attitudes of the individuals. For example, a professional development programme for teachers in a school network can be designed in such a way that it includes all types of knowledge, provides space for peer exchange in a school network and thereby strengthens the relationships between teachers. A relationship between trainers and teachers that includes the affective domain and builds trust increases the chance for adopting the innovation.

Figure 6: Rogers' Adoption-Diffusion Process



Source: Rogers 2003



According to Rogers (2003) certain characteristics of the innovation help decreasing the uncertainty in the diffusion of innovation process. He identifies relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability as most important.

**Relative advantage** is “the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being better than the idea it supersedes” (Rogers 2003: 229). **Compatibility** is “the degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with the existing values, past experiences and needs of potential adopters” (Rogers 2003: 15). If the innovation is compatible with the needs of the schools in the network and their actors, then uncertainty is more likely to decrease and the rate of adoption of the innovation will increase.

**Complexity** is “the degree to which an innovation is perceived as relatively difficult to understand and use” (Rogers 2003: 15). As Rogers states, opposite to the other attributes, complexity is negatively correlated with the rate of adoption. Thus, excessive complexity of an innovation is an important obstacle in its adoption. It is important to allow school networks to reduce the complexity by selecting measures that are most convenient and helpful for them. As we view the social innovation in terms of the network actors’ social practices, their routines and ways of working together, an advantage would be to have a pilot

school as network member. The school network can build on the pilot school’s experience with the implementation of education for social cohesion interventions and gain from exchange and cooperation.

The more innovation is tried, the faster its adoption is (**trialability**). Reinventing may occur during the trial of the innovation and then the innovation may be modified by the school network according to the needs and circumstances. The school network starts to become a community of practice. However, the modification process carries the risk to dilute the concept of social cohesion, e.g. if not building social bonds and bridges between heterogeneous schools.

**Observability** describes “the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others” (Rogers 2003: 16). School development can become part of community development through careful implementation of projects which are perceived relevant in the communities. In their collaborative efforts, the school network can contribute to the common good. The education administration at local, provincial and even central levels can be involved and play an instrumental role in the adoption process thereby contributing to the reduction of uncertainty at the school network and the acceptance of the social innovation.

# Education as a Lever for Social Cohesion?

## The Social Cohesion Radar in Schools in Sri Lanka

by Rüdiger Blumör and Stefanie Licht

### Introduction

In recent years, the term “social cohesion” became popular within the international development community. Education has been identified as a potentially important policy lever for enhancing social cohesion, and hence, investments in education are promoted (Heyneman 2003; Putnam 2004; Easterly et al. 2006; OECD 2011). Taking this vantage point, this paper brings monitoring education for social cohesion into focus. Measuring effects of school activities that allegedly enhance social cohesion is a challenging, yet, feasible task. To acknowledge the strong context-dependency and the specific school setting in deeply divided societies we will not ask which generic features allow an activity to contribute to social cohesion, as this depends on the way activities are implemented. Instead, we will put students experiences at the center of our monitoring, by asking: How do students perceive educational interventions which claim to enhance social cohesion in their schools? To answer this question a conceptual framework for monitoring social cohesion in schools is introduced and presented in part one. The term “social cohesion radar” is borrowed from the Bertelsmann Stiftung (see Bertelsmann Stiftung 2018; Dragolov et al. 2016). In part two, we present findings from the monitoring initiative - the social cohesion radar. Then, we discuss possible explanations by reverting to relevant socio-scientific theories. Finally, we conclude with a reflection on the applied monitoring method and discuss lessons learned for development cooperation.

In 2008, the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka launched the policy on education for social cohesion and peace (Ministry of Education 2008). The policy was approved by the National Education Commission and identified seven strategic areas through which social cohesion was supposed to be developed within the education sector: (1) curriculum, (2) teacher education, (3) second national language education, (4) whole school culture, (5) integrated schools, (6) co-curricular activities, and (7) research. A specific unit (Social Cohesion and Peace Education) was created within the Ministry of Education to steer and monitor the implementation. Although the policy was never operationalised, international organisations such as the World Bank, UNICEF and GIZ welcomed this move by the Ministry of Education (see Aturupana and Wikramanayake 2011) and supported the implementation of the policy. In 2016, the policy was reviewed in the light of the post-war situation after the violent conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the state had come to an end in 2009. In March 2017, a new unit (Peace Education and Reconciliation, PERU)

was established within the Ministry of Education. PERU transformed the review’s recommendations into a three year action plan (2017-2019).

Against this background, the GIZ Education for Social Cohesion (ESC) programme assisted the Ministry of Education in the development of the national policy on education for social cohesion and peace in 2007 and its subsequent implementation. The policy provided the legitimation for continued and flexible work in this area.<sup>14</sup> At present, the ESC programme continuously supports PERU in the implementation of its plan of action. An internal web-based monitoring system provides the programme with relevant data for regular progress reviews and necessary reporting. However, we realised that the regular project monitoring tools are neither based on sufficient operationalisation of the concept, nor do they collect the data necessary to gain insights into the status of social cohesion within Sri Lankan schools. This discontent was the starting point for our monitoring initiative.

### 1. The Social Cohesion Radar – The Concept

We elaborate on some shortcomings with the regular monitoring tools and describe the difficulties in assessing school activities with regard to social cohesion by presenting examples from the normal course of our monitoring routine. Then, we discuss definitions and options to measure social cohesion in the Sri Lankan context. We introduce a conceptual and methodological framework for monitoring students’ perceptions of social cohesion in schools – the social cohesion radar. Finally, we present the monitoring instrument and briefly describe the methodology for data collection.

#### 1.1 Challenges with monitoring social cohesion in schools

Monitoring social cohesion in schools poses a serious challenge to the ESC programme. We regularly collect data on the activities which schools plan and implement that are assumed to enhance social cohesion. We intend to obtain adequate data for the assessment of ESC programme’s progress towards the intended goals. At the same time, we are interested if and to what extent the interventions contribute to social cohesion in education. It does not come as a surprise, however, that not all our data

inform us about the character and quality of the specific activity regarding social cohesion. Sometimes we are not able to conclude from the data if the activity contributes to social cohesion at all, as this very much depends on how the activity was implemented and how social cohesion is understood by all parties involved in the implementation and monitoring process. We assume that latent differences in understanding the concept “social cohesion” are involved.

The following examples of student parliaments, student exchange programmes and student competitions remind us that using the same words does not imply a shared meaning of terms and concepts. Yet, to what extent can we ensure during the implementation and monitoring process that all parties involved have a common understanding of the social cohesion concept? Monitoring is a communicative act, and misunderstanding in a presumably successful communication usually happens unnoticed. Moreover, the following examples illustrate that most school activities are based on underlying assumptions about how cohesiveness can be achieved through these events. Yet, these assumptions are rarely spelled out and hard to monitor.

In recent years many schools established student parliaments in order to encourage students for civic participation and to let them learn and experience democratic rules and principles, which presumably foster social cohesion. However, if it is only recorded that a school has introduced a student parliament we cannot infer that democratic values and principles are applied or even recognised. In more informal meetings with principals, teachers or students we are sometimes informed that members of the student parliament are appointed by the principal or the school board rather than elected by the students themselves as instructed by the guidelines of the Ministry of Education. In another case, we were told that the student parliament was not able to hold meetings because the school could not provide a sceptre for the president of the student parliament. Despite the fact that the guidelines for introducing the student parliament do not stipulate a sceptre, such a mere symbol of authority indicates a curious interpretation of rules and strict adherence to putative practices rather than an encouragement of students for democratic participation. Even if teachers and students are convinced that they have done everything necessary to introduce the student parliament, it cannot be assumed that it has an overall cohesive effect on the school environment. Thus, merely monitoring if an activity happened does not ensure that it contributed to social cohesion.

In another case, we were informed that a student parliament suggested activities which entered the school development plan. These activities were implemented and the student parliament took the lead. For example,

the members of the student parliament had organised a garbage disposal in the community which was carried out by the students and concerned residents. This would have been an interesting case to monitor. Unfortunately, it is beyond the ESC programme’s means to continuously and closely attend to school activities. We are usually informed after the activities were implemented. Therefore, we are not able to assess a change of students’ behaviour and attitudes, for example regarding civic participation and helpfulness or the impact such activities have on inter- or intra-community relations.

Another example are inter-cultural encounters between Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim students. The expected positive impacts of these student exchange programmes are well-grounded within the intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew 1998; Al Ramiah and Hewstone 2013). The positive effects of intergroup contacts have been substantially documented across a variety of settings. A meta-analysis of 515 separate studies by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) provides strong evidence for this claim. Yet, it is rather challenging to monitor the impact of intergroup contact on cohesion between different ethnolinguistic groups. In 2012, the ESC programme evaluated six student exchange programmes which were implemented between 2008 and 2011.<sup>15</sup> 50 students who had participated in these programmes took part in focus group discussions one year, two years or four years after the event. In conclusion, the student exchange programmes are described as a mutually beneficial interaction and accomplishment between students of mixed ethnolinguistic and religious backgrounds. The report expresses the hope that the “long-term relationships will enable students ... from different communities and regions of the country to overcome biases and develop understanding of each other”. This hope arises from the finding that respondents always used the term “friend” when they were talking about students of the other community. However, is the frequent use of the term “friend” an indicator for “long-term relationships”?<sup>16</sup> The students reported that the contacts with their “friends” had faded away. They mentioned that it was difficult for them to stay in contact via phone or internet due to limited opportunities. Yet, three students informed about a private visit of students from other schools. Apart from the limited contact between the “friends” it remains an open question to what extent friendships between students from different social backgrounds contribute to social cohesion. To put it more generally, how can interpersonal relationships at the micro level be linked to social macro phenomena such as social cohesion? Granovetter (1973) in his social network analysis convincingly demonstrates the cohesive power of “weak ties” because they are considered to be the bridges between members of different groups, whereas “strong ties, breeding social cohesion, lead to overall fragmentation” (1378). It will remain a speculation if the friendships that the respondents talk about are more acquaintanceships with the “strength of weak ties” (Granovetter 1973).

The respondents' enthusiasm to speak about their "friends" may have induced the evaluators to assume that the students exchange programmes met unnecessary high expectations of friendship, even though acquaintanceship is enough.

Hence, when we receive a report about a student exchange programme (or any other event that was attended by students from different ethnolinguistic and religious communities) we cannot simply assume that social cohesion was strengthened because students from different backgrounds came together. The contact theory appears attractive, indeed, but needs certain conditions to hold (see below). At the same time, the formation of attitudes toward the "other" can be explained with evidence from the realistic group conflict theory, too (see Jackson 1993). It is based on the argument that interaction among people of different background can worsen intergroup relations and lead to a reinforcement of both prejudice and intergroup hostility.

The following anecdote illustrates the potential negative effects of bringing students together. During one sport event the members of the minority ethnic group complained about the food which was prepared by the host school of the majority ethnic group. Allegedly, the food was prepared in a way, we were told by members of the minority group, to weaken the minority groups' performance in the tournament. Such a negative experience during an encounter makes it more likely that participants will be reminded about different group identities (Rubin 2017). This increased awareness of a person's belonging to a certain group (e.g. ethnicity) within a perceived unequal situation has potential counterproductive effects on intended outcomes such as the acceptance of diversity and transcending of ethnic boundaries. Intergroup contacts may be biased towards worsening intergroup relations rather than improving them. However, this should not serve as a justification for intergroup segregation. As Rubin (2017) states, "negative contact is a powerful force, but positive contact is a prevalent force that can be boosted by prior expectations to bring about an overall reduction in prejudice, discrimination, and intergroup conflict". In consequence, it is crucial to monitor "negative experiences" in order to get a better understanding of the effects of intergroup encounters. It becomes obvious that we need to be prepared to treat negative experiences with appropriate measures if they occur in encounters.

In another instance of a student encounter we observed the framing of the event as "we and the other". The activities were planned in a way that students were asked to display their habits and the cultural and religious particularities of their own ethnic group in contrast to the cultural practices of the other ethnic group: our dance versus the others' dance, our food versus the others' food, our prayers versus the others' prayers and so on. There

was a constant emphasis on learning about difference and "othering", which actually generates confusion when trying to highlight similarities between the ethnic groups. This 'celebration of diversity' through continuously emphasising differences, and the constant emphasis on diverging group identities increases the risk of cementing stereotypes - similar to "negative encounters" (Rubin 2017). Therefore, an experience which is perceived by students and evaluators as positive may, indeed, have unintended negative effects. We do not know if the experiences which were perceived positive have an amplifying effect on the acceptance of diversity or are counterbalanced by negative experiences. We need to observe the students' experiences and their perceptions of practices in school rather than assume that activities have intended positive effects if we want to understand the cohesive effect of different school-based activities.

By contrast, students from six schools with different social, religious and ethnic backgrounds came together for ten days to jointly develop and perform a play. The common goal (performing a play) was equally valued by all participants and became visible. The language barrier was nicely bridged with songs, improvised music and dance while cooperation was encouraged without creating competitions. The play was appreciated by many spectators including local education authorities which provided symbolic support during a public performance on the last day. This activity had an interesting effect because the students had to come together for the performances of the play after they had returned back to their schools, and therefore, stayed in contact over a longer period of time. Principals and teachers of the participating schools convinced the local education administration to take care of the transport cost. Unfortunately, we failed to check if students' attitudes on inter-personal trust had changed after this experience.

The intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew 1998; Al Ramiah and Hewstone 2013) and the realistic group conflict theory (Jackson 1993) both provide evidence that the most important conditions for a successful reduction of prejudice and conflict resolution during group contact are equal status (and power) between the participants, the encouragement of cooperation in order to achieve important goals equally valued by all, and support from the relevant authorities for practical and symbolic reasons.

Another typical activity in regard to social cohesion are student or school competitions. Sometimes, we receive reports about student competitions which are claimed to contribute to social cohesion because these competitions bring students from different ethnolinguistic communities together. Indeed, the highly competitive school culture frames student encounters as competitions. Yet, the reinforcement of competitions may counteract efforts on promoting social cohesion. However, without

further information we are usually left perplexed and puzzled. Once, we were invited by the Ministry of Education for the award ceremony of a second national language competition.<sup>17</sup> The winners underwent a series of competitions from the school to the national level. By the rules of the competition Tamil mother-tongue speakers had to recite texts or poems in Sinhala and vice versa. A mixed group of students together with their parents and teachers did come together, but we left the event without insights into the effects of the competition on social cohesion.

On another occasion, when we discussed possibilities for encouraging second language instruction teachers expressed their frustration about our refusal to support a second language competition. We explained our concerns regarding the effects of such competitions on social cohesion and the potential stress and frustrations among the “losers”. But our concern with social cohesion was not theirs. Competitions are deeply entrenched in Sri Lankan school culture. Openly discouraging students from entering competitions obviously raises the teachers’ concern regarding the compliance with societal demands and expectations which tells us a story about role conformity, and therefore social cohesion, too. Cohesive efforts tread a fine line of bringing different groups together without creating a sense of competition between them. As the examples indicate, the nature of group interactions is critically context-dependent.

These sketchy examples indicate that the observation and record of an activity is not sufficient to identify its contribution to social cohesion. The general principles and characteristics of social cohesion are not defined, observed, and recorded, nor do we assess or fully understand school environments during short school visits. The effects of the activities are based on assumptions and potential intentions which we pretend to monitor. However, only relying on the recorded data (activities) we cannot deduct general criteria of what would cause an activity to promote cohesiveness in schools. To establish if certain activities have contributed to building trust and creating bridges between communities and ethnic groups we need more in-depth and longitudinal investigations into (i) the effects of these activities on the students’ attitudes and behaviour, (ii) how students perceive the activities, and (iii) how the activities are adapted by and interact with the local school context. Further investigations are needed which would require a locally shared understanding of the concept of social cohesion as well as the local school environments.

The dissatisfaction with the monitoring of social cohesion in schools is the starting point for our reflection on the dimensions and characteristics of social cohesion. The focus of our interest is not on the activities themselves but rather on the students’ perception of social cohesion in schools. We will not ask what makes an activity contribute to social cohesion, as this depends on the specific context

and the way activities are implemented, as our examples highlight. The question guiding our monitoring is instead: What kind of socially cohesive experiences do students have in their schools? We are definitely interested in subjective indicators which we will explain in detail below. Next, we turn to definitions and measurements of social cohesion. It serves the purpose of developing a conceptual framework for monitoring cohesiveness in schools. The focus of our discussion is on the relevance for the intended school setting and the Sri Lankan context as well.

## 1.2 Defining and measuring social cohesion in the Sri Lankan context

In recent decades, social cohesion has become an attractive concept which increasingly stimulated social sciences and social policies alike although its roots date back to classic works by Émile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies in the late nineteenth century. Social cohesion was included in debates about quality of life (Noll 2004), and countries such as Canada, Australia, Great Britain, France, the US and Germany, to name but a few, incorporated social cohesion in their social policies. At a transnational level the Council of Europe and the European Commission launched strategies for reforming the welfare state that strongly advocate social cohesion. Eurobarometer and European Quality for Life Surveys inform regularly about trends in social cohesion in European countries. Meanwhile, such surveys are conducted in Africa, South America and Asia, too.<sup>18</sup> The World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) spearheaded the international debate and the development of the concept (see Jenson (2010) for an overview). Nevertheless, a generally accepted definition of social cohesion exists neither in academia, nor in international development cooperation. Rather, it remains an ambiguous concept. On the one hand, it allows for scientific research, and on the other it maintains a vagueness and a flexibility which is conducive to political action.

Social cohesion is increasingly regarded as a goal in itself for quality of life as well as instrumentally valuable. The instrumental effects of social cohesion on economic growth have been a constant concern of economists. In recent years, the attention to the instrumental consequences of social cohesion has widened the debate and now aspects on inequality, social outcomes and human security are also included. In her review for the European Commission in 2000, Berger-Schmitt decomposes the concept of social cohesion into two dimensions: First, the “reduction of disparities, inequalities and social exclusion”, and second, the “strengthening of social relations, interactions and ties” (Berger-Schmitt 2000, 4). In addition to these two dimensions of social inclusion and social capital, the OECD adds social mobility as a third dimension which

concerns “the degree to which people can or believe they can change their position in society” (OECD 2011, 54). The triangular illustration of these dimensions enjoys great popularity. These three dimensions are discussed below with a fourth being added, namely that of social cohesion’s relationship to institutions and governance. These dimensions will be grounded in the specific Sri Lankan context, as social cohesion is no blue print but assumes different forms in different circumstances.

In the Sri Lankan context, the relationship between social cohesion and inequality is of high relevance. In fact, we will connect social cohesion and inequality with conflict. Horizontal inequalities describe inequalities between groups of people who share a common salient identity (Stewart 2010). Horizontal inequalities may occur along economic, political, social or cultural dimensions. The risk of violent conflict increases when groups are deprived across all four dimensions over a long period of time. However, “inequalities, particularly horizontal inequality do not lead to social mobilisation and conflict unless they are perceived as severe and unjust” (Stewart 2010, 33). Thus, Langer et al. (2015) argue that perceptions of inequalities determine people’s attitudes and behaviours which reflect the cohesiveness of a society rather than more objective measures such as income. The authors, therefore, distinguish three dimensions of social cohesion: first, the extent of perceived inequalities, second, the level of societal trust, and third, the strength of people’s adherence to their national identity. In addition to the focus on the individuals’ perceptions, the authors emphasise three types of relationships as relevant to social cohesion: first, relationships among individuals of the same group, second, relationships among individuals across groups, and third, relationships between individuals and groups and the state. For “deeply divided countries” (Hanf 2011) such as Sri Lanka the relationships among ethnic groups are particularly relevant for social cohesion. In addition, the relationship between the state and its population becomes affected by the extent of hierarchy and patronage that mediate how people are able to access social services such as education. Moreover, the relationships of ethnic groups with the state differ, in particular when the majority group dominates the state.

With respect to Stewart’s notion of mobilisation it can be stated that mobilisation along group identity lines becomes easier if people identify strongly with their own group, and if they view others as being different in fundamental aspects. Identities are socially constructed with fluid and vivid boundaries, but by and in themselves they are not primordial. However, people may perceive their most salient identities and those of others as essential or primordial. This primordial view of identity or “tendency to essentialise” (Stewart 2010: 7) has been identified by Stewart as effective mobiliser and stabiliser of ethnicity.<sup>19</sup> Under such circumstances group boundaries

are fairly stable and reshaping of identities is difficult. In Sri Lanka, the heated dispute about ethnic identities and the popular perceptions of what makes people “Sinhalese” and “Tamil” has been closely tied to indigeneity. It takes place in a stage near obsession (Wickramasinghe 2014) which limits the space for the evolvement of new meanings and ideas.

Based on individuals’ perceptions Langer et al. construct a social cohesion index (SCI) and a social cohesion index variance-adjusted (SCIVA). The SCIVA takes into account the level of variation across different ethnic groups within countries. They apply these instruments in nineteen African countries and find that countries with low levels of societal cohesion in a particular year according to the SCI are more likely to experience a range of different violent conflicts in the subsequent year. We are not aware about an application of SCI and SCIVA in Asia. However, we hypothesise a similar result for the present context.

With respect to Sri Lanka, the ethnolinguistic divide caused several violent conflicts since independence. The Tamil minority,<sup>20</sup> particularly in the North of the island, had been favored by the British colonial administration, enjoying relatively privileged access to education and to government employment in the first half of the 20th century. Families demanded education as a way of creating more opportunities for the lives of their children. Tamils also profited from the use of English as the official language where they outperformed the Sinhalese majority. After independence, the Sinhalese majority came to power with a strong and exclusive Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. The Sinhalese dominated state sought to correct the horizontal inequalities perceived as a disadvantage to the Sinhalese majority through educational quotas including the standardisation of the secondary school leaving qualification (GCE A/L) for entry to university, the introduction of Sinhala as the only official language and medium of instruction in schools and universities, and regional investment policies. As a consequence, the horizontal inequalities changed its direction and extent. Tamil youth in the North and East as well as Sinhalese youth in the South did not benefit from increased education expansion. For the Tamil youth the standardisation of the GCE-A level results and the Sinhala language became a restriction for social mobility. Similarly, rural youth in the South who were educated only in Sinhala were not able to compete for access to scarce higher education and rare employment opportunities in the English dominated private job market. Their aspirations and expectations for upward social mobility were badly disappointed. The frustrated Tamil youth were mobilised by an increasingly violent Tamil separatism, and the Sinhalese rural youth were mobilised by a left movement led by the People’s Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, JVP). “Cascades of violence” (Braithwaite and D’Costa 2016)

resulted in two insurrections of the JVP against the state in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century and a violent conflict between Tamil separatists, chiefly the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the state which lasted for 26 years. The LTTE did not only challenge the state with military power, it also built state-like parallel structures in de facto LTTE controlled areas. For example, the government and the LTTE regularly negotiated over the execution of national examinations (O-level and A-level) in these areas. Paradoxically, the very same school examinations that were perceived by Tamils as part of their growing sense of discrimination were protected by the LTTE. Yet, in the grip of a civil war the Tamils kept their aspirations and expectations for a better future of their children alive through education and education examinations. Education was still seen as legitimate means for success and upward mobility despite difficult times.

As a result of the pro-Sinhalese education and language policies soon after independence, Sri Lanka faces an ethnolinguistic segregation in the education system.<sup>21</sup> Educational segregation, in turn, has helped to reproduce mutually exclusive ethnic constituencies, preventing the emergence of an overarching social citizenship that transcends ethnic boundaries (Little and Hettige 2016). The extremely exam-oriented and highly competitive education system reinforces the ethnolinguistic divide in schools and reduces the space for combating ethnic prejudice, discrimination, mistrust and intolerance. Sri Lanka is often cited to demonstrate the largely negative and destructive forces in the education sector that foster growing inequality and violent conflict (for example Heyneman 2003). The “inflammatory” textbooks are repeatedly made a point in case. However, the context is more complex as Sorensen (2008) finds in her ethnographic study in Tamil-medium schools in the Northwest of the country. Despite the creation of a dominant experience of discrimination and marginalisation, social networks in more resourceful communities developed a strong sense of communal solidarity. Some of the observed schools were part of these community networks’ dedicated struggle for the improvement of the socio-economic situation in the community and a better future for their children. This “peripheral citizenship” (Sorensen 2008) strengthens bonding capacities of the in-group. The study is silent, however, about the creation of social capital and social networks that function as bridges between different ethnic groups.

Easterly et al. (2006) define the absence of social cohesion “as the nature and extent of social and economic divisions within society” (105). With this negative definition, the authors measure social cohesion by three indicators: (1) ethnic heterogeneity or ethnolinguistic fractionalisation, (2) income distribution, and (3) trust and other attitudes. They apply a regression analysis and find a negative correlation between economic outcomes

and these indicators of failing social cohesion. The authors conclude that “more social cohesion leads to better institutions, and that better institutions in turn lead to higher growth” (113). Thus, building social cohesion through the construction and maintenance of high-quality and trusted institutions pursuing the common good remains a challenging task for deeply divided countries. With respect to policy implications and a reference to Heyneman (2003), the authors point to the importance of education as a potential policy lever for enhancing social cohesion. The close relationship between social cohesion and functional institutions and the reference to education adverts to the school. First and foremost, the school is the social institution that delivers the educational services to the society through its principal functions of socialisation and allocation. Both are crucial not only for defining the status of individuals, but also that of ethnolinguistic and religious groups.

With regard to Sri Lanka, Colenso (2005) recommends to include a “political economic-governance” dimension of education for social cohesion for the sector policy reform (sector wide approach, SWAp). He assumes that education affects social cohesion through transparency and participation in education policy formulation, planning and management. Although the recommendation remained a donor driven idea which did not enter into education policy in Sri Lanka it is worthwhile exploring. We suggest a focus on education governance at the school level where - through school development - the relationship between good institutions (schools) are strengthened by establishing school networks that widen the space for bridging capacities between ethnolinguistic groups (see Blumör and Licht in this publication). We assume that schools with strong networks, high levels of trust and well-established habits of cooperation and association are better off in terms of cohesiveness than isolated schools. At this point institutions and social capital dimensions of social cohesion intersect and can reinforce each other.

As for now, consensual aspects of social cohesion can be summarised. First, cohesion is a characteristic of a society; while individuals’ values and behaviours affect, and are affected by social cohesion, cohesion is not a characteristic of individual members of the society. Second, societies can be more or less cohesive. The level of cohesion is reflected in the attitudes and behaviour of the individuals or groups in the society. Third, social cohesion is a multidimensional construct. Subsequently, Dragolov et al. (2016) define social cohesion as “the quality of social cooperation and togetherness of a collective, defined in geopolitical terms, that is expressed in the attitudes and behaviours of its members. A cohesive society is characterised by resilient social relations, a positive emotional connectedness between members and the community and a pronounced focus on the common good.” (Dragolov et al. 2016; 6). The authors, in turn, divide each of these three aspects into three dimensions which are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: The Dimensions of Social Cohesion**

Domain	Dimension
1. <b>Social relations create cohesion</b> through a network of horizontal relationships between individuals and societal groups of all kinds, which is characterised by trust and allows for diversity.	1.1 Social networks 1.2 Trust in people 1.3 Acceptance of diversity
2. <b>Connectedness promotes cohesion</b> through positive identification with the country, a high level of confidence in its institutions and a perception that social conditions are fair.	2.1 Identification 2.2 Trust in institutions 2.3 Perception of fairness
3. <b>Focus on the common good promotes cohesion</b> through actions and attitudes that help the weak, are in keeping with society’s rules and allow for a collaborative approach to the organisation of society.	3.1 Solidarity and helpfulness 3.2 Respect for social rules 3.3 Civic participation

We accept this scheme as a starting point for the development of our conceptual framework. We are mainly interested in students’ experiences in school regarding social cohesion. Before doing so we reflect on six specific features of this definition. We assume that they are of high relevance in the Sri Lankan context, especially in the education sector.

First, Dragolov et al. (2016) avoid a focus primarily on homogeneous values or value consensus which we recognise as being fruitful in the Sri Lankan context. The necessity of common values which people have to share in order to guarantee cohesion is highly contested. A homogeneity-based model does not appear preferable for the Sri Lankan situation at all, because the society is rooted in diversity and mutual interdependence instead. The notion of heterogeneity and its acceptance points towards the social relationships and its dimensions of “social networks” (1.1), “trust in people” (1.2) and “acceptance of diversity” (1.3). With respect to the network dimension we need to differentiate between social relationships among individuals of the same group (bonding social capital) and social relationships between individuals of different groups (bridging social capital). With an empirical analysis of war-afflicted communities in Sri Lanka, Goodhand et al. (2000) find that Tamil communities in conflict zones created bonding social capital at the expense of bridging social capital between Tamil and non-Tamil groups. In general, Green and Janmaat (2014) argue that “intra-group bonding does not necessarily translate into inter-group harmony” (18). Resolutely, they distinguish social cohesion from social capital, and reserve the former for whole states and the latter for smaller communities and groups. However, considering the Sri Lankan context, we stop short of doing so. Instead, we point to Portes’ (1998) caution regarding an excessive extension of the concept of social capital. He identifies four potential negative consequences of social capital which are of high relevance in the Sri Lankan context. We assume that in ethnic groups in a deeply divided country these forces are at work. First,

exclusion of outsiders; second, excessive claims towards group members if less successful members enforce all kinds of demands that are backed by shared norms on the more successful members; third, restrictions on individual freedoms as group participation creates demands for conformity and enforcement of norm observation; and fourth, downward levelling norms as group solidarity can be cemented by keeping a member in place through blocking his or her upward mobility. Portes mentions patronage networks such as mafia families and prostitution and drug gangs that illustrate how embeddedness in social structures can be turned to less than socially wanted ends. We do not need to think of criminal organisations, indeed, to see forces of bonding solidarity and trust with similar undesirable effects. Critics of social capital with a less normative outlook may emphasise that conflict and struggle are essential to the advancement of people on the margins, at least in the long run. Conversely, these critics argue that consensus and collaboration may offer a false promise to minorities, especially when they are poor and perceive themselves discriminated (see Goodhand et al. 2000).

Second, the acceptance of diversity is an important dimension for the Sri Lankan case because social cohesion is only possible if people are able to deal with diversity appropriately. Cohesion cannot exist only in subgroups of a society, e.g. among the ethnic majority. The exclusion of groups can promote short-term cohesion among the majority (in-group). However, this exclusion has devastating consequences, particularly for the affected minorities. The effects of diversity on social cohesion are contested. Putnam (2007) finds in the US, that living in an ethnically heterogeneous environment was harmful to interpersonal trust and undermined social connections between and within ethnic groups. His “constrict claim” reinvigorated research and the public debate.<sup>22</sup> In a meta-analysis of 90 studies (mainly in North America and Europe) on the effects of diversity on social cohesion van de Meer and Tolsma (2014) do not find a consistent



support for the constrict claim. They provide a “cacophony of empirical findings” (460), instead. In summary, they conclude that “people in ethnically heterogeneous environments are less likely to trust their neighbors or to have contact with them. However, this does not spill over to generalised trust, to informal help and voluntary work, or other forms of prosocial behaviour and attitudes” (474). Uslander (2012) argues, on the basis of empirical evidence mainly from North America and Europe, that segregation rather than diversity constrains trust. The pathway leads from segregation towards greater economic inequality and finally to lower trust. In the highly segregated school system in Sri Lanka, therefore, the key issues are in the nature of the relationship between schools, the students’ attitude formation toward the “other” and their acceptance of diversity. When segregated schools act independently they may reinforce social divisions. Thus, mixed schooling does not necessarily promote social cohesion in case diversity is not accepted, bridging social capital is not built, and a dominant culture is imposed, instead.

Third, Dragolov’s et al. (2016) definition excludes objective measures of social inequality which corresponds with Langer’s et al. (2015) approach. Dragolov et al. (2016) assume that a widespread perception of unfairness (dimension 2.3) may be a direct evidence of weak cohesion whereas an observably inequitable distribution of resources is a possible cause for a low level of social cohesion. We will emphatically take the horizontal (group-based) aspect of fairness into account. In the fairness dimension we also accommodate the students’ perception of the assessment system at school which relates to confidence and trust in the institution (dimension 2.2).

Fourth, we understand the identification dimension (2.1) in the way Langer et al. (2015) define it as “the strength of peoples adherence to national identity in relation to their group (or ethnic) identity” (6). With regard to the self image and identity of Sri Lankans Dissanayake and McConatha (2011) find that Sinhalese tend to value their national identity more than their ethnic identity whereas Tamils give preference to their ethnic identity.<sup>23</sup> Overall, the findings are in correspondence with a social identity perspective (Tajfel and Turner 1986) which emphasises that an individual possesses several social identities deriving from perceived memberships in social groups. The school paves the way for identity formation through molding students’ behaviour and instilling cultural beliefs and values. However, identity formation is an active process through which students develop particular patterns of thinking, behaving and feeling in interaction with others. Therefore, in the school setting students’ behaviour can change if students modify their self-identity or part of their self-concept that derives from the knowledge of and emotional attachment to the group. We expect to observe the extent of affiliation with a specific group and the nation. The perceptions of raising

the flag in the morning assembly, singing the national anthem<sup>24</sup> and national festivals as they are celebrated in schools contain some references.

Fifth, the trust in institutions (dimension 2.2) will focus on the confidence of the students in the school and the teachers. We assume that students express their grievances and complaints only if they trust the representatives of the institution (teachers, principal) and are confident that the school provides space to deal with them. For this reason, we assign school counselling to trust in institutions (dimension 2.2), although it is strongly related to social rules in school (dimension 3.2) which includes discipline and school violence. We sometimes observe that school counselling is misunderstood and misused by principals, teachers and school administration as a disciplinary measure. We expect to observe perceptions of such tension between social control and trust.

Hence, sixth, the dimension “respect for social rules” (3.2) includes students experience with discipline and violence. Apart from the ragging of newcomers at universities, colleges and prestigious schools and outbursts of violence during sports events between schools which find regularly sensational attraction by the media we are mainly interested in the perception of the authoritarian culture in schools within which violence is accepted and generated. Control and surveillance mechanisms may resort to or use physical punishment. Indiscipline, and therefore conflict, is partly a result of teaching methods that encourage competition. Failure may lead to stress, frustration and low self-esteem predisposing tension or violence. The extent of students’ suicides in Sri Lanka is a serious warning sign of mental health problems among youth.<sup>25</sup> In addition, the dimension of respect for social rules covers students’ perceptions of school rules and their reinforcement. Do students view the rules in their school as reasonable for living and learning together and keeping a positive discipline in school? Do they accept or disregard the school rules and how discipline is maintained? Did they participate in the formulation of the school rules? In particular, we are interested in the social influence of these rules on the students. To what extent do they feel social pressure on conformity to rules, especially if they perceive rules as not reasonable and their reinforcement as unfair? In general, how is discipline perceived by the students? Adherence to social norms can be regarded positive as well (dimension 3.2).

After taking into account some context specific considerations for the operationalisation of the concept of social cohesion for the Sri Lankan case, we will now present a conceptual framework combined with the hope to addresses some of the shortcomings for monitoring social cohesion which we discussed in the previous chapters.

### 1.3 Monitoring students' perception: a conceptual framework

Based on the definition by Dragolov et al. (2016) we develop a conceptual framework for monitoring social cohesion in schools in Sri Lanka. It is specifically adapted to the Sri Lankan school context in order to account for the context-dependency of social cohesion. We focus on students' perception and ask what kind of social cohesion experiences students make in their school.

The controversial debate about subjective measures of the quality of life and social cohesion has been settled meanwhile and a pragmatic consensus has been reached inasmuch as attitudes, beliefs and perceptions are considered as a valuable and indispensable complement in measuring the cohesiveness of a society at a specific moment of time (see OECD 2011; Noll 2004). It has been accepted that especially sense of belonging, trust and people's attitudes towards the state can only realistically be measured by using subjective measures.

Developing the conceptual framework we proceed as follows: First, for each domain of the social cohesion definition (see Table 1) we formulate an overall concept for the school context. Second, for each overall concept we identify characteristics which correspond with the domains' dimensions for the school context. Thus, we obtain a conceptual framework for the three domains: (1) Social relations and inter-personal trust, (2) Connectedness and trust in school, and (3) Focus on the common good. Each domain in turn, comprises three characteristics constituents. Some examples illustrate the characteristics and the overall concepts in order to help students to ground abstract concepts (like respect and trust) in familiar everyday experiences and behaviours that embody certain values. This conceptual framework (see Table 2) serves as the basis for the development of a monitoring instrument (see questionnaire in Annex).

**Table 2: Conceptual Framework for Social Cohesion in Schools**

Characteristic	Example
1. <b>Social Relations and Inter-Personal Trust:</b>	Students have strong and durable relationships with other youth. These relationships are characterised by trust and allow for diversity.
1.1 Students have long-lasting friendships, also with youth from different ethnic or religious backgrounds.  1.2 Students trust each other and support each other if they have a problem.  1.3 Students respect people with other values and lifestyles as equal members in school and the community. Nobody is discriminated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School is a place to meet friends.</li> <li>• Students have engaged with youth in student exchange programs.</li> <li>• Students are still in contact with youth they met during an exchange.</li> <li>• School collaborates with other schools nearby (e.g. joint cultural celebrations, friendly sports events).</li> <li>• Through co-curricular activities students work together in an open and collaborative way (e.g. language club, school choir, student magazine).</li> <li>• Students celebrate religious festivals of various religions together.</li> <li>• Students are encouraged to communicate in the second national language.</li> </ul>

<p>2. <b>Connectedness and Trust in School:</b> Students identify as Sri Lankans, have a high level of confidence in their school and perceive education conditions as fair.</p>	
<p>2.1 Students feel positive about their country and identify as Sri Lankans.</p> <p>2.2 Students have a high level of confidence in the school and the teachers. Students are happy to attend this school and not any other school.</p> <p>2.3 Students believe that education opportunities are fairly distributed and that they are being treated fairly. Nobody is excluded.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students celebrate the national day together.</li> <li>• Students can participate in school activities and events. They are not excluded because of their gender, language or religion. Being Sinhalese/Tamil/Muslim is not important in our school.</li> <li>• The assessment of students' performance is transparent and understood by all students.</li> <li>• Students obtain the marks they deserve. Students are successful because of their merits.</li> <li>• School counselling is available in our school. A school counsellor helps students with their problems.</li> <li>• Students can express and report their grievances and complaints in a confidential way.</li> <li>• Students' achievements are valued by the teachers and principal. Teachers encourage all students likewise to participate in school activities and events.</li> <li>• Teachers treat students fairly at our school.</li> </ul>
<p>3. <b>Focus on the Common Good:</b> Students perform actions and show attitudes that help the weak, reflect on school rules for living and learning together and engage in cooperation and collaborative activities.</p>	
<p>3.1 Students feel responsible for others and are willing to help them.</p> <p>3.2 Students demonstrate responsibility for effective positive discipline in school. Conflicts are solved without using violence.</p> <p>3.3 Students participate in school life beyond classroom activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students engage in community work or school projects which support the community (e.g. project in relation to care of the elderly, persons with disabilities or returnees, waste disposal, nature conservation).</li> <li>• Students from poorer families are supported to participate in school activities if necessary.</li> <li>• Students feel safe in school and on their way to school.</li> <li>• Students do not beat, harass or intimidate other students in or outside school.</li> <li>• Corporal punishment is not applied in our school.</li> <li>• All students likewise get the same treatment if they do not follow the school rules (e.g. code of conduct).</li> <li>• There is no tolerance for violence in our school.</li> <li>• All students can participate in the student parliament.</li> <li>• Student parliament is responsible for the implementation of activities in or outside school.</li> </ul>

We have selected schools for executing the instrument based on their proven record of having implemented activities such as student parliament, student exchanges, second language instruction (Sinhala and Tamil), and school counselling as well as being active members of school networks. A school profile has been developed

including basic school statistics, ethnolinguistic and religious composition of school and community, and actual activities regarding social cohesion which were planned and implemented by the school itself or in cooperation with other schools, e.g. in the school network.

## 1.4 Methodology

The methodology of the social cohesion radar is adapted from the equality audit of the Amadeu Antonio Foundation (Amadeu Antonio Stiftung 2009), in so far as the method is grounded within the local context and realities of its participants and enables them to examine and discuss these. The process was initially developed to investigate if and how adolescents experience equality within their school, youth centre or other institutions. Therefore, we deemed the method suitable for our research by framing the questions around aspects of social cohesion instead of equality.<sup>26</sup>

The data collection consists of a mixed method approach. In the first step quantitative data of grade nine students (15 years old) on their perception of aspects of social cohesion within their school are collected through a questionnaire (see Annex). In a second step, focus group discussions and open-end interviews are conducted to probe some of the responses given in the questionnaire. This triangulation enhances the data quality and counters potential social desirability bias.

Altogether 15 schools were visited between September 2017 and July 2018, including two visits for testing and revising the instrument, but these students' responses do not form part of the analysis. Thus, the analysis contains the findings of 13 schools located in the programme target provinces of Northern, Eastern, Uva, Central, and Sabaragamuwa Province.<sup>27</sup> Of the visited schools eight are Sinhala-medium schools with 57 female and 45 male participants, and five are Tamil-medium schools with 41 female and 26 male participants. Hence, overall 169 questionnaires were administered, and 13 focus group discussions, and 22 single, double, or triple interviews were conducted. Out of the 169 students (71 male; 98 female) who completed the questionnaire a total of 141 students (56 male; 85 female) were interviewed.

The interviews were executed and recorded by experienced psychologists in the students' mother tongue (Sinhala, Tamil), transcribed and translated into English for the analysis. The anonymity of students was secured.

Given the small scale qualitative nature of this approach, it is important to note that the findings offer insights into local school conditions and students' perceptions, but they are not representative for the whole of Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that certain social-cultural norms and dynamics between students, teachers and parents can be found across the island, especially when expressed by students in all 13 schools. Moreover, this approach only addresses social cohesion at the individual and school level. Aspects of cohesion connecting larger social structures are not considered. However, implications for social networks and communities are discussed.

## 2. Findings from the Social Cohesion Radar in Sri Lankan Schools

After presenting the findings of the questionnaire and the interviews, we discuss possible explanations by reverting to relevant socio-scientific theories. Finally, we conclude with a reflection on the applied method and discuss lessons learned for development cooperation.

### 2.1 Questionnaire

In general, the distribution of student responses shows only small deviations within the response patterns and overall student 'fully agree' or 'agree' with most of the given statements on trustful social relations, trust in the school, and focus on the common good (see Table 4, Annex).

Within the first set of questions on social relations and inter-personal trust student responses indicate that they perceive the school as a place to meet friends, work together in an open and collaborative way in co-curricular activities, and engage with youth from other schools through student exchange programmes or other joint cultural or religious activities. Only the two statements on staying in contact with youth met during a school exchange (1c) and the absence of discrimination within the school show (1.5) a small disagreement rate of 15%. Both aspects were later probed in the group discussion and interviews.

The domain of connectedness and trust in the school shows a similar picture, with the clear majority of students agreeing with the statements. 14% disagree on the availability of a counsellor and 18% agree that less well-performing students never get a chance to participate in special school events. Moreover, 10% indicate that students are not proud to attend this school.

Within the domain of focus on the common good, again, students agree to most of the statements, while the presence of corporal punishment and the differentiating treatment of students by the teachers is indicated through disagreeing with the respective statements by 18% and 24%.

Overall, the responses indicate that students mostly agree with statements that imply attitudes and behaviours that characterise a cohesive school and do have cohesive experiences like trusting each other, trusting the teachers and the schools, as well as supporting each other. Yet, the informative value of these answers remains limited and a triangulation of these findings with the responses in interviews is necessary for a better understanding and validation purposes. For example, even if 83% of the

students agree with the statement that “students are still in contact with youth they met during an exchange”, this response does not tell us anything about the quality or intensity of the contact or social relations students have with each other. To better understand these aspects the findings of the focus group discussions and the interviews are presented in the next chapter.

## 2.2 Interviews

### 2.2.1 Social Relations

We start with findings on students’ perceptions on the student exchange programmes that lead to findings on the dimension acceptance of diversity. This is followed by findings on trust in people. We differentiate between more symmetrical peer and friendship relationships and asymmetrical student-adult (teacher) relationships that correspond with child-parent relationships. Findings on gender relationships conclude the domain on social relations.

## Findings

Almost all students (98%) responded in writing that they had engaged in student exchange programmes lasting between several days and one day (sports, cultural, religious events). In addition, 83% of students claimed in writing that they are still in contact with students from other schools who had participated in these programmes. In the interviews the following questions were investigated: (i) How do students perceive the exchange programmes? (ii) What does it mean to be still in contact? What kind of contact do students still have?

Most students indicated an appreciation of the encounters and the opportunity to meet students from other ethno-linguistic and religious backgrounds and “learn about each other’s cultures and traditions” (student):

Quotation 1-1<sup>28</sup>:

*S: I very much enjoyed the activity and it was a good experience for me, since I haven’t had an opportunity to work with students from other ethnicity before.*

*I: What do you think about it?*

*S: I think it is good for us to have such opportunity as it would help us to grow with a better understanding of other ethnicities. (1)*

Quotation 1-2:

*S: This is the first time in my life to get to know students from other ethnicities. I felt that they are good. Then we had another similar programme, the Thai Pongal [religious] festival. It was organised in our school and different schools from all three ethnic groups participated. It was a good opportunity for us to learn about other cultures. (3)*

Some students mentioned that these exchange programmes provided an opportunity to review their attitudes toward others.

Quotation 1-3:

*S: I think in such moments [of students encounters] you can overcome your own stereotypes and negative attitudes about the other.*

*I: You, mean to say that will help you change attitudes?*

*S: Yes, that will lead to respect each other. (11)*

Quotation 1-4:

*S: My negative attitudes towards them got changed. Earlier, my feeling was that they are not good, but after having experience with them, I feel that I was wrong that they are also like me and nothing wrong with their culture or traditions. It was my attitude that made me feel bad. (7)*

The diffuse “feeling that they are not good” remains unchallenged in the absence of the other, and it is not reflected unless an encounter with the other takes place. The origins of an expressed feeling of anger is probed in the next interview sequence.

Quotation 1-5:

*S1: I felt that it helped me to overcome the anger or the misunderstanding that I had towards the other ethnic and religious groups.*

*I: So, you felt you had some anger against these groups?*

*S1: Yes.*

*I: From where and when this anger came into you? How did it develop?*

*S1: - [Silence]*

*I: Have you ever thought about the reason for having such a feeling?*

*S1: No, I never thought about it. I am also not sure*

how it came into me. But I knew I had something negative about them.

I: Are you happy overcoming it?

S1: Yes, I am happy and I also feel free.

I: What about you?

S2: I think I also had a similar feeling like him

I: What is it?

S2: It was anger.

I: Was it an anger towards revenge or anger that you want to ignore them totally?

S2: I cannot explain, but something made me dislike them.

I: How do you feel now?

S2: I am happy for getting this opportunity and being able to overcome that feeling. I think now I like to move with them freely.

I: Can you both tell me when this change took place. Was it an activity, an event, a person or something that touched the bottom of that feeling with a realisation that need to be corrected?

S1: It was during the group activity when we all were trying to reach to the same goal. I felt that we hardly [had] any differences other than we spoke different languages that also will not prevent us to be friends.

S2: I also felt that we all were students. Since they haven't done anything wrong to me, why should I feel negative about them? (12)

According to the student's response working together in group activities towards a common goal induced a change of attitude. Working together for the common good has the potential for making identity markers less relevant. But, where do such feelings of anger (quotation 1-5) and depreciative ("negative") attitudes (quotation 1-4) toward the other come from? S1 is honest: "I never thought about it" (quotation 1-5). Unfortunately, these feelings and attitudes were not probed further, and S1's relief ("I am happy and I also feel free") remains without scrutiny.

Quotation 1-6:

I: What do you think the students learn from attending these [exchange] programmes?

S1: I think students were able to practically learn about each other's cultures and traditions.

S2: I think students' respect towards each other increased, they also seemed to value others.

I: What do you mean by value the other?

S2: Students who were not bothered about other religion or ethnicity started showing interest in them.

S1: There are also students who think their ethnicity and religion are higher than others, for them this seemed an opportunity to learn the beauty in other ethnic and religious customs, cultures and traditions.

I: What did both of you learn from this?

S2: I learn to appreciate other's cultures.

S1: I learn lots of similarities and differences in my own culture, traditions and worships to the others.

I: How do you find this unity among your friends in the school?

S2: Actually, we are like brothers and sisters. (14)

The student's "appreciation of cultures" is an expression of the acceptance of diversity. It is remarkable, but not surprising that the students' appraisal of their own learning experience is in accordance with the assumptions that they express about other students learning. The two students express a sensitivity of learning about other cultures, religions and other people as well as learning about one's own culture and religion through reflexive thinking. In short, they differentiate between "we" and the "other". Unfortunately, we do not hear anything about learning with others. As another student (see quotation 1-5) indicates, learning together for a common good can reduce the importance of the otherness.

Remarkably, no student showed a negative attitude toward the exchange programmes. One student, however, expressed a reserved attitude:

Quotation 1-7:

S: Sometimes I felt there was no meaning in those activities [of the exchange programme].

I: What made you feel like that?

S: The way they pray and with their rituals, I was not impressed. (15)

The student's attitude of not being impressed was not probed. We neither can infer a refusal to tolerate the other religions nor an acceptance of religious diversity. Some of the activities during the exchange programme which are not specified seem not to correspond with the student's expectations that were not investigated either.

With regard to continuous contact, several students admitted that they did not keep contact with students from other schools after the exchange programmes. They mentioned the long distance, financial and language problems as reasons. In a group interview, girls mentioned security concerns by their parents.

In addition, students expressed a realistic opinion about establishing lasting relationships with participants of exchange programmes:

Quotation 1-8:

*S1: I think it was to build a good relationship, but it did not continue.*

*I: What was the reason?*

*S2: I think students should have been encouraged.*

*S1: I think one time activity will not make us to do it. Therefore, at least once a month or once in two months, having some activity would naturally build that relationship.*

*I: Do you see any personal responsibility of maintaining these relationships?*

*S2: No, we haven't thought that. (16)*

S1 is of the opinion that a “one-time activity” that is most likely one exchange programme, is not sufficient to keep regular contact. Though it is not clear what or who should encourage students, it seems students expect the school to organise opportunities for contact. S2 is honest in admitting that they have not reflected about their own role and did not consider their own responsibility for keeping contact if they wish to do so.

In principle, two settings can be differentiated. In homogeneous settings with students from the same ethno-linguistic and religious background it is difficult to keep contact with students from the other social groups. Sometimes, almost homogeneous schools are attended by few students from other ethno-linguistic or religious backgrounds. Language is not a major problem to them as they need to follow instructions in the medium of the school that is the language of the local majority group. Students report about their integration in class:

Quotation 1-9:

*S: We have two students in our class, one Muslim student and one Tamil student. But we do not have many people belong to other ethnicity in our village, therefore we do not get much opportunity.*

*I: How do you find those two in your class, are they different to other students?*

*S: No, no, we do not see any difference in them; they are like any one of us in the class. (16)*

Unfortunately, neither the Muslim nor the Tamil student participated in the interviews to test the student's statement. From the student's point of view the two students with different ethno-linguistic and religious backgrounds are assimilated in the school.

In heterogeneous settings, students report that they meet students from other schools (with other ethno-linguistic and religious background) on the road, in the bus or in tuition classes:

Quotation 1-10:

*S: Actually, when we meet each other on the way, some of them smile with us and some come and talk to us.*

*[...]*

*I: How do you keep a conversation if you do not know the language?*

*S: We somehow try to manage. Often it is beyond language looking at them and the way we exchange [...] smile and say hello shows that we are happy to meet each other. (5)*

Quotation 1-11:

*S: Actually, now when they see us in the bus some of the students come and talk to us. (11)*

Quotation 1-12:

*S: [...] we meet them on the road and some of us travel together in the bus to school.*

*I: That sounds good. So, do you speak to them in their language and practice the language?*

*S: No, no, they speak to us in Sinhala. (10)*

Quotation 1-13:

*I: So you had all these experiences [exchange programmes]. What did you do after that? Did you make any friends that you continue the friendships?*

*S1: Not a strong friendship as such, but we meet them in the bus and they speak to us.*

*S2: Not like those days, as recognition we smile at each other or getting the opportunity to speak with them. (14)*

The quotations 11 and 13 are taken from interviews with Sinhala students that indicate a passive role in approaching Tamil students, especially because of the language skills. It always needs someone to do the first step, and sometimes it can start with a smile. However, it needs opportunities for contacts.

Now, we turn to findings on the dimension of trust in people. In the questionnaire, 94% of students agreed or fully agreed with the statement “students in our school trust each other”. In interviews students explain:

Quotation 1-14:

*S1: Since we have been in the school for many years we know each other for a long time. That experience of knowing each other, encourages us to trust them.*

*S2: Sometime at our free time we just talk to each other, share our feelings, experience, that helps us to come together and build our trust. (12)*

Students sometimes include teachers in trustful relationships. A student describes the conditions for collaborative work:

Quotation 1-15:

*S1: It [working together] naturally happens, because, among the students we have friendship, with the teachers we have respect and trust that makes us easy to work. (12)*

However, this isolated remark about respectful and trustful relationships with teachers is superposed with experience that creates mistrust. Some students describe grievances that are related to perceived unfair treatment, favourism, physical punishment or psychological aggression by teachers or principals.

Quotation 1-16:

*S1: I do Music. I participate in competitions also. But Music teacher will give more marks to some other children.*

*I: Why do you think she does that?*

*S: They are from the same village. They are her relatives. Even if they don't sing well, she will give them good marks. Because she knows her parents. (30)*

Quotation 1-17:

*S: The yoga master is the one who beats us also. He beats boys and girls.*

*I: Does the lady teachers also give physical punishment?*

*S: Yes, they do. Principal is the worst one.*

*I: Why do you say so?*

*S: She treats us bad in front of teachers and other students.*

*I: How does she treat you and in what situations?*

*S: If she comes to know that we are telling we have periods, then she says: 'I need to check it to confirm.'*

*I: Does she do that?*

*S: No, but when she says in front of everyone we feel so bad. (28)*

Shaming in public is wholly unacceptable for students. The perceptions on physical punishment and psychological aggression are presented and discussed in detail in chapter 2.2.3 on the domain focus on the common good. A comment about prefects indicates mistrust as well:

Quotation 1-18:

*S: Never approach a prefect when you have a problem. (23)*

Competitions can become a source of anger and mistrust, too. However, students know how to settle the conflict by themselves:

Quotation 1-19:

*S: Once I remember it happening during the house meet [students are sometimes grouped into houses for sport competitions] when one house won and when they looked down at the other houses, the students start reacting to each other. But they did not have any physical fight as such.*

*I: So, what did the teachers do?*

*S: So, often teachers do not know that students are angry with each other. Often these kinds of situations naturally get solved after two or three days. Then there are no hard feelings, and everyone relates as usual. (7)*

Students express an awareness about the conditions for the formation of trustful relationships with teachers and students. Two remarkable incidents during the interviews indicate a learning environment that is not conducive for trust formation:

Quotation 1-20:

*I: Why is that you suddenly look uncomfortable?*

*S: That little girl near the window is listening to us.*

*I: So what?*

*S: She is a daughter of one of our teachers. She is waiting there, may be to listen and report on what we share with you. (15)*

The student expresses fear about being eavesdropped by a bystander. From the students' point of view the bystander's presence did not happen incidentally, because she was a teacher's daughter to presumably report back. In



another school, the interview was disturbed by a teacher. The interviewer reported that the teacher came close to the classroom (venue of the interview) and pretended to read a newspaper. The interview continued only after the teacher had left. The incident itself did not broach the issue of the interview.

Though in different situations, other students also expressed their fears about sharing information with others, e.g. friends, that can create a social climate of mistrust:

Quotation 1-21:

*S: Sometime if the person whom we trust and share a secret get close to another person and share it, that person become untrustworthy. (15)*

Quotation 1-22:

*S: Best to tell parents [secrets] because with friends you never know if they are good or bad inside. (23)*

Quotation 1-23:

*S: Do not tell secrets to your friend, they will tell others. (21)*

The students' understanding of friendship was not probed and clarified. The two statements (quotations 1-22 and 1-23) seem to echo parental advice which they ought to follow. We cannot infer if they really do not share secrets with their friends or not. Sharing secrets becomes the litmus test for intimate relationships: With whom can adolescents talk with confidentiality?

Gender relationships are influenced by the gender segregated schools. Without intention gender become a topic of discussion in a gender mixed school:

Quotation 1-24:

*Boy 1: I wish girls in a separate class and boys in a separate class.*

*[All start giggling.]*

*I: So, you, want two separate schools for both genders?*

*Boy 1: Yes.*

*I: Any reason?*

*Boy 1: I do not like to be with them [girls].*

*I: Do you have sisters at home? Do they annoy you or fight with you?*

*Boy 1: No, it is not them, but it is the girls in the school fight and I do not like that.*

*[All giggle.]*

*Girl 1: I also like to be in a girl's school.*

*I: You also like, why is that so?*

*Girl 1: I do not know, but I like.*

*I: But there should be a reason, what is that so?*

*Girl 1: No, because the boys fight.*

*I: So, do you think there should be a separate school for boys and girls or in the same school gender wise separate classes?*

*Boy 1 and Girl 1: In that case we would like to have separate schools.*

*I: Can you explain a little why you want such a school?*

*Boy 2: Girls fight with us. Then they carry the tale to the teacher against us. Therefore, we do not like to have them.*

*I: Do you mean that boys do not fight, and they do not carry tales?*

*Boy 2: No, no boys do fight, but we do not carry tales against each other. (20)*

First, a boy talks about separate classes for boys and girls. The interviewer misunderstood and mentions separate schools. The girl, then, prefers to attend a girls' school. Finally, students, both boys and girls express their preference for separate schooling and explain it with presumably different problem solving strategies. The boy bluntly states that the girls squeal.

In another gender mixed school students reported that boys and girls from grade 7 onwards are prohibited to talk to each other in school, even though they attend the same class. Boys and girls became excited in the group discussion so that the recording became unusable.

## Discussion

In line with Dragolov's et al. (2016) definition of social cohesion, social relations create cohesion through trustful and diverse networks between various individuals and groups of society. The cohesive quality of social relations is scrutinised along the dimensions of the constitution and characteristics of social networks, the trust in people, and the acceptance of diversity.

According to many responses student exchange programmes have the potential to enhance the acceptance of diversity. Most students appraise the opportunities for contact explicitly as relevant for "learning about each other cultures and traditions" (student), and possible learning

with others, when diversity becomes more acceptable and the otherness less relevant. These positive attitudes are in accord with findings from intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew 1998). Demanding that students learn to live together requires a claim on education policy and schools to provide for adequate learning opportunities. Nevertheless, the implementation of student encounters, even with a persuading pedagogical concept, best intentions and good practices, will face structural limitations within the segregated school system and segregated communities as well as restricted sustainable effects on the acceptance of diversity.

The findings are compatible with social network research on homophily (see McPherson et al. 2001; Kadushin 2012). We find strong homophily on ethnicity in school students' relationships which can be classified as baseline homophily. In segregated schools, opportunities for contact and tie formation are limited towards one's own community. The ethno-linguistic segregation is reflected in the constitution of students' networks. The ethnic homophily is not only dependent on the attributes and preferences of the students making the choice, but it is fundamentally influenced by the opportunity of contact. The most basic source of ethnic homophily is space. Sporadic encounters such as student exchange programmes can create opportunities for learning to accept diversity, but they do not help strong tie formation between students from diverse ethno-linguistic backgrounds. In heterogeneous settings students use opportunities for weak tie formation, expressed through greetings and smiles. But students' relationships are still characterised by homophily.

Considering both heterogeneous and homogeneous settings, the high percentage of agreement with the statement "students have friends with other ethno-linguistic backgrounds" is irreproducible. It may be an expression of a social desirability bias.

As students express in the interviews, student exchange programmes and enduring encounters rely on their language competencies. Either English is used as link language or students practice Sinhala and Tamil as second language. However, direct contact is not necessarily needed for the promotion of an acceptance of diversity as it rests on pro-social attitudes and behaviours that require the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. Thus, empathy can be induced through fictitious characters in literature, movies and other media that comprise characteristics of desirable pro-social attitudes and behaviours and allow for identification. As Batson et al. (2014) find, feeling empathy for a member of a stigmatised group can improve the feelings toward the group as a whole, and this prevails, even so, if it is a fictitious member of the group, as long as the perspective of the stigmatised person is adopted. However, media

education is in its infancy in Sri Lanka, and literature and media education both depend on qualified teachers being competent and confident in promoting the acceptance of diversity. We have reason to doubt that, at present, literature and media education are able to unfold their potential for the promotion of the acceptance of diversity. For example, in view of the public controversy that is charged with strong emotions and resentment a sound and independent textbook analysis on the acceptance of diversity that is widely accepted cannot be expected.

With regard to the dimension of trust in people we observe a discrepancy between the high percentage of students who agree with the statement in the questionnaire that students trust each other and the multitude of responses of mistrust in the interviews. Adolescents are conspicuously peer-oriented and experience trustworthiness among their peers. The peer relationships represent a clear example of a more symmetrical relationship that allows for expressing mistrust in interviews. What becomes decisive is the quality of the peer relationship. In a friendship the relationship is characterised by mutual affection with strong interpersonal bonds, and trust is viewed as core characteristic. Some responses indicate that the notion of emotional intimacy, that is so characteristic especially for adolescent friendships in Western cultures (Keller 2004), is less relevant to them. In recent years, throughout the world, the pervasive use of social media such as Facebook complicates the definition of friendship, since all of one's social contacts on these digital platforms are referred to as "friends". As friendship is a relationship that results from both social and personal conditions a further investigation of friendship concepts in Sri Lanka is recommended.

In an asymmetrical relationship between students and teachers the quality of the relationship depends on the treatment and the perceived fairness. Students will express grievances about perceived unfair treatment and thereby appraise trust and mistrust respectively. The prefect system in school transcends the clear distinction between symmetrical peer-relationships and asymmetrical teacher-student relationships, as prefects are assigned the dual roles of being a student while also being responsible for discipline. This creates an asymmetrical element of injustice. Prefects can be trusted as peers or mistrusted by students in the same way they trust or mistrust teachers. The mistrust in people creates a disturbing learning environment with a strong influence on the dimension trust in institution as we will discuss below.

Assuming that feelings of anger and depreciative attitudes toward others (out-group) as expressed by students provide a fertile soil for the formation of prejudices and discrimination, we suggest a more detailed investigation. The "syndrome of group-focused enmity" (Zick et al. 2008) and the social dominance theory (see Pratto et al. 2006) can serve as a conceptual framework. Group-focused enmity

describes abasement and discrimination occurring solely on the basis of actual or attributed group membership, regardless of individual behaviour. The group-focused enmity syndrome encompasses interrelated prejudices that all mirror a generalised devaluation of out-groups. The group-focused enmity rests on the assumption that the devaluation of out-groups is strongly determined by an ideology of inequality. Such an ideology of inequality is a strong factor linking group-focused enmity with social dominance orientation that “captures the extent of individuals’ desire for group-based dominance and inequality” (Pratto et al. 2006, 281). Social dominance orientation is an essential construct of the social dominance theory. According to this theory, human societies tend to organise as group-based social hierarchies in which at least one group enjoys greater social status and power than the other group, irrespective of the feelings toward individual members of the other group. Social dominance theory argues that societies contain three distinct systems of group-based hierarchy. Apart from an age system, in which adults have disproportionate social power over children, and a gender system, in which men have disproportionate power compared to women, coalitions are constructed on arbitrary bases meaningfully related to power such as ethnicity or religion. The hierarchical dominance is produced by the effects of discrimination across individuals, institutions and collaborative inter-group processes. The behaviours of individuals and the operation of institutions such as schools are shaped by consensually held values, attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes which Pratto et al. (2006) call “legitimising myths”. The very same prejudices that are crucial to the syndrome of group-focused enmity are also part of the delegitimising myths. By all means, the strong ties of group-focused enmity and social dominance orientation stress that an ideology of inequality does play an important role in Sri Lanka. We will return to these legitimising myths and ideology of inequality in the conclusion.

Gender segregation is the norm in Sri Lankan schools. This norm is internalised and defended by students, both boys and girls. Yet, the gender mixed school tries to make leeway of this norm through a prohibition of communication between boys and girls. From students’ responses we cannot recognise a pedagogical concept on co-education. The learning together (of boys and girls) is dealt with administratively, instead, owing to the fact that boys and girls cannot be segregated at different spaces in school. Co-education is simply the second best option. Consequently, the school administration has to take care that the prohibition will be controlled by the teachers, the school administration and by the students themselves. If the prohibition is disobeyed the administration has to identify and punish the culprit. Fear among students becomes part of the gender socialisation. Gender roles are not supposed to be challenged, they are imposed with a taboo. This is a purpose of gender segregation. The gender

relationships are relevant for social cohesion, and need further investigation.

## 2.2.2 Connectedness

First, we present findings on the dimension perception of fairness, followed by trust in institutions that are schools here. The dimension identification was not specifically investigated and students’ comments were arbitrary and not utilisable.

## Findings

In the questionnaire, 98% of students agree or fully agree with the statement “teachers treat students fairly at our school”. As students explain in the interviews fair treatment by teachers can lead towards trustworthy relationships (see above). However, the percentage of agreement with the statement becomes doubtful as students report about perceived unfair treatment by teachers and principals frequently. Apart from the quotations presented already, students in a Tamil school report about an unfair treatment of a girl who was dismissed from religious studies (Hinduism) because she was Catholic. Christian religion is not offered as subject at the school, therefore, the girl was not allowed to take examinations in religious studies which was appalling to the Tamil girls. The girl’s exclusion from class is perceived as unfair. In another school, a student described the principals’ behaviour as unfair.

Quotation 2-1:

*S: Principal uses bad words and scolds us. Also she never bothers about our studies.*

*I: What you mean?*

*S: During classroom teaching, sometimes, she will come and ask the teacher to send students to do work.*

*I: What kind of work?*

*S: Clean the garden, water the plants, clean the hall etc. Mostly she asks boys to come and do. Girls, too, are asked to work. She has to be the person who bothers more about our studies, but she is not. (28)*

Obviously, the student expects the principal to care more about the student’s needs, especially regarding their academic studies. The trust in the institution is influenced by the students’ expectations about teachers and principals’ behaviour and adherence to expected social roles.

Quotation 2-2:

*S: [...] all of us have some financial problems and problems with education such as lack of teachers for some subjects.*

*I: How do you see these problems are solved?*

*S: Our principal and teachers try their very best to fill those gaps. We in return try to do our best in studies. (2)*

The student advances the opinion that problems can be solved, if teachers and students comply with their roles well. For the student, this compliance of roles seems to be a precondition for trust in school to emerge eventually. It requires both teachers and students to meet their presumed obligations, thereby indicating an interdependency which reproduces and manifests certain behavioural expectations. Another student articulates a similar view while elaborating on the relationship between school and community.

Quotation 2-3:

*I: How do you find the relationship with your school and the village?*

*S1: Since we do not have security for the school during the holidays, the neighbors protect the school.*

*S2: We also have extra-curricular activities that we do in the village. Our school also has the water resource that villagers make use of it.*

*S1: There is a youth club in this village and they use our ground for activities.*

*S2: During sports meet, New Year celebration, we invite the villagers to participate.*

*I: Now, these are things that are taking place in a way as a routine, but what are the contributions or service of the students to this village?*

*S1: Most of the students here are from the village. The first service could be to study well.*

*S2: Student parliament organised certain programmes in the school such as health clinics, awareness programmes, leadership programmes for the villagers. (12)*

S1 expresses an interdependent view of belonging: The best community service that a student can do is to study well. Feeling connected to the community will help the student as well as the community.

In general, many students express their ideas on what makes a “good” school. In some cases, they were asked explicitly, in others they mentioned it openly.

Quotation 2-4:

*I: What is school for you?*

*S: A place to study and make friends.*

*I: How do you find your school?*

*S: A happy place, I have good friends and kind teachers. (3)*

Quotation 2-5:

*I: How do you feel about your school?*

*S1: I feel proud.*

*S2: I am proud, but at the same time, I wish if we could have more opportunity and facilities. (5)*

Quotation 2-6:

*S: [A perfect school is] when students from our school get good results, when it [our school] wins from the activities and games [in competitions with other schools], has the facilities to help and create opportunities for the students to reach their ambition or goal, also, when our school becomes first in languages and in various subjects. In general, perfect in everything, students would be proud. (10)*

Quotation 2-7:

*S1: From childhood I have been in this school and whatever I learn, I have got from this school. I love my teachers as they are friendly and encouraging.*

*S2: I also feel the same. In addition, even in our weakness our teachers kindly guide us to the correct direction. (11)*

Quotation 2-8:

*S1: There are students who through this perfect school should get disciplined and become good citizens.*

*I: Who are they?*

*S1: Students who do not bother about studies and just play around and disturb others.*

*I: What about you? Do you go to school to have a good time?*

*S1: I do not think that is going to be a good idea.*

*I: But this is in the perfect school and child friendly school?*

*S1: Students need education, therefore, they need to study.*

*I: Don't you think that you can't do both at the same time?*

*S1: If it is the balance that is ok.*

*S2: We can get to know others more, we can study,*

spend time with friends and we also spend time in recreation.

S3: I think, if we can have leisure time that would help us to relax and as a result what we study could be grasped well.

S1: There are also students who do not want to come to school. But, if there is time for relaxation, that would attract them to come back to school. (20)

Interviewer and S1 have a different idea about a “perfect” school. S1 insists that studying is the first priority. During the debate S1 accepts recreation time in school because it helps learning and may attract drop outs to come back to school.

Quotation 2-9:

I: Tell me, what are the things you liked about your school?

S: It's a big school, when I compare with my previous school. We have good facilities. Teachers are good. Principal is very good, caring and very much interested in us. (25)

Quotation 2-10:

I: What you really like about your school?

S: I like everything, teachers, principal. Good education, good facilities. Other schools also come here to learn from our school. When I compare with my previous school its big and nice. We have teachers for all the subjects, we can do English medium, principal is very good with children, like the class teacher. (26)

According to these statements a “good” school has characteristics as follows:

- good facilities
- kind, good, caring teachers who are interested in students and provide guidance to students
- giving a feeling of pride
- high reputation (famous, model for other schools)
- keeping discipline
- being a happy place
- meeting friends
- winning in competitions
- good relationship with the community.

Within such a “good” school context how do students address grievances and complaints? Sometimes, students

mention complaint or suggestion boxes in schools which teachers or principals check regularly. The students do not report about actions as a result of these complaints or suggestions. Other students explain that they can approach teachers or the counselling teacher for help or advice.

Quotation 2-11:

I: When students have grievances or personal problems to whom do they go? May be cannot share with students, need a support of an adult what will they do?

S: - [Silence] First they would go to the class teacher. If the class teacher does not take any action they would go to the principal. Then they bring the parents to school. (17)

Quotation 2-12:

S: If there is a counsellor for students to go they will be able to find ways and solve their problems. One student from the upper class committed suicide due to a love affair. A student to commit suicide means a very big issue. If there was a counsellor that life should have been saved. Therefore, I see it as a great need in the school. (8)

Inherently, this single comment on suicide is remarkable. The interviewer did not investigate further.

And yet, others complain during the interviews that they are frightened to report any grievances or complaints. In a group interview, students had listed several grievances, e.g. not allowed to bring biscuits to school, working in the school garden while wearing white school uniforms and being scolded when uniform gets dirty. First, students keep quiet after being asked if they have tried to suggest changes to teachers, principal or the student parliament. The interviewer continues probing:

Quotation 2-13:

I: What is the reason that you never made any effort [to make suggestions]?

S: We are frightened.

I: Of what?

S: We are frightened that we will get scolded. (19)

Quotation 2-14:

S: Teachers often pull parents into the problem and talk bad about them.

I: Can you explain it bit more? What you mean?

S: If they scold us or beat us and if we go and tell

*our parents, it will be a problem.*

*I: How will it be a problem?*

*S: Once my parents come and talked to the principal. And after that, she has asked the teachers, and after all of them scolded my parents, saying 'who are they to come and ask us'. (29)*

Quotation 2-13 indicates a fear of being scolded or punished for talking with teachers about grievances, complaints or even suggestions for improvement. Quotation 2-14 explains students' concerns about parent's involvement. The teachers are annoyed about parents interference in school affairs, and presumably, the student wants to avoid embarrassing the parents.

With regard to problem solving students indicate clear steps for action that appear in several interviews independently.

Quotation 2-15:

*I: When there are problems, how do you solve them?*

*S: Handling our problems among peers are good, but failing to handle, we get a support from the elders, especially from teachers. But I personally haven't seen students fighting or having such big problems within the school. We normally listen to the teachers and prefects. Our punishments are mostly advice from the teachers. (3)*

Quotation 2-16:

*S: When students have any disagreement or problem they try to solve among themselves. If it is boys they try to solve it among boys, if they can't then girls, mostly from the same class also will try to help them. Only when students find that they cannot solve, then it is taken to a teacher or to the principle. (6)*

Students try to solve their problems among themselves, first, before involving teachers or the principal. We come back to it when presenting findings on the dimension, respect for social rules. Sometimes, students talk about fights.

Quotation 2-17:

*I: How do the students solve their problems?*

*S: When there are disagreements or small fights among students, friends try to solve it. If that is not possible other students also try to help them to solve. If that also does not work, we take it to a teacher whom we think would understand us and help to solve it. (8)*

Quotation 2-18:

*S1: No, we do not fight in the school, sometime whatever happens in the school, we wait until after school and outside the school, we fight.*

*I: Does that happen among seniors or the juniors?*

*S1: Among both seniors and juniors it happens.*

*S2: Sometime between them also it happens.*

*I: Why do they fight? Can you give me an example?*

*S2: For various things they do. Sometime, if a prefect tries to correct a junior student or a class of students publicly and if he or they do not like, then for such issues, they would fight.*

*I: Is that serious fighting? Don't your teachers or parents know about that or do the prefects complain it to the principal?*

*S1: No, no one complains or brings it to the school. This issue is dealt and finished outside the school and no one brings it to the school. (16)*

It is not clear what kind of fights are meant. Are these fights quarrels or disputes ("small fights") that are settled with arguments or physical fights that involve violent behaviour? Students report that they settle these "fights" outside the school so that teachers and parents do not become aware. But it seems everybody knows anyway, otherwise they would not confess it frankly. It needs to be scrutinised if "fight" includes violent behaviour, and if such kind of "staged fights" (Collins 2009) outside school are an accepted method of problem solving. A search on the prevalence of adolescent fighting should provide more insight.

## Discussion

Students attitudes of social relations in schools (teachers and principals) and the connectedness to their school are influenced by their aspirations and expectations for education. Although, students were not asked explicitly, their expectations can be inferred from their elaborations and understanding of a "good" school and their self-description of what constitutes a "good" student. As students decide their future target of education during secondary school before the GCE Ordinary level examinations (Samarakoon et al. 2016), from their point of view, the school has to do everything possible in order to make them realise their aspirations and expectations for education. Their trust or mistrust in school and their feeling of belonging to the school community derives from the school's promises for an occupational career and actual social mobility. With some certainty, we can assume that their expectations and aspirations for education are identical or at least similar to those found by Little and

Hettige (2016) and Samarakoon et al. (2016). Between 2000 and 2003, Little and Hettige (2016) conducted a survey of youth and their aspirations and expectations for education and livelihoods in nine urban and rural communities of the country. They found that the educational aspiration among youth was the Advanced level as school leaving certificate or above, and their expectations were lower, falling between GCE Ordinary and Advanced levels. Youth aspirations and expectations reflect the aspirations and expectations their parents hold for them. The majority of parents in every community aspired to a university education for their children. These findings are confirmed by a more recent study on youth aspirations, social mobility and educational target achievement in Sri Lanka (Samarakoon et al. 2016). All 150 undergraduates who participated in the study, had high expectations regarding employment conditions and professional work after graduation. Their expectations were not fully based on performance and aspirations, but influenced by their parents, teachers and friends as well as prospects open to them depending on their social status and financial means. The aspirations for “white collar jobs” and the public service influenced the decision making process strongly.

The interviews reveal that students are aware about their role and what is expected from them. They indicate their preparedness for taking over their roles as students. “There is time for everything” (student) and schooling is the time “to do your best in studies” (student). If students perceive that the school cannot keep its promise for social mobility, they get frustrated and “feel like run away” (student). The connectedness to the school is a reciprocal relationship.

In demanding the school to keep its promise, the students resort to schemata and models that they internalised during socialisation in the family. The school builds upon and reinforces a hierarchical model that is the outcome of a socialisation process in the Sri Lankan family. Chapin (2014) describes a model of ranked relationships in childhood<sup>29</sup> with key cognitive and emotional characteristics. The parent identifies and provides for the child’s needs without solicit verbal input from the child and without justification and explanations of actions. Thereby, the parent’s emotional orientation is supposed to be sensitive and responsive, kind, caring and committed, confident and powerful as well as restrained and judicious. The child is expected to offer compliance, passivity, service and respect behaviour, not to question or offer opinion, not to discuss thoughts and experiences. The child’s emotional orientation is supposed to be acquiescent, expectant and patient as well as shy, properly ashamed and a little afraid. If the child violates the role expectation, the parent may ignore, tolerate or indulge a behaviour, physically control, threaten or promise, chastise or physically punish. The parent, however, must avoid shaming the child in public. This hierarchical model is in accordance with the structure

of the group-based hierarchy as described by the social dominance theory (Pratto et al. 2006).

The parent-child relationship and the interdependent role expectations find a close match and an extension in the teacher-student relationship and the organisational structure of schools. We do not expect a complete concordance of roles and relationships. However, the more the roles of parents and teachers are in accordance the better the children will understand their role as students and their relationships with adults and peers in school. A perceived positive experience of interdependence allows a feeling of belonging and connectedness to the school community to emerge and to be reinforced. Otherwise, students are afraid of being excluded as a runaway.

The perception of fairness is linked to the acceptance of diversity as the episode of the girl who was excluded from religious studies shows. There is nothing to be said against assuming that the students tolerate the girl’s religion other than their own. Important to them is the girl’s exclusion from class that is perceived as unfair, as the school is not fulfilling its primary role in offering the best education possible. The school does not offer any other religious studies than Hinduism which is the religion of the majority of students in the school. An alternative could be to offer ethics demanding teaching and learning about religions rather than teaching and learning their own religion. Apart from missing prerequisites (curriculum, textbooks, qualified teachers), without an acceptance of the idea to teach and learn about religions this alternative remains hypothetical. However, an opportunity for teaching and learning religious diversity is not utilised.<sup>30</sup>

The student’s comment on a girl’s suicide is well reflected in statistics on suicides and self-harm in Sri Lanka. In 2017, the Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine (2017) estimates the suicide rate in the age group 15-29 years at 23.7 per 100,000 individuals. As part of the Global School-based Student Health Survey Initiative, the World Health Organisation (2017) reports on self-reported suicidal behaviours and other warning signs of mental health problems. Out of the 3,173 students 13-17 years, who participated in Sri Lanka, 7% reported that they seriously considered attempting suicide in the last 12 months. Suicide has been a leading cause of death in the 16-24 years age group. It is the only age group in which female rates meet or exceed male rates. With serious limitations in available data, researchers assume that the rates of self-harm have been high throughout, and that they are actually increasing. For example, Widger (2015) in his ethnographic study on suicides in Puttalam district reports that suicides occurred on a monthly basis, acts of self-harm on a weekly basis, and suicide threats were part of everyday discourse. Marecek and Senadheera (2012) describe the normalisation of self-harm. Their data on female adolescents’ acts of self-harm suggest them to

conclude that “self-harm is not an extraordinary event in the lives of rural people, but rather a banal occurrence” (175). In addition, Knipe et al. (2018) find in a study with 165,233 people, 47,919 households in 171 rural communities in Sri Lanka that 22.3/1,000 individuals of age 10 or older reported a suicide attempt in their lifetime. About 7% of households included at least one person who had committed or attempted suicide. Out of the 171 communities surveyed all reported lifetime suicide attempts. Although research on suicidal behaviour in Sri Lanka has mentioned failure in examinations and school in general as a cause for suicides or acts of self-harm, we are not aware of any specific study on the correlation between schooling, education and suicidal behaviour.

## 2.2.3 Focus on the common good

We present findings on all three dimensions: solidarity and helpfulness, respect for social rules, and civic participation.

### Findings

In the questionnaire, 99% of students agree or fully agree with the statement “students feel responsible for others and are willing to help them”. This helpfulness is reflected in the interviews. Students provide various examples.

#### Quotation 3-1:

*S1: Children are concerned and helpful to each other. We do not have problems among students. We relate to each other in a friendly manner. Even if we had a competition we divide and cheer one group but that is for a short while and we come together after that game.*

*S2: We had a student who was blind and almost all the students were very much concerned in helping her.*

*I: Are children concerned and helpful to each other always?*

*S1: Yes, not only within the school but we also do things to help children outside the school. We are looking for students who can't come. If someone is sick or unable to walk we share the notes with them. If that is due to poverty then we try taking necessary steps to help them. (4)*

#### Quotation 3-2:

*S1: Students help each other. When we struggle with any subject some students who are good at it help us to understand it [...]. Some cannot afford to buy their books or put covers to their books.*

*I: How these students are helped?*

*S1: Sometimes friends help among themselves.*

*S2: Most of the time teachers help them and there are times that both students and teachers get together and help in common.*

*S1: Often class teachers also help them.*

*S2: Earlier our principal was a Buddhist monk and he gives gifts to such students. (14)*

#### Quotation 3-3:

*S: If one student does not understand lessons, others help.*

*I: What kind of help do they provide?*

*S: If they don't bring pen, give pen, if one does not write notes, share notes. If one has to draw something and he does not know how to do it; if another one knows, draw for him. (31)*

Students are willing to help others in need, for example, students with disabilities and students from poor families. Teachers and principals (e.g. Buddhist monk) serve as role models. Considering the highly competitive situation in schools it is remarkable that students mention their willingness to help others to improve their academic performance. In an everyday situation helpfulness and solidarity can maintain good relationships among students as is reflected in the sharing of instructional materials, too. Solidarity and helpfulness seem to be well established and valued behaviours. When students express that they are “concerned in helping” (quotation 3-1) they hint at a feeling and a motivational state in which the goal is to increase the other person’s welfare.

The students make reference (deliberately or not) to an ancient practice of cultivating generosity. The virtue of generosity, charity or giving of alms are included in the concept of *dana*. In Hinduism and Buddhism *dana* can take the form of giving to an individual in distress and need. It can take also the form of philanthropic public projects that empower and help many.

In the interviews, the dimension respect for social rule is discussed at length and in depth. The intensity with which students report about school rules is a remarkable result in itself. School rules can be defined as a set of explicit or understood principles or instructions that states the



way things are or should be done in school. The school rules tell students what they are allowed or not allowed to do. Students comment on rules and regulations in their schools, describe strategies for punishment as applied in their schools, and provide reasons and justifications for punishment.

First, students appear to be sensitive to school rules. Students are expected to comply with principles and instructions in the day to day routine. How do students perceive these rules? Do they accept the rules? Are they aware about the consequences of not following rules?

#### Quotation 3-4:

*S1: I want the rules that are very strict to be less strict.*

*I: Can you give an example?*

*S1: In our school when there is a function and not all students are participating, the students not participating are strictly not allowed to go out of the classroom, not even allowed to go to the toilet. I feel such rule needs to be changed.*

*I: Of course, I understand.*

*S1: We have a period for agriculture when we would like to go to the garden and do agriculture. Since we do not have a teacher for that subject, we are asked to stay in the classroom.*

*I: That is a practical session and you do not want to be in the class.*

*S1: We have a rule for cleaning. I want that rule to be properly implemented.*

*S2: Normally in the school, we are not supposed to grow nails and colour them. But I see some upper class students do not obey that. I want that rule to be properly implemented.*

*I: Is it to stop them doing nail polish or let the students have the freedom to choose?*

*S3: No, I think this is a school. We should have some discipline. Students should not be allowed to colour the nails.*

*I: Ok, if the rule is implemented equally then fine.*

*S3: Though we have a rule, sometimes boys cut their hair in various styles, some of them are not suitable for school. [Students giggle.] That rule needs to be strictly implemented.*

*I: Why can't students come to school with stylish haircut?*

*S3: We have a rule about the uniform. For the girls, how their hair should be with the uniform and same for boys, with boys it explains how their hair should*

*be with their uniform. But some boys who are not interested in education come to school with funny hairstyles which is not suitable for the school.*

*I: Why it is not suitable for the students?*

*S3: Students have to behave as students, students need not behave as adults. Our time as students is very short and [...] now better to spend this time. (20)*

This dialogue shifts from school rules (what students, who do not participate in a school function, are allowed to do) to social norms (appearance). Social norms and (school) rules interfere with each other. While wearing the school uniform, students are expected to appear in a certain way, e.g. decently. A decent appearance is affected by the prevailing social norms. Rules are seen as necessary for keeping and maintaining discipline which has been identified by students earlier as a characteristic of a “good” school (see chapter 2.2.2 on connectedness). Students may disagree with the strict implementation of rules. They not only justify the rules regarding dress code, hairstyle and appearance, in general, they are actively involved in controlling their adherence.

In addition, students indicate that they understand the need for corrections when they misbehaved. They appear to tolerate punishment (in general) for keeping discipline. However, gradual transition from (positive) discipline as effective classroom or school management to punishment can be observed. Sometimes, it appears that the term discipline (as part of teaching and instruction) is used synonymously with punishment indicating a punitive stance.

#### Quotation 3-5:

*I: Are students punished when they do not obey the rules?*

*S1: Yes, when someone disobeys they are punished. Punishment means they are given advice.*

*S2: Sometimes, students continue to do the same thing. In such moments they need punishment and they are thoroughly advised or told to clean the garden or something like that. Without such punishment it is difficult to maintain discipline in the school. (4)*

Here, the term “punishment” means (positive) discipline, and advice is one of its strategies. In the following quotation, prefects explain how they keep discipline in school through advice and warning.

Quotation 3-6:

*I: When students do not obey the rule, how that will be handled?*

*[Silence]*

*S1: Punish them.*

*S2: If they have done it for the first time unknowingly they will be advised.*

*S3: Punish them.*

*I: Please tell me what kind of punishment you have got?*

*S3: Cane them in the palm of their hand. Sometimes, they were hit below the knee. We ourselves got punished [giggle].*

*S1: No, no first advice, if they do not listen, second time give strong advice, if they do further then only they are caned.*

*S2: Sometimes, minor punishments such as cleaning the garden are also given.*

*I: Do you think punishment is something that will help to correct that person?*

*S3: Yes, punishment is necessary to discipline those who do not obey the rule.*

*S1: We as prefects, we do find to get the children to do things. First time, we advise, second time, if they do not listen to us we send them to the principal. Therefore, it is good to have punishment for those who do not listen.*

*S2: In general, we do not have very big problems with our students. Coming late to school, not wearing the uniform properly are some of the problems we deal and for that, always, we advise them. (5)*

The prefects are part of the social hierarchy and social control system in school. They are conscious about their roles on keeping discipline in school within the school hierarchy. They send students to the principal for punishment. Corporal punishment (caning hands) is administered, but it is not clarified by whom.

Quotation 3-7:

*I: If someone does not obey the rule, then what happens?*

*S1: Teachers punish them.*

*I: How?*

*S1: Teachers would call the person who disobeyed and advise them.*

*S2: Often they are advised.*

*I: In case if that student does not listen to the advice what will happen?*

*S3: In such case, they are punished.*

*S2: Their parents would be asked to come and meet the principal.*

*I: How this punishment is given?*

*S3: Caned on to the palm of their hand.*

*I: Do you think such punishments are good?*

*S1: Yes.*

*S2: We think to correct a person doing wrong, punishment is good.*

*I: Why do you think such punishment is good?*

*S2: When students repeatedly make the same mistake without listening to the advices, then that person needs to be stopped by punishment.*

*S3: Because we need discipline in the school, students should not be allowed repeatedly to commit the same mistake.*

*S2: Rules are for everyone to obey and it is known by everyone. If someone disobeys, it would disturb the rest. Therefore, having punishment would control those who disobey. (9)*

After advice fails, corporal punishment is administered to correct misbehaviour and to keep discipline that is perceived necessary for the disobedient student and other students as well. The acceptance of and adherence to rules seem to be connected to students' understanding of the hierarchical student-teacher relationship and the role of being a "good" student.

Quotation 3-8:

*I: What about rules and regulations in the school: are students happy about it?*

*S1: Yes, we do have rules.*

*S2: In general, all the students know those rules and obey them.*

*I: In case if someone disobeys a rule, what will happen?*

*S2: If we come to know we will advise them, when we cannot, we alert the teachers.*

*I: How does the teacher handle it?*

*S2: Normally they advise, but if it is a serious issue, the student will be sent to the principal.*

*S1: Beyond that, the parents of the student will be asked to come to the school and they will also be made aware of the situation. (14)*

Students control the adherence of rules themselves and advise those who disobeyed them. If their advice is not followed, they report to a teacher, and eventually the report is pursued in the school hierarchy.

Quotation 3-9:

*I: If a student breaks one of the school rules what will happen?*

*S1: First advise them, if that continues they will be caned.*

*I: Who punishes them?*

*S1: Sometimes, teacher, sometimes principal.*

*I: Do you think such punishment is good or bad?*

*S2: Bad.*

*I: Then, how to correct when someone disobeys the rule?*

*S2: Find another solution.*

*I: If you are given the authority to find that solution what will you suggest?*

*S2: I will advise them.*

*I: So, students will listen to the advice?*

*S1: No, some students cannot be controlled by that.*

*I: So, what do you suggest?*

*S1: Maybe to get their parents to school and inform them about the student.*

*I: Do you think that will solve the problem?*

*S1: Yes, to some extent.*

*S2: Students do not like to get their parents to school in such situation as they are frightened of the parents. (16)*

While a student defends (positive) discipline, another student argues that not all students can be controlled by advice. It seems that this student assumes that children fear their parents, and hence, summoning the parents to school is viewed as a punishment.

Quotation 3-10:

*I: Now tell me if a student disobeys the rules of the school, what happens?*

*S1: Teachers advise such students.*

*I: If that students continue to do that what will be the next step.*

*S2: They are punished, but not tough punishments.*

*I: What do you mean by that?*

*S2: No physical punishment, maybe they are sent to the principal or parents are informed.*

*I: Do you think punishment is necessary when someone disobeys the rule?*

*S1: In order to maintain the discipline, it is necessary.*

*I: So, in order to maintain the discipline, you think punishment is necessary. So what kind of punishment?*

*S1: I think advising is the best method.*

*I: But there could be students even they do not listen or respect the advice, then what to do?*

*S2: For such caning is the solution.*

*I: Can you remember such situation happened in your school?*

*S2: So far no. (18)*

For S1 advice is the best method for keeping discipline. After probing S2 offers corporal punishment as solution which S2 has not observed in school.

Corporal punishment<sup>31</sup> is meant to be a physical forceful method of correcting student misbehaviour. It appears that physical punishment is tolerated by students if fairly executed by teachers or principals after less severe forms of punishment have failed. Quotation 1-17 has already shown students' perception of corporal punishment as unfair treatment. Another episode illustrates the point.

Quotation 3-11:

*S1: We have a system to punish.*

*I: What is that system?*

*S1: Not big punishment, but according to the wrong they do, sometimes, they are sent to the principal.*

*I: What kind of punishment do they get?*

*S1: Cane them in their palm; but before the punishment, they will be questioned and asked the reason for behaving.*

*S2: But I have a concern, when someone betrays the other for making the mistake, then punishing the student who did not commit it, that is injustice.*

*I: Did that happen in the school?*

*S2: Yes, sometimes it happens.*

*I: So why the other students kept silent, knowing it was an injustice?*

*S1: Some do in the name of supporting their friend, but some will tell the truth.*

*S2: When students are frightened to tell the truth, then also the injustice happens.*

*S1: There are times, some teachers without investigation or finding out what happened, immediately react and punish the person who has not committed the mistake [...]. However, before doing anything, it is good if they can investigate and find out who misbehaved. At the same time if the student is able to honestly accept the mistake done, then there should be less punishment. (20)*

Physical abuse can be defined as the use of physical violence that harms the student's health, development and dignity. It appears that a confusion about a clear demarcation of corporal punishment from physical abuse exists.

Quotation 3-12:

*S: Male teachers beat the boys very badly. Using thick stick and beat. [S shows a thick stick in the room]. They punish for everything.*

*I: Do you think the punishments you get are not appropriate?*

*S: Yes.*

*I: Why, explain, why do you think they punish you?*

*S: They punish thinking we will correct, but we don't. [...] Once you get a bad name and even if you don't make a mistake you get punished. (29)*

However, the student does not report about the frequency of the corporal punishment, beating badly with a thick stick can be recognised as physical abuse.

Quotation 3-13:

*S: Principal one day pinched me on my cheeks to punish. The flesh come out and it started bleeding. The moment my father saw it when he came to pick me, he got furious knowing what has happened. He went to the police. But later principal patched it up with us. Because she [principal] is so scared of my father. He helps a lot to the school.*

*I: What happened when other children got punished like this? Hard physical punishment, when they get hurt what do they do?*

*S: Normally students are scared to inform parents.*

*I: Why?*

*S: Because if we inform and if parents come and ask the teacher or principal then later they will say that in front of everyone, and also will take revenge on us. (28)*

Students are reluctant to report corporal punishment or physical abuse to their parents supposedly being afraid

of them and the consequences (revenge) that eventually means more punishment. The student's brief description of the incident (detecting the physical abuse by the father, reporting to the police, "patching up" by principal) indicates the prevalence of a vicious cycle of violence in school. At the same time, the incident indicates that the father's social status and reputation (as being helpful to the school) influences the relationship between student and principal and how the student is treated by the principal.

In addition, students report about psychological aggression such as shaming in public (see quotation 1-17) or standing on a chair for being noisy.

Quotation 3-14:

*S1: We are always compared with other school students and we are told that we are fools.*

*I: How about the results of the students in this school?*

*S1: Students have shown good results for the subjects of the teachers who are kind and friendly with the students.*

*S2: Compared with the other school, we are the last.*

*S1: Because we have been always called fools, which mentally discourage us and we also start feeling that we can't. (19)*

Strategies of psychological aggression, especially public shaming, seem to be particularly stressful for students.

In summary, we obtain reports about two different - but interconnected - types of rules: a) rules regarding orderly and smooth proceedings in class and school, and b) normative rules regarding socially desirable behaviour and development of children and youth. In addition, three distinct strategies of action for not respecting these school or classroom rules can be identified from students' responses:

1. (Positive) discipline: advice, warning
2. Punishment
  - without using physical violence: suspending students from class, cleaning garden, scolding
  - corporal punishment: caning hand, hitting
  - physical abuse: hitting with strong stick, pinching on cheek until bleeding
3. Psychological aggression: calling fools, standing on chairs, shaming in public

Calling parents and appearing before the principal takes a middle position between (positive) discipline and punishment depending on how students perceive

the measure and what consequences they expect to face. If the students fear the principal or their parents to be summoned to school then they will perceive these measures as punishment in anticipation of the possible action taken by the principal or the parents, and not as a supportive measure to correct a misbehaviour.

The prevalence of corporal punishment as reported by the students creates doubt regarding the validity of responses in the questionnaire on the statements “students are not getting hit or beaten by teachers as punishment” which 77% of students agree or fully agree, and “there is no tolerance for violence in our school” which 94% of students agree or fully agree. However, the statements may appear inconclusive, if students perceive corporal punishment as maintaining discipline (rather than violence).

Students provide various reasons for punishment: not adhering to dress code (school uniform) including hair style and appearance, coming late to school, disturbing the proceedings of the class and being noisy. There seems to be a gradual transition from obeying school and classroom rules toward active social control, especially when behaviour relates to expected normative development in adolescence. This social control can lead to moral dilemmas as female students explain.

Quotation 3-15:

*S1: Even we cannot speak to our own brother in town or in the bus. That news comes to the school as I was talking to a boy.*

*I: Is it when you are in uniform that they [teachers] do not want you to talk to boys?*

*S1: No, even in colours [street clothes] it is the same.*

*I: So, is it that the students themselves carry the story to the school?*

*S1: There are other people like parents who are watching the students.*

*S2: For some [people], they call and inform or for some even take photos and give them to the principal.*

*S3: We are in a girl's school. We are never allowed to speak to boys, and even the primary children are frightened to do it.*

*S1: Sometimes, our own cousins, brothers and relatives blame us and scold us for ignoring them or pretending as if we haven't seen them on the road or in the bus. They think it is due to pride, but we are unable to tell them the truth. (19)*

The school rule (not to talk to boys) and the social obligation to respect (male) relatives through greeting them in public are perceived as unresolvable contradiction and conflict. The inability “to tell the truth” leaves the girls in a moral dilemma.

Finally, we find the response of the “naughty” boy who self-confidently demonstrates his non-conformism.

Quotation 3-16:

*S: Once they [teachers] fix their minds about this one [student] being naughty then that will not change. Even when I don't do any naughtiness on that day, I will get punishment [...].*

*I: Ok, but don't you think 'ok, now they are saying that I am wrong, and I misbehave, being naughty and they give me punishment, even when I am not wrong, so let me change and show them that I don't deserve this treatment'?*

*S: No, I don't think like that. I need to have fun. I don't like to be bored. In my previous school, the class was big with more students. Our class was far from principal's room. So, we always had fun and laughter. Here, it's a small number, and the classroom is close to the principal's room. So, even if we make small noise, he comes and punishes us. I don't like to be silent in the class. During lesson times it is ok, but other time, I need to crack jokes, and being naughty. (30)*

The boy has a reputation of being naughty. He wants to have fun in school though not disturbing the lesson. Even if he boasts about his naughtiness, his non-conformist stance is exceptional.

With regard to civic participation, students make reference to community work (see also quotation 2-3) and participating in the student parliament.

Quotation 3-17:

*I: Can you tell me any common activity done by the parliament in the school or in the village.*

*S1: We did a programme on how to manage garbage disposal.*

*S2: We did it in the village.*

*I: How did you all do it, did you go house by house?*

*S1: No, we targeted the village level society meetings. Some of the members [student parliament] went during the meeting and gave awareness on how to do it.*

*S2: We also did another programme on alcohol prevention in a similar way. For that we got the parents to school and did an awareness programme as well.*

*I: So, you did all these through school parliament?*

*S1: Yes, under the minister for discipline.*

*S2: These activities were done in the school and also done in the village. (4)*

Quotation 3-18:

*I: So, do you mean that the principal and teachers are willing to listen to the student parliament?*

*S1: Earlier they were attending to the student parliament and listening to the students, therefore, we hope that they would listen to the students.*

*I: So, they are open to make changes according to the students wish?*

*S2: Definitely, if students suggest something that is appropriate for the school's development they would be open for changes. At the beginning, students were bringing individual suggestions as they wish which did not sound very good. But collectively, if we suggest something that would further develop the school they would definitely accept it.*

*I: So, you see that student parliament has already created some kind of power, a least to voice your needs and suggestions you have got some power.*

*S1: Yes, student parliament has given some confidence and skills on how to speak and communicate these kinds of issues which earlier we would not have done. (20)*

Quotation 3-19:

*I: What happens in school parliament?*

*S: I got selected to be the Deputy Health Minister. Since the teacher in charge of the student parliament is not in good health, therefore, at the moment, it is not functioning.*

*I: Why can't students do it, since it is a student parliament?*

*S: Students feel that they need more guidance and support before they try to do anything independently. (1)*

Students talk about the benefits of becoming active in the student parliament. It can develop their leadership and management skills as well as their self-esteem if students' participation is valued by the teachers, principals and the community. As students in quotation 3-6 indicate, the student parliament needs active support by the school administration and "guiding" teachers. This finding on civic participation corresponds with the particularly pronounced solidarity and helpfulness.

Apart from active participation in the student parliament and active engagement in school and community projects, students report about a successful protest that indicates an active representation of their interests.

Quotation 3-20:

*I: Can you remember anything that you all got together and did for a common good?*

*S1: As we said we did not have a Mathematics teacher for this school for several years, our principal and teachers kept on requesting, but finally, we together with parents protested.*

*I: Where did the protest take place?*

*S2: In front of the Zonal Education Office.*

*I: What happened?*

*S3: Finally, we have got a teacher this year.*

*S1: We won.*

*I: What did you learn?*

*S2: We learned and got an experience on how to fight for our rights.*

*S1: I think what I learned was that if we come together, we could win.*

*S3: I learned that when all students, teachers and parents come together, we get a strong power and we could bring change. (5)*

## Discussion

The strong social cohesion in the dimension of solidarity and helpfulness as expressed by students in the interviews is confirmed by findings of a survey on social cohesion in 22 countries in Asia including Sri Lanka by the German Bertelsmann Foundation (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2018). Croissant (2018) explains this particularly strong dimension of solidarity and helpfulness with the predominantly Buddhist population in Sri Lanka. He points out that in other countries with strong Buddhist majorities (Thailand, Myanmar, Bhutan and Laos) the dimension of solidarity and helpfulness is similarly strong as in Sri Lanka, and he continues to argue that Buddhism's emphasis on the "virtue of giving" (Croissant 2018, 182) could be decisive. At the same time, Croissant points out exceptions. Cambodia with 97% Buddhists has a low level of solidarity and helpfulness, and Hong Kong with only 13.2% Buddhists has the strongest social cohesion in this dimension relative to the rest of Asia. In addition, our findings indicate an equally high level of solidarity and helpfulness among Hindu students. The "virtue of giving", therefore, deserves more detailed elaboration.

The virtue of giving is closely related to altruistic behaviour. From the perspective of evolutionary biology altruism is a behaviour that involves considerable personal costs to the helper. Is the “virtue of giving” together with its corresponding altruistic behaviour an expression of care about others for their sakes and not simply for the sake of the giver or helper to be virtuous? The empathy-altruism hypothesis offers an affirmative answer. We introduce the hypothesis and discuss selected liabilities of empathy-induced altruism.

The empathy-altruism hypothesis states that “empathic concern produces altruistic motivation” (Batson et al. 2014; 1). An empathic concern includes feelings of sympathy, compassion, tenderness, sorrow, sadness, upset, distress, concern and grief. Altruism refers to a motivational state in which the goal is to increase another person’s welfare as an end in itself. From this perspective of social psychology altruism is not defined as a behaviour but as a motivation. The empathy-altruism hypothesis predicts that those feeling high levels of empathy for a person in need will be more likely to help than will those feeling less empathy. This prediction is well supported by research (see Batson et al. 2014). However, a number of egoistic alternative explanations have been proposed to explain these findings. For example, those feeling high levels of empathy may feel more distress and, consequently, may be more likely to help because they are egoistically motivated to reduce their own stress. Another possibility is that those feeling high levels of empathy are more likely to help because they are more egoistically motivated to avoid feeling bad about themselves or looking bad in the eyes of others should they fail to help. This version claims that we learn through socialisation that feeling empathic concern introduces a special obligation to help and, as a result, self-administered shame and guilt if we do not. In addition, those feeling high levels of empathy may be more likely to help because they are more egoistically motivated through expected rewards for helping. These rewards are in the form of extra praise from others or a special feeling of pride in ourselves. Given prior learning, when we feel empathetic concern we think of these special rewards, and we help to get them.

Moreover, implications of the empathy-altruism hypothesis can be negative. Empathy-induced altruism may be harmful. As we are reminded by ethics in health care, surgeons are prohibited from operating on close kin or friends. The problem is not that they feel no empathic concern for the patient, quite the opposite. They feel too much of it. In addition, empathy-induced altruism can produce immoral action. Considering the principle of fairness, an egoistic desire to benefit myself may lead me to unfairly serve my needs and interests at the expense of the needs and interests of others. An altruistic desire to benefit another may lead me to unfairly serve that person’s needs and interests in a similar way. Each action violates the moral principle of fairness. Egoism, altruism and morality

are three independent motives, each of which may conflict with another. Not only does the empathy-altruism hypothesis predict that empathy-induced altruism can lead a person to act immorally, but it also predicts that it can lead a person to act against the common good in a social dilemma. In the research on social dilemmata it is usually taken for granted that the only individual to whom one would allocate scarce resources would be oneself. Yet, the empathy-altruism hypothesis predicts that if you feel empathy for another member of the group, then you will be altruistically motivated to benefit that person. If you can allocate resources to him or her, then rather than the two motives traditionally assumed to conflict in a social dilemma, egoism and collectivism (motivation with the ultimate goal of increasing a group’s welfare), three motives are in play: egoism, altruism and collectivism. If the egoistic and altruistic motives are stronger than the collective motive, the common good can suffer.

Although, we have laid stress on alternative explanations and liabilities of empathy-induced altruism, overall, the empathy-altruism hypothesis has generated a large body of research that answers important questions about why people help and fail to help, and offers insights into the roles played by different types of motives underlying human social behaviour. It may provide a better explanation for the high level of solidarity and helpfulness than the virtue of giving. It can be assumed that empathy-induced altruism is at work in the school context. To investigate helpfulness and solidarity and their underlying motives, questionnaires and interviews can be complemented by appropriate experiments that game theory provides. Diekmann (2016) suggests experiments on altruism, reciprocity and social norms as they are linked and most relevant for explaining the cohesiveness of a society. Reciprocity is a special case of altruistic behaviour, and altruistic reciprocity in turn is important for the stability of norms and sanctions. In case enforceable legal norms do not have the intended effects, reciprocity is the glue which keeps societies together.

Respect for social rules implies controlling their adherence. It occurs through social control as expressed by the students and students’ self-control as we elaborate briefly. From a psychological perspective, self-control requires skills in overcoming tempting immediate rewards, distraction and frustration in favour of greater but delayed rewards such as passing an examination (e.g. GCE Ordinary level is the most relevant for grade 9 students). The ability to resist temptations in favour of long-term goals has been suggested to be in form of cognitive control that implies to suppress or override competing attentional and behavioural responses (Mischel et al. 2010). The apparent inability of students to sometimes discipline and control themselves can be explained by self-regulation failures (Baumeister and Heatherton 1996). For example, underregulation occurs because students

lack the strength of cognitive control, and misregulation occurs because students operate on the basis of false assumptions about themselves and about the school or because they try to control things that cannot be directly controlled. In the interviews, students repeatedly demand clarity and acceptability of school rules as secure guidance for adequate and desirable behaviour. Students constantly alter themselves to conform to the demands of schooling. We observed a high level of self-control which can be verified and measured by a self-control scale (Tangney et al. 2004) as a marker of the extent of students' adjustment to school life.

Besides, in Sri Lanka, we assume self-control and social control to be closely linked. Drawing on Markus and Kitayama (2010) we suggest to explain students' attitudes toward respect for social rules and their adherence with an interdependent schema of self that prescribes the normatively appropriate relations between an individual (self) and others. In general, the self is defined here as "a continually developing sense of awareness and agency that guides action and takes shape as the individual, both brain and body, becomes attuned to the various environments it inhabits" (Markus and Kitayama 2010; 421). Selves develop through symbolically mediated, collaborative interaction with others and the social environment. Cultural variations across selves arise from differences in the images, ideas, norms, tasks, practices and social interactions that characterise various social environments and reflect differences in how to attune to these environments. Therefore, Markus and Kitayama argue, selves and culture mutually constitute each other: a person requires input from socio-cultural meanings and practices, and the self is the centre of awareness and agency that incorporates, reflects and reproduces these socio-cultural patterns. People's thoughts, feelings and actions, in turn, reinforce, and sometimes change the socio-cultural forms that shape their lives.<sup>32</sup> Markus and Kitayama distinguish between two types of social relations. The independent type assumes that social relations are formed on the basis of instrumental interests and goals of participating individuals. The interdependent type assumes that individuals are inherently connected and made meaningful through relationships with others.<sup>33</sup> The two types of social relations indicate two different patterns of attuning to the social world and two different senses of self or agency which are called "schema of self". When an independent schema of self organises behaviour, the primary referent is the individual's own thoughts, feelings and actions. When an interdependent schema of self organises behaviour, the immediate referent is the thoughts, feelings and action of others with whom the person is in relationship. Markus and Kitayama claim that independence and interdependence are universally available, and every context recognises both. Moreover, every individual self also carries elements of both schemata to varying degrees. Nevertheless, cultures vary systematically in how these

schemata are developed, utilised, balanced and considered dominant or foundational. Viewing self-control and social control from the perspective of these schemata of self, students' demands for distinct social rules and their adherence can be explained. In obedience to the school rules they can insist on obedience from others. A student being self-controlled can expect the same from others. At the same time, interdependence demands from the student to control others. We assume that the extent of the social control depends on the characteristics of the independent and interdependent schemata of self.

The high respect for social rules has a dark side: the students' tolerance for corporal punishment. The findings on the high prevalence and frequency of corporal punishment are confirmed by studies on punishment in schools (de Silva et al. 2017) and in families (de Zoysa et al. 2006) in Sri Lanka. These studies find that parents, teachers and principals alike believe in the efficacy of corporal punishment. Hence, corporal punishment, even at abusive levels, is not the result of an isolated event triggered by an extreme situation, but rather a recurring pattern of the use of violence for correcting misbehaviour. Children and youth tolerate and sometimes justify the use of corporal punishment if they feel that the misbehaviour is significant and if they perceive the extent of corporal punishment as fair treatment.

It is remarkable that school counselling does not appear in students' reports regarding corporal punishment. Counsellors are supposed to support students when they encounter problems. Yet, as we know from the project monitoring, counsellors play a role in the disciplinary system of schools (positive or negative discipline) which puts them in a conflict of interest and compromises the purpose of school counselling that is the students' physical and mental well-being.

The interest in the student parliament is but one opportunity for students' civic participation in school. Students' responses relate mainly to active engagement in school and community projects, sometimes not related to the student parliament. We did not investigate the motivation of students to participate in the student parliament or to engage in school or community projects. A possible egoistic motive for active participation might be the demonstration of being a "good" student who complies with school assignments rather than being interested in representing students' interests or in the common good. The prestige and pride displayed by students being a member of the student parliament point to such an egoistic motivation. A more detailed examination of students' motivations for active participation in school and community projects can illuminate their civic attitudes and provide a better understanding of civicism and civility in the school context.



The students' responses adumbrate various understandings of a student parliament. From the project monitoring and our own observations, we identify three of them with distinct purposes that are compatible with the circular and guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education: (1) Student parliament as an administration of the ministerial circular by following instructions of the guidelines (administrative purpose); (2) implementation of the student parliament as a role play with the intended (or unintended) development of skills (e.g. leadership, speaking in public) and self-esteem of participating students (pedagogical purpose); (3) implementation of student parliament as active representation of students' interests with students participating in school and community projects (civic participation). The last purpose of civic participation can eventually lead to an active participation of students in school governance.

In order to let more students engage in school life, the litmus test for the student parliament is the inclusion of its recommendations (e.g. school and community projects) in the school development plan and the active participation of students in their implementation. In the context of academic learning based on civic theory, the provision of opportunities for practical civic experience is a pedagogical relevant and significant teaching method. The initial idea of the student parliament was to offer such opportunities. The pedagogical purpose is still observable when the elections and proceedings of the student parliament are acted as a role play of students. However, if the student parliament is mainly implemented for administrative purposes for the school to realise a ministerial circular, the pedagogical purpose easily gets lost and the student parliament serves symbolic representations without active civic participation within the school community. An example provides the principal who proudly explains that he has selected the best students for the parliament. Hence, students' civic participation is not necessarily intended. By contrast, an understanding of civic participation as an active representation of students' interests is observed when students report about the successful protest to get a teacher vacancy filled.

## 2.3 Conclusion

We have examined students' perceptions of social cohesion and have investigated what kind of cohesive experience students make in their schools. Drawing on Dragolov's et al. (2016) definition of social cohesion, we identified three domains and nine dimensions of social cohesion. For each of these dimensions we have formulated school specific statements to which students agreed or disagreed in a written questionnaire. In analysing these responses, we find an overall agreement with the statements by the majority indicating attitudes and

behaviours that characterise the school communities as having a strong social cohesion according to Dragolov's et al. definition. An analysis of the interviews, however, does not confirm this finding for all dimensions equally. As expected, it provides a more differential picture on social cohesion in schools. We explain these discrepancies with a social desirability bias. It can be assumed that grade 9 students have learned the hidden curriculum of schooling, and they have developed a sense of school requirements and expectations. From the students' point of view, filling a questionnaire must be seen similar to a test situation, in which certain responses are seen as desirable or presumably "correct".

Table 3 provides a summary of questionnaire responses and interview findings. We present the percentages on disagreements with statements in the questionnaire. If more than one statement corresponds with a dimension, we take the highest percentage of disagreement within the dimension. Regarding the interview findings we propose rough estimates of the dimensions' characteristics as they can be inferred from students' reports: strong, weak and mixed indicating strength and weakness in the dimension at the same time.

Generally seen, weak and mixed estimates of dimensions do not allow to confirm the high percentages of agreement with statements in the questionnaire. In the domain of social relations, the high percentage of agreement with statements on strong social networks can be explained with ethnic homophily and strong bonding in-group ties. Students report about no or weak ties with out-groups which lets us estimate the dimension of social networks being of a "mixed" characteristic as the ethno-linguistic segregation is a persistent feature of students' networks. The high percentage of agreement with statements on trust in people in the questionnaire is undermined by the multitude of mistrust expressed in interviews. We suggest exploring friendships in more detail as peers and friends are the most important reference groups in adolescence apart from the family. Similarly, the agreement with statements on the acceptance of diversity in the questionnaire stands in contrast to the reported limited opportunities for contact between different ethno-linguistic and religious groups. Despite the expressed interest and openness for contact with students of different ethno-linguistic and religious background, for example during exchange programmes, the segregated school system bears structural limitations for the formation of bridging social capital. However, it should be mentioned that the expressed openness might already be regarded as an increased acceptance of diversity. Students exchange programmes implemented during or right after the end of the war in 2009 were sometimes characterised by public scepticism and fear from students and their parents, expressed through limited participation and distress to meet peers from the other ethnic group.

**Table 3: Summary of questionnaire responses and interview findings**

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Questionnaire</b> Disagreement with statements (%)	<b>Interview</b> Rough estimate of characteristics	<b>Comment</b>
Social Relations	Social networks	15	Mixed	Ethnic homophily with strong bonding in-group ties and no or weak ties with out-groups
	Trust in people	5	Mixed	Reports about trust as well as mistrust in students and teachers; concept of friendship to be investigated
	Acceptance of diversity	15	Weak	Openness and interest in contact with out-group, but structural limitations on the formation of bridging social capital prevent enduring encounters
Connectedness	Identification	3	n.a.	No explicit data available for an estimate
	Trust in institutions	10	Strong	High expectations and aspirations for education let students to demand "good" schools with fair teachers
	Perception of fairness	28	Mixed	Demands on fairness and reports about unfair treatment
Focus on the common good	Solidarity and helpfulness	0	Strong	Strong helpfulness for people in need; motives of solidarity and helpfulness to be investigated
	Respect for social rules	24	excessively strong/ ambivalent	High respect for social rules with reports about social control and self-control, but tolerance for corporal punishment
	Civic participation	6	mixed	Participation in school and community projects and student parliament with unclear motivations to be further explored

In the domain of connectedness, the high percentages of agreement with statements regarding trust in institutions (schools) and perception of fairness in the questionnaire are at least partly foiled by plenty of reports about unfair treatment in schools and openly expressed grievances. The students' sound conviction regarding the social mobility function of schooling constitutes the decisive factor for a strong estimate of the dimension trust in institution. With serious attempts to realise their and their parents' expectations and aspirations for education, they demand "good" schools with competent and fair teachers, and they hardly show reluctance to express grievances and frustrations. Thereby, they resort to schemata and hierarchical models introjected during the process of primary socialisation in the family which is reinforced in schools. Regarding the dimension of identification, the interviews do not provide sufficient and explicit data for analysis. An estimate is not applicable.

In the domain of focus on the common good, the interviews confirm the strong agreement with statements regarding solidarity and helpfulness in the questionnaire. We suggest the motive of empathy-induced altruism as an explanation for the high levels of solidarity and helpfulness as expressed by the students. Further investigations can build on the well-established empathy-altruism hypothesis. The high respect for social rules – as indicated by the high percentage of agreement on corresponding statements in the questionnaire as well as responses in the interviews – is overshadowed by the students' tolerance for corporal punishment expressed in the interviews. Therefore, we estimate the dimension respect for social rule as excessive strong and ambivalent. Respect for social rules demands controlling their adherence through social control and students' self-control. In the interviews, various students' reports indicate a high level of social control in schools. According to our knowledge measures of self-control that show the extent of adjustment to school life have not yet been administered in Sri Lankan schools. The high percentage of agreement with statements on civic participation is contrasted with mixed interview reports as active participation depends on the provision of opportunities in schools and communities, school governance and students' motivations which need further exploration.

Now, we return to three thoughts that we have already expressed throughout the paper with the intention of supplement and extension. First, we propose reasons that persuade us to be highly skeptical about the feasibility of schools' desegregation, second, we suggest a change in focus on enhancing capacities for the formation of bridging rather than bonding social capital, and third, we establish the need for a closer monitoring of exclusion experiences in schools.

First, the ethno-linguistic segregation of schools has structural limitations for inter-group interaction and cultural exchange. The repeatedly pronounced demand by the Ministry of Education and civil society for bringing ethnic communities closer to each other would need policy interventions in the education sector. A desegregation of schools may be seen as "indispensable in combating ethnic prejudice, discrimination, mutual mistrust, and intolerance" (Little and Hettige 2016; 198). At present, however, a comprehensive desegregation of schools is unrealistic to expect, because it would not only require a complete reorganisation of the school system with far reaching and unpredictable political and administrative implications. Such an affirmative action has a high risk of discontent and conflict. While promoting inter-cultural understanding and the desegregation of schools the very same values and "legitimising myths" (Pratto et al. 2006) that produced and shaped the segregation of schools need to be addressed and challenged. In Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalism became the "legitimising myths" emerging during British colonial rule and being continuously adapted and refined after independence.

Moreover, because of its allocation function, schooling produces "winners" and "losers" and injustice to individuals is an inescapable consequence. This injustice towards individuals may be perceived and construed by groups as collective injustice and inequity of educational opportunities towards their group. Such resentments can be exploited and politicised which may result in conflict (Stewart 2010). An analysis of the role of education in deeply divided countries allows Hanf (2011) to conclude that neither domination of one group nor forced assimilation of minority groups provide a suitable political framework for an educational policy that intentionally and effectively mitigates conflict. Instead, an educational policy can help to reduce the potential for conflict if it "creates the same educational opportunities for members of all groups, effectively guarantees freedom of choice between schools with different cultural options, and allocates decision-making authority according to the principle of subsidiarity, ..." (Hanf 2011; 335). In the paper on school networks and social cohesion in this collection, we have suggested school development and school networks as being conducive to applying this principle of subsidiarity. Through reallocating power and decision-making to the school level the local actors get the opportunity to decide for themselves what is useful for their school context. We assume that more relevant and context-specific solutions for school specific challenges (in general and especially in regard to social cohesion) can be tailored by local actors instead of higher level administration. In order to encourage actors to use these decision-making powers the school networks have been established and created a "safe space" which eventually can give rise to innovative social practices like cooperation, learning from others and exchange. A monitoring of school networks' impact on social cohesion is still missing.

Second, drawing on Portes and his collaborators' insights (Portes 1998; Portes and Landolt 2000; Portes 2014) we have pointed out potential downsides of social capital. In the interviews we can observe at least some of the potentially negative consequences of social capital, for example, restrictions on individual freedoms as group participation creates demands for conformity and enforcement of norm adherence and the exclusion of outsiders. The widely accepted definition of social capital as "the ability to secure resources by virtue of membership in social networks or larger social structures" (Portes and Landolt 2000; 532) tends to emphasise the positive consequences of social ties, at the expense of their less desirable consequences. Praising social solidarity and community bonds leaves the negative consequences of ethnic particularism and excessive reliance on community and trust unnoticed, and the "primordial" social ties guaranteeing the observance of norms unchallenged. Granting resources to others out of "bounded solidarity" (Portes and Landolt 2000) with members of the same ethnic or religious community is not based on general values, but on the particularistic loyalty to a relevant in-group. Trust exists in these contexts precisely because it is enforceable through the power of the community and its mechanisms of social control and norm observance. The particularistic benefits accruing to some by virtue of membership in ethnic or religious communities is experienced by others as exclusion from the same social and economic benefits. Communitarianism is just one form of cohesion that keeps Sri Lankan societies together. However, it is one not required, and not necessarily ideal for the smooth operation of complex institutions such as schools. In the Sri Lankan context of segregated schooling the formation of bridging rather than bonding social capital is increasingly important which requires additional monitoring efforts.

Third, we have discussed the supposedly negative relation between ethnic diversity and social cohesion. In his review of 172 research studies, Schaeffer (2013) finds mixed empirical evidence on negative consequences of ethnic diversity on social cohesion with slightly but significantly more confirmatory than confuting evidence. This finding provides a strong claim for observing and measuring the acceptance of diversity. An adequate indicator would need to make sure that the people one has contact with includes those who embrace different values, and that these values are at least tolerated. Furthermore, van Staveren and Pervaiz (2017), in exploring the relationship between social cohesion on the one hand and ethnic diversity and social exclusion on the other hand, argue that for social cohesion it is not ethnic diversity which matters but the way in which social groups relate to each other. Their empirical results suggest that social cohesion is influenced more by social exclusion than by ethnic diversity. Therefore, the perceptions of social exclusion need to be included compellingly in the monitoring of social cohesion.

Finally, we describe three lessons learned for development cooperation. They include an adamant monitoring of social cohesion, a change in perspective regarding capacity development and a serious investigation of the potential negative aspects of social cohesion. First, as the results of the questionnaire suffer from a desirability bias, monitoring students' perceptions of social cohesion needs to be complemented by qualitative methods of investigation. We combined a questionnaire with interviews to receive a more detailed insight on local understandings of various dimensions of social cohesion, and to ground the quantitative data in qualitative narratives. As strategic interactions are the essence of game theory we expect experiments based on game theory (see Diekmann 2016) to be a promising supplement.

Second, as capacity development usually is focused on attributes of individuals, and hence, intends to develop the individual's competencies, we recommend an additional focus on the relationships of individuals while investigating the cohesiveness in schools (or other institutions) and the students' perceptions of it. In deeply divided societies such as Sri Lanka, the relationships that bridge the social divide between ethno-linguistic and religious communities are essential for social cohesion. Such tie formation develops bridging social capital. It needs to be linked with opportunities for civic participation without excluding or "othering" individuals or social groups to unfold its cohesive effects. We suggest learning together and working on the common good makes ethnicity and religion less relevant as marker of social identities. The benefits of bridging social capital accruing to individual students allows the yield of education to be increased with the voluntary efforts of participants rather than by coercion.

Third, the comments on suicide and the prevalence of corporal punishment and physical abuse in schools prompt us to recommend an investigation of the dark side of social cohesion, that is anomie. A suicide is the ultimate break down of a person's relationships with the members of the groups in which the person leaves a gap behind. In her literature review, de Alwis (in this volume) has not found any study on the relationship between education and suicide in Sri Lanka. We propose an investigation into the schools' cohesiveness through the perspective of a social network. We can refer to Durkheim's classic study on the social conditions of suicide (Durkheim 1897). According to Deflem (2015), in Durkheim's sociology "any profound disturbance of the social order is captured under the heading of anomie" (Deflem 2015; 719). In addition, viewing corporal punishment and physical abuse as violent acts and as a form of crime, despite the fact that corporal punishment is lawful in Sri Lanka, we find Messner's and his collaborators' (Messner et al. 2008) institutional-anomie theory a promising framework for examining deviant behaviour and the high rates of violence

in Sri Lankan schools. The distinguishing feature of the institutional-anomie theory is its principal focus on culture and social structure as manifested in social institutions. Institutional-anomie theory is built upon the underlying premise that the levels and forms of criminal activity as deviant behaviour in any society reflect the fundamental features of social organisation. Recently, Groß et al. (2018) have applied institutional-anomie theory on school-level determinants to delinquency, and Messner (2017) elaborates the ways in which institutional-anomie theory can be transformed to become applicable in the context of Asian societies. They both indicate the way forward. Apart from suicide, a civil war is the anomie by all means. The essential characteristic of a civil war is the endogenous disintegration that is a deep divide and fragmentation of social relationships as a result of dynamics which have their cause within these relationships. Therefore, an investigation of the role of education in the prementioned violent conflicts in Sri Lanka<sup>34</sup> has to analyse the social divides and fragmentation within the education system and offer convincing explanations for the endogenous disintegration.

In summary, although, we are able to monitor the project's progress against stipulated indicators, we were still dissatisfied with our project monitoring. Our discontent derived from confusions with the concept social cohesion and its measurement. The development and application of the social cohesion radar was a learning process that allowed us to generate knowledge about the concept social cohesion, methodological aspects of its measurement and, finally, about students' perceptions of social cohesion in the Sri Lankan school context. Such knowledge indicates an understanding beyond facts and information. It implies practical know-how needed for taking action. Thus, we encourage the adaptation and application of the social cohesion radar in various contexts that allow actors to learn from experience with the instrument and to obtain insights in the cohesiveness of societies. The acquaintance with the social cohesion radar provides the preconditions for an exchange of experience, knowledge and learning that may eventually develop the capacity among actors for improved monitoring and evaluation.

**Table 4: Questionnaire Results**

n = 169, data in percentage (round-off error may result in more or less than 100 percent)

**(1) Social Relations and Inter-Personal Trust**

<b>Examples</b>	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement (example)?				
	fully agree	agree	disagree	fully disagree	no answer
a) School is a place to meet friends.	74	25	0	0	2
b) Students have engaged with youth in student exchange programs.	57	42	0	1	1
c) Students are still in contact with youth they met during an exchange.	40	43	10	5	2
d) School never collaborates with other schools.	1	3	11	83	1
e) Through co-curricular activities students work together in an open and collaborative way (e.g. language club, school choir, student magazine).	77	21	1	1	1
f) Students celebrate religious festivals of various religions together.	75	23	1	1	0
g) Students are encouraged to communicate in the second national language.	48	43	3	5	1

<b>Characteristics</b>	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement (characteristic)?				
	fully agree	agree	disagree	fully disagree	no answer
1.1 Students have long-lasting friendships, also with youth from different ethnic or religious backgrounds.	57	41	0	1	1
1.2 Students in our school trust each other.	47	47	4	1	1
1.3 Students in our school support each other if they have a problem.	71	27	1	1	1
1.4 Students respect people with other values and lifestyles as equal members in school and the community.	55	40	4	0	1
1.5 In our school nobody is discriminated.	57	26	8	7	2

<b>Overall Concept</b>	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement (overall concept)?				
	fully agree	agree	disagree	fully disagree	no answer
Students have strong and durable relationships with other youth. These relationships are characterised by trust and allow for diversity.	57	41	0	1	1

## (2) Connectedness and Trust in School

Examples	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement (example)?				
	fully agree	agree	disagree	fully disagree	no answer
a) Students celebrate the national day together.	81	15	1	0	2
b) All students can participate in school activities and events. They are not excluded because of their gender, language or religion.	79	15	2	1	2
c) In our school it is important if a student is Sinhalese/Tamil/Muslim	14	22	14	47	2
d) The assessment of students' performance is transparent and understood by all students.	44	48	4	2	3
e) Students obtain the marks they deserve.	66	26	2	2	2
f) Students are successful because of their merits.	72	20	3	2	2
g) A school counsellor is available in our school.	63	25	9	5	8
h) The school counsellor in our school helps students with their problems.	60	24	10	2	4
i) Students can express and report their grievances and complaints in a confidential way.	57	35	5	1	2
j) Teachers select the best students to participate in school activities and events.	38	32	14	14	2
k) Less well-performing students never get a chance to participate in special events.	4	14	33	42	8
l) Teachers treat students fairly at our school.	84	14	1	0	2

Characteristics	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement (characteristic)?				
	fully agree	agree	disagree	fully disagree	no answer
2.1 Students feel positive about their country.	68	27	2	1	2
2.2 Students identify first and foremost as Sri Lankans.	78	19	2	0	1
2.3 Students have a high level of confidence in the school and the teachers.	80	18	1	1	1
2.4 Students are proud to attend this school and not any other school.	57	31	5	5	2
2.5 Students believe that they are being treated fairly.	60	34	3	1	2

Overall Concept	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement (overall concept)?				
	fully agree	agree	disagree	fully disagree	no answer
Students identify positively with Sri Lanka, have a high level of confidence in their school and perceive education conditions as fair.	77	22	0	0	1

### (3) Focus on the Common Good

Examples	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement (example)?				
	fully agree	agree	disagree	fully disagree	no answer
a) Students engage in community work or school projects which support the community (e.g. project in relation to care of the elderly, persons with disabilities or returnees, waste disposal, nature conservation).	75	22	3	0	1
b) Our school does not support students from poorer families.	6	4	19	68	2
c) Students feel safe in school and on their way to school.	41	47	8	1	3
d) Students do not beat, harass or intimidate other students in or outside school.	50	38	7	3	1
e) Students are not getting hit or beaten by teachers as punishment in our school.	46	31	13	5	5
f) All students likewise get the same treatment if they do not follow the school rules (e.g. code of conduct).	46	29	16	8	2
g) There is no tolerance for violence in our school.	74	20	2	3	1
h) All students can participate in the student parliament.	54	25	14	5	2
i) Student parliament is responsible for the implementation of activities in or outside school.	44	47	6	1	2

Characteristics	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement (characteristic)?				
	fully agree	agree	disagree	fully disagree	no answer
3.1 Students feel responsible for others and are willing to help them.	65	34	0	0	1
3.2 Conflicts are solved without using violence in our school.	65	28	4	2	1
3.2 Conflicts are solved without using violence in our school.	57	35	5	1	1

Overall Concept	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement (overall concept)?				
	fully agree	agree	disagree	fully disagree	no answer
Students identify positively with Sri Lanka, have a high level of confidence in their school and perceive education conditions as fair.	61	38	1	0	1



## Endnotes

- 14 Lynn Davies had advised the Ministry of Education in the development of the policy. In her reflections on the process she describes the policy document as a negotiated compromise of complex interests, agendas and hierarchies, thereby becoming the least common denominator to a certain extent. She concludes that the policy provided “a national framework within which people can work and draw authority for their continued strenuous efforts in social cohesion and peace” (Davies 2012; 266). Again in 2016, she assisted the Ministry of Education in the review process.
- 15 121 schools with 1.210 students from various ethnolinguistic and religious communities participated in a seven days programme each with well-designed social, cultural and sports activities. Quotes are taken from the unpublished report.
- 16 The intergroup contact theory proposes that contact situations should allow for the development of friendships through meaningful and repeated contact (Al Ramiah and Hewstone 2013). Certainly, “friendships” are not necessarily the only way in which an exchange programme can impact on social cohesion. However, other dimensions of social cohesion such as inter-personal trust were not evaluated.
- 17 In multi-lingual Sri Lanka the Sinhalese are encouraged to learn Tamil while the Tamils are encouraged to study Sinhala as second national language.
- 18 In 2018, the German Bertelsmann Foundation published a study on social cohesion in 22 societies in Asia including Sri Lanka (see Bertelsmann Stiftung 2018).
- 19 We do not enter into a discussion of the “politics of identity” (Wickramasinghe 2014) here. The ideas of essentialism and authenticity as something unchanged and unchangeable have their own history as much as the idea of plurality. Nevertheless, we assume that identity is something that is embodied in the practice of people. We are interested in this practice at school level with characteristics and extent. We will get back to social identities when we discuss the dimensions of social cohesion.
- 20 We refer here to Sri Lankan Tamils in the North and East of the island. The administration has conserved a system of ethnic groups that combines language and religion. In this system, Sri Lankan Tamils, those settled on the island before the 19th century and Indian or up-country Tamils, those that migrated from India to the island from the 19th century onward are differentiated. In addition, religion takes the upper hand in the case of Tamil speaking Muslims, considered to be “Moors”. The various names for the communities have shifted from titles ascribed by the colonial and later government administration to those determined themselves.
- 21 More than 95% of all public schools are segregated by language, ethnicity or religion. Nevertheless, Sri Lanka has a history of experiments with integrated schools. For example, in 2001, the Ministry of Education started establishing so-called “amity schools” with the aim to allow high-achieving students from all ethnic groups to learn together using English as a common link language and studying Sinhala and Tamil compulsory as first or second language. Although this initiative addressed diversity, it remained an exclusive diversity for the advantaged few. We do not know how diversity was reflected and if the interdependence between different groups was recognised. It seems that the intention was not to deal with issues of horizontal inequality at all. In 2004, Perera et al. (2004) report that the “amity school initiative may be at best incidental” (404). As a consequence, the amity schools slowly disappeared.
- 22 The debate derives mainly from the concern about the increase of ethnic diversity in western countries because of immigration (see Putnam 2007).
- 23 Dissanayake and McConatha (2011) find a difference in the rated importance of social identities for Sinhalese and Tamils as follows: 1. religion, 2. nationality, 3. occupation, 4. ethnicity, and 5. caste for Sinhalese, and 1. ethnicity, 2. nationality, 3. religion, 4. occupation, and 5. caste for Tamils.
- 24 Singing the national anthem in both Sinhala and Tamil carries highly symbolic connotations. The unofficial ban on singing the national anthem in Tamil was lifted in March 2015 and during the official independence celebrations on 4th February 2016 it was sung partly in Tamil for the first time since 1949. In 2016, a public opinion survey (Centre for Policy Alternatives 2016) finds that 41% of adult respondents disagreed with the decision to sing the national anthem in both languages. Almost all disagreements (97%) came from the Sinhalese community.

- 25 In 2017, the Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine (2017) estimates the suicide rate in the age group 15-29 years at 23.7 per 100.000 populations. As part of the Global School-based Student Health Survey Initiative the World Health Organisation (2017) reports on self-reported suicidal behaviours and other warning signs of mental health problems. Out of the 3173 students 13-17 years, who participated in Sri Lanka, 7% reported that they seriously considered attempting suicide in the last 12 months, and 38% reported being bullied on one or more days in the past 30 days.
- 26 The initial idea of the equality audit not only focuses on analysing but also changing local conditions. For the purpose of our work we only took up the first part of the audit.
- 27 Distribution of location of schools: 5 in Northern Province, 3 in Eastern Province, 2 in Central Province, 2 in Uva Province, 1 in Sabaragamuwa Province.
- 28 Quotations are taken from individual or group interviews. I is a marker for interviewer, and S for student respectively. In case of group interviews students are numbered (S1, S2 and so on).
- 29 Chapin (2014) conducted her ethnographic study on childhood in a Sinhalese dominated community in the Central Province of Sri Lanka. She claims that the described model and its application are “likely to differ across groups in Sri Lanka... However, many of the basic ideas about hierarchy and desire do resonate with similar models that people connected with this region hold.” (176)
- 30 Similarly, subjects such as Geography and the most contested History do not have a strong focus on teaching and learning diversity. For example, History as a subject teaches mainly about cultural heritage and glorifies the past rather than providing opportunities for students to construe the past. The dominant view is mirrored in the textbooks, but is challenged as a deliberate misinterpretation of the past by several groups. The public debate about history education is caught in a repeating pattern of assignment of blame with each side defending its own interpretation of the past and blaming the other side for deliberate misinterpretations which the minorities perceive as severe discrimination. In the absence of any sound and non-partisan investigation on history teaching and learning another opportunity is missed to propagate the acceptance of diversity through history education.
- 31 Sri Lanka is among the 69 countries in which corporal punishment is lawful in schools (Gershoff 2017). A circular, issued by the Ministry of Education in 2005, states that corporal punishment should not be used in schools, but this has not been confirmed in legislation (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children 2018).
- 32 In the Sri Lankan context, the concept of “self” would be incomplete without considering the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* (not-self, selflessness) which denies the existence of any self. According to Collins (1990) Theravada Buddhist tradition has constructed a philosophical and psychological account of personal identity on the apparently impossible basis of denial of self. Though much disputed and thus open to various meanings, *anatta* depends on advanced intellectual and spiritual education which can be expected from specialists (monks), but not from lay Theravada Buddhists. *Anatta* inspires meditative practices applied mainly by monks, and it does not provide for ritual practices of lay persons. Nevertheless, *anatta* is part of a particular and culture-specific form of religious feeling, thinking and acting. *Anatta* belongs to the set of material and symbolic concepts that give direction to behaviour and action. We assume, in Sri Lanka, it is part of the interdependent schema of self.
- 33 Other labels for independent are “Gesellschaft” (society), egocentric and individualistic. Other labels for interdependent are “Gemeinschaft” (community), sociocentric, communal and collectivist.
- 34 These violent conflicts are especially the civil war between the Sinhalese dominated state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and its failed attempt of forming an independent Tamil homeland (eelam) between 1983 and 2009, and the insurrections of the People Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, JVP) against the state in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century.

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# On Suicide in Sri Lanka

## An Outline for Investigating the Correlation between Education, Schooling and Suicidal Behaviour among Students

by Rüdiger Blumör and Stefanie Licht

In Sri Lanka, suicidal behaviour seems to be common and widespread as it surfaces as a topic in everyday conversations. Twenty years ago, Sri Lanka was among the countries with the highest suicide rates worldwide. Since then, the suicide rates decreased, but remain at a level that the World Health Organisation still considers “high”. We will explore the trends of suicide rates in Sri Lanka, the patterns of suicidal behaviour and causes for suicides and acts of self-harm. Durkheim’s theory of anomie and suicide and Merton’s theory of anomie and deviant behaviour serve as analytical guides. Our focus is on the groups, in which the person who committed suicide took a position and had relationships with other group members. Therefore, we start with an introduction of the cohesiveness of groups as it is explained by social network theory. We will identify two distinct contexts in which suicidal behaviour has diverse meanings. This paper serves the purpose to outline an eligible study on the presumed link between education, schooling, and suicidal behaviour.

### I. Introduction

#### Collapse of social cohesion

A suicide is the ultimate break down of a person’s relationships with the members of the groups in which the person leaves a gap behind. To begin with, we will not focus on the person who committed suicide, and his or her attributes. As we can assume that the person was an actor in a social network, our focus will be on this social network and the groups in which the person was a member. Our starting point is social cohesion and the cohesiveness of groups.

If social cohesion is understood as a “field of forces” (Friedkin 2004) that holds individuals together in a group, it is assumed that forces act on individuals, and the resultant of all forces is decisive for the individuals to remain connected to other group members or to become disconnected from them. This resultant of all forces could then be considered an expression of the group’s cohesiveness. Such a conceptual understanding, however, implies only an intuitive core that rests on how well a group holds together or falls apart. What are the forces that act on members to remain connected to or to become disconnected from the group?

We assume that the forces and bonds that hold a group together are the observed relations among members, and cohesion is an emergent property of the relational pattern. Moody and White (2003) define a group “structurally cohesive to the extent that the social relations of its members hold it together” (112). A group is thus cohesive to the extent that it is robust to disruption which is captured by node removal and connectivity. Cohesiveness can be estimated by observing what happens to the disconnectedness of a group when (a) one or more members (nodes) are removed or, keeping the same number of nodes, when (b) one or more connections between the members are removed. Group members are united through relational paths that bind nodes together. As structural cohesion depends on how pairs of members (nodes) are linked, chains of relations or paths become the focus of study. Two nodes A and B do not need to be connected directly. They may be connected through other nodes. The paths from node A to node B (direct or through other nodes) are called node-independent if they have only nodes A and B in common. Node connectivity is a property of the group, but individual members can be more or less strongly embedded within the group. According to Moody and White (2003) structural embeddedness refers to the depth of involvement in a cohesive structure. As individuals are members of more or less cohesive groups, these groups nest within one another, and they are embedded within a bigger social network.

For the cohesiveness of groups, White and Harary (2001) propose a pair of related measures. First, the connectivity refers to the minimum number  $k$  of the group’s members whose removal would not allow the group to remain connected or would reduce the group to but one single member. Second, the conditional density refers to the proportion of ties beyond that required for connectivity  $k$  over the number of ties that would force it to  $k+1$ . The greater the minimum number of members (nodes) whose removal disconnects a group, the greater the group’s cohesiveness. Equivalently, the greater the number of multiple independent paths, the higher the group’s cohesiveness. A clique, that is a network in which all possible interpersonal ties are present, by definition, is the strongest cohesive group. While this mathematical definition is neat and clear it can be recognised immediately as being too high a standard, and therefore too restrictive. Social cohesion does not require high density networks or networks based on strong interpersonal ties. A complexly differentiated group with members connected directly or indirectly by paths of positive weak or strong interpersonal ties may be cohesive if the group’s social network has



particular structural characteristics. The higher the redundancies of independent connections between pairs of nodes, the higher the cohesiveness.

Apart from connectivity and density the type of relationships between the nodes is another essential aspect. The concept of “role” is often used both for the position in a network (node) as well as for the relationship between positions which may become confusing when studying positions and relationships in more complex social networks in detail. Kadushin (2012) refers to Merton who distinguishes between a named position, which Merton calls “status” and relationships between statuses. According to Merton, these relationships between statuses are role relationships. For example, a teacher (named position) has a role relationship with her students, other teachers, parents and so on. All these role relationships are considered a “role set”. Besides “teacher”, the person may have a number of different statuses such as “mother” which is part of the person’s “status set”. The status positions are negotiated and the relationships are created by virtue of social structure and cultural values and norms.

The motivation to make contacts, establish and maintain relationships, and to actively network is rooted in early human cooperation (Tomaselo 1999). Safety is the motivation to derive support from one’s social environment. Safety corresponds to dense, cohesive networks. Effectancy is the motivation to reach out beyond one’s current situation. Effectancy corresponds to networks with structural holes that refers to a gap in the social network between two groups that are not connected. Establishing relationships with networks that otherwise would not be much connected (brokerage) is essential for the survival of a network. While in safe networks trust is an attribute to the entire network, in effective networks trust is more on the individual’s (broker) side. Status is generated by the hierarchical network structure.

Cohesive groups are resistant to breaking apart and are weaker or stronger in proportion to the multiplicity of bonds that hold them together. Therefore, cohesion in groups starts (weakly) when members can reach each other through at least one relational path. These paths that link members are considered to be the social glue holding them together. Structural cohesion is weakest when there is one path connecting all members, stronger when there are two node-independent paths, stronger yet with three node-independent paths, and finally when, for  $n$  members, there are almost as many  $(n-1)$  independent paths between each pair of members. In reverse, a social network becomes weaker if the paths become disconnected or disrupted by force, and finally collapse. A threshold will be exceeded when the disruptive forces become stronger than the resistant forces. Then, the social network no longer can be called cohesive, rather it starts becoming anomic. The structural characteristics are no

longer cohesive, but anomic. The relationships are affected by disintegration and deregulation, and the positions are characterised by a lack of recognition, and their statuses diminish. From the perspective of social network theory, the suicidal behaviour poses a threat to the cohesiveness of the group (connectivity and density), and ultimately to the collapse of ties as a result of overstrained relationships. However, suicidal behaviour and acts of self-harm, as we will see in the following, may change social relations even for the better.

Before turning to Durkheim’s concept of anomie and suicide we summarise that an investigation of suicide needs to include the person’s status position and the various relationships (role and status sets) within the social network. This social network covers all groups in which the person is a member. By focusing only on one group which may be considered the most essential for determining status positions and prescribing social relations such as family, we may lose sight of other important positions and relationships. Gauging the cohesiveness of these groups by applying the measures of connectivity and conditional density provides insight into the characteristics of these groups.

## Durkheim on anomie and suicide

As a scientific concept, anomie was introduced by Emile Durkheim and subsequently popularised through the writings of Robert K. Merton. In contemporary sociology, according to Deflem (2015), multiple understandings of the concept and related theories coexist. Etymologically, the concept derives from the Greek “*anomia*” which means deregulation or normlessness. “*Anomia*” refers to a lack of order, and also carries with it an ethical judgement of the undesirability of that condition. Therefore, according to Greek traditions, “*anomia*” affects people’s dispositions and conduct as well as the social order in which human relations were organised. We take note of this original meaning of anomie as “a state of society and as a state of mind” (Teymior et al. 2016; 1). As we will see in the following, Durkheim insists in the study of anomie as social fact.

From a perspective of history of political thought, Gunderson (2012) explains the origins of anomie in Eastern Buddhist thinking. According to Gunderson, the concept of anomie is inconsequential without the idea of “recurring human thirst” which causes suffering and pain. Durkheim borrowed this idea from Schopenhauer who had introduced it after studying Buddhist texts that were translated during the oriental renaissance in Europe. The idea of *trsva* - understood as ceaselessly recurring thirst - is key in Buddhist thinking as it causes human suffering. From the perspective of Buddhist ethics, the

idea of suffering is not personal but has public accepted symbolisms and meanings. The cause for suffering is the attachment to or desire for things and people in the material world. The only way to overcome this suffering is to realise the transience of life through meditation and detachment from the self (body) and the physical world. In Durkheim's work the origin of anomie in Buddhist thinking is gleaned. The "work of culture" (Obeyesekere) enables the transformation of suffering into publicly accepted meanings and symbols in the Buddhist context of Sri Lanka.

In his study on the social causes of suicide, Durkheim (1897) relies on a notion of anomie as part of a general theory of society which he develops to account for various types of suicide. According to Mestrovic (1987), Durkheim never used the term "normlessness". He referred to anomie as a painful state of "dérèglement" which does not mean the absence of norms, rather being itself a deranged norm. Durkheim defines suicide as "all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce this result." This definition has two distinctive features. First, according to Durkheim, suicides are not special and distinctive phenomena unrelated to other forms of human behaviour. On the contrary, they are related to common human practices, but in an exaggerated form. Second, Durkheim does not yield to temptation to define suicide as subjective mental state, rather he explains suicide as a social fact. Therefore, according to Durkheim, each society is predisposed to contribute a definite quota of suicides. Durkheim proposes to study these predispositions from a sociological perspective.

The suicide typology derives from the analytical differentiation between regulation and integration (see Thome 2000). Egoistic suicides result from an insufficiency or lack of integration. As a society disintegrates, the individual depends less on the group, depends more on him or herself, and recognises no rules of conduct beyond those based upon private interests. Altruistic suicide is brought about by an extreme excess of integration. Sacrificing one life, Durkheim argues, is imposed by society for social purpose, and for society to be able to do this, the individual personality must have little value. Anomic suicide is explained by Durkheim on the basis of an absence or a weakening of social regulation. Under these circumstances of inadequate or ineffective regulation the suicide rate is abnormally high. Durkheim's concept of anomie assumes that social rules are needed in order to limit human desires, and society holds a favourable coercive force over the individual's desires. Under certain circumstances, such as moments of transition or crises, societal constraints are not effective in regulating human practices. Then, acute forms of anomie ensue raising the level of suicide. But anomie is not a temporary disruption but rather a stable state. In trade and industry, Durkheim

argues, the traditional sources of societal regulation fail to exercise moral constraints on an increasingly unregulated capitalist economy. The fourth type of fatalistic suicide results from an excess of regulations. Durkheim believes that the fatalistic suicide is a subject of merely historical interest. He could not foresee the dictatorships of the 20th century.

According to Durkheim, suicide is a normal element in the constitution of all societies. Therefore, the strict subordination of the individual to the group as an indispensable part of collective discipline renders altruistic suicide. Again, if the dignity of the person is the supreme end of conduct, egoistic suicide flourishes. In addition, if economic progress and social change is rapid and social restraints become weak, anomic suicides are inevitable. Finally, if social restraints become overregulated, fatalistic suicides are an outcome.

Besides, Durkheim identifies affinities of various suicide types. For example, altruistic suicide is characterised by the serene conviction that one is performing one's duty, or a passionate outburst of faith and enthusiasm, while anomic suicide, though equally passionate, expresses a feeling of anger and disappointment at aspirations unfulfilled. As there are different types of suicide distinguishable by their causes, therefore, there are different emotions or dispositions through which these types are expressed. Different causes may simultaneously afflict the same individuals, giving rise to composite modes of suicidal expression. For example, the socially detached egoist, Durkheim elaborates, is often unregulated as well while the unregulated victim of anomie is frequently a poorly integrated egoist.

In conclusion of this section, we formulate guiding questions for our brief investigation to follow: Do we find Durkheim's types of suicide in the Sri Lankan context? What are the social causes of suicide and self-harm, and how are they understood in the Sri Lankan context? While putting suicide and self-harm in social context, does suicidal behaviour make sense to the agents (individuals committing suicide and acts of self-harm), their kin, friends and other others in their environment?

## II. Suicide in Sri Lanka: Trends, Patterns and Causes

In the past decades, Sri Lanka has alarming suicide rates overlapping with acts of deliberate self-harm. More Sri Lankans died as a result of suicide than due to the ethnic conflict (Kathriarachchi 2009). The suicides and acts of self-harm represent a significant health and social crisis and became a public concern. For example, in 1997, a Presidential Committee developed the country's first National Suicide Prevention Strategy, and in 1998, an Act

of Parliament de-criminalised suicide to make Sri Lanka the first country in South Asia where suicide is legally no longer treated as criminal act. The British colonial government had criminalised suicide to defer suicidal behaviour such as provoking suicide including slander, non-payment of debts, damage of crops by another's cattle and thwarted love affairs. It seems that suicide threats had been common practice to such an extent that the Kandyan Kings already levied fines on all the inhabitants of villages where a suicide occurred and if the deceased was found to be of "sound mind" (de Alwis 2012). In the following we will pursue the Sri Lankan rates of suicide and self-harm and try to search for explanations.

A suicide rate is calculated per 100,000 of the population which allows a comparison to be made between countries as well as demographic groups within them. According to the World Health Organisation, a suicide rate that exceeds 13/100,000 is "high", while a suicide rate below 6.5/100,000 is "low". From the available data<sup>35</sup> three major findings regarding rates of suicides and self-harm are outstanding:

1. After independence Sri Lanka's suicide rates were never "low". Since 1964 the suicide rates always exceed the margin of 13/100,000 that is "high". By the final decade of the twentieth century, suicide rates in Sri Lanka ranked among the highest in the World with a peak at 47/100,000 in 1996 (Thalagala 2009; Kathriarachchi 2009; Widger 2013).
2. The history of the Sri Lankan suicide rate after independence is a story of two halves: an upward spiral of suicide between 1960 (10/100,000) and 1996 (47/100,000) is followed by a rapid contradiction since then. In 2011, the suicide rate was at 18.5/100,000 (Thalagala 2009; Kathriarachchi 2009; Widger 2013).
3. While the suicide rate dropped after 1996, fragmentary evidence suggests that the rates of deliberate self-harm have significantly increased (Widger 2013; Knipe et al. 2017).

In addition, patterns of suicide and self-harm vary by age, gender, religion and region. In summary, studies (Thalagala 2009; Senadheera 2013; Widger 2013; Knipe et al. 2014; Knipe et al. 2017) suggest:

**Age:** Suicide has been a leading cause of death in the 16 – 24 year age group. It is the only age group in which female rates meet or exceed male rates. The decline of suicide rates since 1996 covers all age groups. It began among the 16 - 24 year olds already in the 1980s followed by the other older age groups at a later point in time. However, among men the suicide rates rise again from around 50 years onward. Self-harm is highest in the 16 – 24 year age group.

**Gender:** More men commit suicide than women. Between 1955 and 2011, male suicide rates were two to three times higher than the female rates. However, for the age group of up to 21 years, more girls and young women commit suicide than boys and young men, and the girls and young women contribute to one fourth of overall female suicides while the boys and young men of the same age contribute only to 6 percent of men's suicide. In addition, the patterns of suicides in males and females differ. In the 1980s, the highest rate among males was in the 21 - 35 years age group, and rates declined with increasing age, whereas the opposite pattern was seen in the 2000s with rates increasing with age among males. In contrast, to males, younger females (< 35 years) had the highest rate throughout the period 1976 to 2011 with a peak in 1983 and a contraction in all age groups ever since. Regarding self-harmers gender ratios tend to be much closer, at least a male:female ratio not greater than 2:1.

**Religion:** Between 1986 and 2006, the suicide rates of Buddhists were highest throughout, and the suicide rates of Muslims were always lowest. From 1996 onwards, the suicide rates of members of all four religions recorded (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity) declined.

**Region:** The lowest suicide rates appear concentrated in urban areas in and around Colombo throughout the period 1955 to 2011. The regions with the highest rates are generally in northern and central Sri Lanka. In 2011, the districts of Puttalam, Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi had the highest suicide rates. Suicide rates are higher in lower density areas.

With serious limitations in available data, researchers assume that the rates of self-harm have been high throughout, and that they are actually increasing. For example, Widger (2013) in his ethnographic study on suicides in Puttalam district reports that suicides occurred on a monthly basis, acts of self-harm on a weekly basis, and suicide threats were part of everyday discourse. Marecek and Senadheera (2012) describe the normalisation of self-harm. Their data on female adolescents acts of self-harm suggest them to conclude that "self-harm is not an extraordinary event in the lives of rural people, but rather a banal occurrence" (175). In addition, Knipe et al. (2018) find in a study with 165,233 people, 47,919 households in 171 rural communities in Sri Lanka that 22.3/1,000 individuals of age 10 or older reported a suicide attempt in their lifetime. About 7 percent of households included at least one person who had committed or attempted suicide. Out of the 171 communities surveyed all reported lifetime suicide attempts.

Research into the causes of suicide and self-harm have been conducted by sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, and health scientists with some consistent findings and persistent disagreements as well. First, the fall

in the suicide rate since 1996 has been largely attributed to efforts to regulate a range of pesticides, especially banning the most toxic pesticides, and improved health services (see Pearson et al. 2013 for the policy response). At the same time a shift from pesticides to medicinal drugs as a popular method of self-harm was observed. These drugs have a lower fatality rate which may explain the consistent high or even increasing rates of self-harm.

Second, as much as the various perspectives reflect a diversity of opinions still research on suicides and acts of self-harm agree on the following: The available medical evidence shows little connection between suicide and psychiatric illness. Only a small percentage of suicides are committed by people who have been treated on psychiatric illness. Many suicides and acts of self-harm occur in the context of a range of family and interpersonal disputes such as arguments between spouses, parents and children. They are largely unpremeditated and driven by feelings of anger, frustration, humiliation and desire for revenge against wrongful treatment.

Third, while it seems very likely that psychological, sociological and cultural factors are all important, and a mono-causal explanation will not be helpful, convincing explanations of the suicide and self-harm epidemics still seem a long way off. Some health professionals tend to argue that suicide is primarily caused by depression, whereas others highlight that depression accounts for only a small number of cases. Moreover, we may follow Obeyesekere's (1985) argument that depression as a treatable illness is meaningless within the Buddhist worldview. While the symptoms of depression are recognised as painful, unpleasant and disabling, they are seen "as more or less 'natural' vicissitudes of life" (Obeyesekere 1985). The symptoms, in principle, can be treated by medical drugs and therapy, but it does not make sense to expect medical effects on depression as a cultural concept. Furthermore, sociologists, some in the tradition of Durkheim, argue that suicide is caused by rapid economic and social change. For example, Kearney and Miller (1985) explore four forces of social change as causal factors for suicides: rapid population growth, expansion of education opportunities, growing unemployment, and internal immigration. Regarding psychological studies (Marecek 2006, Marecek and Senadheera 2012), we notice that reports by interviewees on kinship relations often mention alcohol abuse in the family with occasional domestic violence, but are almost silent on teenage or unwanted pregnancies or sexual abuse. In addition, the interviewees' reports contain kinship relationships exclusively without mentioning relationships with peers or teachers in school, or failed examinations though many self-harmers are students. Presumably, ethnographic studies can provide more insight as anthropologists usually argue that suicide is a culturally-embedded response to interpersonal disputes. Widger (2012) claims that suicides and acts of self-harm

arise in response to the breaking of core kinship rights, duties and obligations or as a challenge to inflexibility or contradictions within the kinship system. The usually complex relationships that are considered to be long term and defined by a morality of altruism become relevant to acts of self-harm and suicide when the supposed inevitability of such relationships fails.

In summary, the 'precipitating' causes of self-harm and suicide appear to be largely predictable at the micro level: love problems, money worries, marital strife, fear, guilt, sorrow and so on. Such individual problems are usually framed by macro-level forces such as economic growth or depression and rapid social change. What seems to be different in space and time are highly context-specific relationships that allow individuals to consider suicidal behaviour a legitimate option while facing those common human problems. The exploration, so far, sparks some doubts about Durkheim's suicide definition. Are suicide threats and provocations, reported to be common in Sri Lanka, covered by the definition? Similarly, if the suicide is a means of communicating frustration, anger or revenge, one's own death is at stake, but not necessarily intended. The normalisation of suicidal behaviour does not seem to indicate a disintegration of social constraints as Durkheim has suggested (see Widger 2012). In Sri Lanka, suicide and self-harm seem to be part of a behavioural repertoire, though in an exaggerated form, which is culturally grounded, and therefore, socially acceptable. However, what about the regulative function of kinship and caste systems? Do socio-economic forces affect families and communities in such a way that the social positions and statuses of individuals are challenged, and their relationships get disrupted which eventually lead to a lack of recognition? The individuals' lack of recognition may cause or reinforce suicidal behaviour as we will elaborate further below.

### III. Suicide Attacks in Sri Lanka

So far, we have not discussed the linkage between suicide, war and political violence. Apart from the widespread traumatisation for the general population in war-affected areas of Sri Lanka, Somasundaram and Rajadurai (1995) report a decline in suicide rates in Jaffna during the time of war, especially during periods of intense fighting. In addition, they describe frustrated adolescents involved in interpersonal conflicts that made them consider suicide. These youths expressed that they rather join the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and die in combat, at least then their lives would have been honoured on posters which was a common method of commemorating dead combatants in Jaffna.

Sri Lanka seems particularly relevant for the study of the linkage between suicide and war in view of the fact that the LTTE during a period from 1983 to 2009 was dedicated to the goal of forming an independent Tamil homeland (*eelam*) in the North and East of the country, and employed suicide attacks<sup>36</sup> as a potent weapon. The suicide attack database at the University of Chicago records a total of 115 suicide attacks with 264 attackers, 1,584 people killed and 3,996 people wounded between 1987 and 2009. 105 (91.3 percent) of these suicide attacks are assigned to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Ramasubramian (2004) reports that, in 2004, the strength of the LTTE elite unit “Black Tigers” (*karrampuli*) especially trained and committed to suicide attacks was at 404 fighters including 92 women (23 percent).

The LTTE developed the capacity to establish and maintain state-like structures in a territory (North and East) under their control, at least for some time. According to Schlichte (2009), the politics of insurgencies and armed groups such as the LTTE can be interpreted as being part of the processes of state formation, though the LTTE is a failed case. Nevertheless, the LTTE was formed chiefly as a result of state repression mechanisms emerging from an oppositional milieu in the North. Emerging as the strongest armed group, the LTTE had to find answers to at least three essential challenges: securing its material reproduction, establishing a social and symbolic order in controlled territories and finding ways of legitimising its violence.

In international comparison, the LTTE became one of the biggest and best organised armed groups of its time with complex internal organisation of strict military hierarchy and strong transcontinental branches (Richards 2004). It not only achieved territorial control, at least for some time, but was also able by using a mixture of coercion and moral persuasion, to collect taxes from the population in territories under its control as well as from diaspora communities. Through various institutions, either part or closely related to the LTTE, security (police), judiciary, transport and social services (health, education) were provided in LTTE controlled territories. In 2002, the LTTE established the Tamil Eelam Education Council which “mimicked that of the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education” (Richards 2014; 47) by giving instructions and directives to provincial representatives within the LTTE’s civilian administration. The LTTE applied fairly flexible and pragmatic strategies without compromising its ultimate goal of independence. For example, salaries of doctors, nurses and teachers were paid for by the government of Sri Lanka so that clinics, and schools continued to operate. The Ministry of Education and the LTTE regularly negotiated over the execution of national examinations (O-level and A-level) in these territories. Paradoxically, the very same school examinations that were perceived by Tamils as part of their growing sense

of discrimination were protected by the LTTE. Yet, in the grip of a civil war the Tamils kept their aspirations and expectations for a better future of their children alive through education and education examinations. Education was still seen as legitimate means for success and upward mobility despite difficult times. In addition, students participated in the LTTE’s student organisation which organised meetings with LTTE commanders to promote the LTTE world view.

Again, following Schlichte’s (2009) argument, the primary challenge for the LTTE was to overcome the delegitimising effects of violence in that it produces traumatic experiences among their fighters, followers and the population in general. Within the LTTE, the subjective belief in the rightness of the LTTE’s actions was a necessary complement to other motivating factors for joining the group and risking the consequences of armed fighting. When the LTTE stabilised its position in its social environment, it also urgently needed to create this belief in a social setting. In order to attract external support, the LTTE had to legitimise its actions by discourses and narratives. The relation between violence and legitimacy is thus central in order to understand LTTE politics. Suicide attacks were not only used by the LTTE as a military strategy, suicides needed also to become a critical element in the legitimisation of violence.

The LTTE developed a sophisticated cult of martyrdom reserving a prominent place for acts of suicides and self-harm. When referring to suicide attacks, the LTTE leadership usually used the Tamil term *tar-kotai*, literally translated as self-gift. According to Roberts (2010) the term transforms the standard word for suicide, namely *tarkollai*. A suicide attack becomes than innovatively a life-gifted-as-weapon (*uyirayutam*). Besides the reinterpretation of terminology, the LTTE became very innovative in the replacement of social values and norms through using powerful symbols that link past and present. At the core of the cult of martyrdom, however, is the devotional sacrifice for the ultimate goal of independent Tamil Eelam. This devotional sacrifice for independence (*cutantiram*) clearly indicates Durkheim’s type of altruistic suicide. The following examples may sufficiently demonstrate our case in point.

The devotional sacrifice is embedded in the revivalism and reinterpretation of religious concepts with origins in Hinduism and Christianity as the majority of LTTE leadership and fighters were Hindu with a Christian minority. According to Schalk (1997) the LTTE had applied a sacrificial ideology with specified and commonly used terminology. For example, *tiyaham*, literally translated as “abandonment” receives a very specific meaning as the voluntary abandonment of life in the act of killing. A killed LTTE fighter is regarded as a *tiyahi* who is considered as a martyr. The ideal *tiyahi* is the *karumppuli* (black tiger).

The *tiyabi* are honoured as heroes with the *karumppuli* obtaining the most honoured status.

The fallen heroes are not cremated by the LTTE like the ordinary Hindu persons. They are buried, or rather planted as seeds to be reborn, and the gravesite is marked with a hero stone or planted stone (*natukal*). The *natukal* is not a private, kinship-based object of worshiping, but a territorial seal. The *natukal* and its surrounding belong to the group of people who live in the same territory, and the LTTE puts its territorial seal. The regular commemoration of the martyrs by the LTTE on Great Heroes Day (27th November) played an important role in the cultivation of martyrdom.

The key symbol of heroic sacrifice is the cyanide vial (*kuppi*) that LTTE fighters were supposed to carry. In a ceremony with the LTTE leadership they were inducted into the organisation through swearing an oath on fighting for an independent Tamil Eelam and receiving the *kuppi* committing themselves to biting it if they were in danger of being captured. As a model served the suicide of an early militant student, Ponnudurai Sivakumaran, before the LTTE was formed. Swamy (2008) describes the incidence as the origin of Sri Lanka's "cyanide culture" (29) that indicates the significance of this act of suicide and its public attention and acceptance. Sivakumaran was a student in the Jaffna Peninsula when he joined the Tamil Students League. After violent protests and clashes with the police, he formed a militant group named after him. On June 5, 1974, at the age of 17 years, Sivakumaran was trapped by the police while attempting a bank robbery on the Jaffna Peninsula.<sup>37</sup> He swallowed a cyanide pill which he used to carry. Sivakumaran's funeral in his home village of Urumpurai became an expressive public event with hundreds attending. At the day of the funeral, shops were closed, and the funeral became a demonstration of protest and resistance when several youths slashed their fingers and with the blood marked their foreheads, pledging collectively to continue the fight for an independent Tamil Eelam. Some other youths assaulted moderate Tamil politicians with slippers (a most degrading insult in Sri Lanka) when they began speaking about Sivakumaran. Later a statue was also erected in recognition of his heroism, and a symbolic struggle occurred around this icon as the Sri Lankan army knocked it down repeatedly after it was rebuilt.

In addition, acts of self-harm were also used and exploited by the LTTE as instruments of political protest and resistance. For example, in 1987, Tileepan, a LTTE fighter protested against the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) and its intervention in the Sri Lankan conflict with fasting until he died. Two years later, in 1989, Annai Pupati, a mother of ten children, fasted to death in the Eastern Province in support of the demand that the IPKF should leave the island. Both Tileepan and Pupati were

regarded as heroes by the LTTE and commemorated regularly.

Through replacement and reinterpretation of social values and norms the LTTE intended to make suicidal behaviour and acts of self-harm acceptable for their fighters and the Tamil population in general. For example, the increasing level of female participation in the organisation compelled the LTTE leadership to relax traditional roles of women. Dearing (2010) quotes Lawrence arguing that "most (Tamil) women can easily recite the 'four virtues' of Tamil women: modesty, charm, coyness, and fear – now replaced by the new notions of courage, confidence and thirst for liberation" (73). The mobilisation of women as protectors of Tamil Eelam was wrapped by the LTTE in a narrative of cultural liberation that outlined the necessity of female martyrdom.

## IV. Insights into Suicide

In order to gain more insight into suicidal behaviour, we let ourselves be guided by the following question: Is suicide a deviant behaviour in the Sri Lankan context? First, we refer to Merton's theory of anomie and deviant behaviour, and afterwards elaborate on two different contexts in which suicides are committed.

### Merton: Anomie and Deviant Behaviour

Merton (1938) showed interest in anomie when he developed a novel sociological perspective of deviant behaviour over a period of several decades (see Deflem 2015 and 2018). This perspective conceives deviant behaviour as the normal outcome of certain social conditions, rather than an aberration on the basis of psychology or biology of criminal dispositions. He distinguishes between cultural goals and the institutionalised means of a society as two of its most defining elements. The cultural goals are preferred in a given social context and refer to those values which the members of a society are meant to aspire to as legitimate objectives. The institutionalised means are the proscribed and legitimate resources to achieve those goals. Cultural goals and institutionalised legitimate means are, according to Merton, not necessarily in a state of harmony or balance as one or the other may be more or less emphasised and devoted attention to.

This viewpoint is applied to the United States at the time, whereby, Merton argues, the predominant goal is individual success in the form of monetary wealth, and the institutionalised norms in the American context value hard work by means of education and employment. Merton observes that the cultural objectives of the American society are typically emphasised much more

than the legitimate means to reach them, thus unsettling the equilibrium between goals and means. As a result, Merton concludes that anomie takes place in the form of a de-institutionalisation of the legitimate means in society. Merton insists that anomie is a social condition, not an attribute of individuals.

Anomic conditions place specific pressures on individuals regarding their ability to adopt cultural goals and means. This ability varies according to their respective position in the social structure. Merton identifies five modes of adaptation which individuals within the anomic structure of American society can resort to (see Table 1). In the first mode of adaptation, members of society conform both to cultural goals and institutionalised means. Conformity is most widespread because otherwise, according to Merton, the social order would break down. The other four forms of behaviour are considered deviant and involve an inability to adopt culturally approved goals and institutionalised means respectively. Innovation refers to those forms of deviant behaviour whereby people resort to illegitimate and potentially illegal means to achieve success goals. Ritualism implies the continued reliance on legitimate means even though upward mobility is excluded. In the case of retreatism, individuals withdraw from the society altogether to lie at the margins without interference from, nor demands being placed on the surrounding social order. Ritualism and retreatment are typically not treated as illegal or even socially considered illegitimate. The final deviant type of rebellion seeks to substitute society's dominant goals and means for a new form of social life altogether. Such substitution attempts might be pursued peacefully, but could also imply violent means.

**Table 1: Merton's Modes of Adaptation**

	Cultural Goal	Institutionalised Means
Conformity	+	+
Innovation	+	-
Ritualism	-	+
Retreatism	-	-
Rebellion	+/-	+/-

+ acceptance - rejection +/- substitution of goals and means

Source: Merton 1938

Within the context of an anomic American society, Merton develops his theory of deviant behaviour in terms of individual modes of adaptation. Anomie refers to a state of a de-institutionalisation of means brought about

by an imbalance that exists between (American) society's cultural goals and institutionalised means whereby the goals are over-emphasised. Thereby, Merton differentiates between the cultural, social and opportunity structure. First, the cultural structure refers to the distribution and organisation of values which in the case of the United States, Merton argues, primarily implies that individual success is widely accepted. Second, the social structure refers to the distribution and organisation of socio-economic positions. Finally, the opportunity structure refers to the distribution of conditions that provide probabilities for individuals to attain certain desired objectives. From a criminological perspective, Merton refers to "the theory of anomie-and-opportunity structure" (see Deflem 2018).

Closely related to Durkheim's and Merton's intentions, Messner and collaborators (see Messner et al. 2008) developed the institutional-anomie theory. The core arguments of this approach were initially presented as part of an explanation of the comparatively high rates of serious crime in the United States. The distinguishing features of the institutional-anomie theory is its principal focus on culture and social structure as manifested in social institutions. Institutional-anomie theory is built upon the underlying premise that the levels and forms of criminal activity as deviant behaviour in any society reflect the fundamental features of social organisation. Recently, Groß et al. (2018) have applied institutional-anomie theory on school-level determinants of delinquency. A marketised mentality predicts students' delinquency along a competitive school culture. In addition, Messner (2017) elaborates the ways in which institutional-anomie theory can be transformed to become applicable in the context of Asian societies.

In general, despite the fact that Merton specified his anomie theory distinctly in the context of American society in the post-World War II area, Deflem (2018) suggest that its implications can be examined in other socio-historical contexts that share relevant characteristics. Under the influence of momentous social changes such as the globalisation of free-market capitalism anomie can be employed to refer to relevant processes of deregulation and disintegration.

## Suicide and Self-harm as Communication

As Marecek (2006) and Marecek and Senadheera (2012) explain, suicides and acts of self-harm are communicative acts. They usually arise abruptly in situations of high emotion, typically provoked by conflicts with family members or intimates. Suicidal behaviour is performed for an audience, whether for the antagonists or for a larger group of witnesses. Next, we will elaborate on five features of suicidal behaviour as communication.

First, in order to be considered a means of communication, self-harm needs to be a relational practice. In all 23 incidents that were examined in detail by Marecek and Senadheera (2012) self-harm was embedded in contexts of unbearable interpersonal strife involving mostly parents and other family members, and occasionally romantic partners and school mates. In addition, in their study of 87 patients admitted at Batticaloa hospital over a period of two years with self-burning injuries, Laloe and Ganesam (2002) confirm that most victims were young, married women with children, who had interpersonal problems with their respective husbands.

Second, in Sri Lanka, the prototype for suicide and self-harm is the dialogue in contrast to the monologue suicide that is the prototype in Europe and North America (Marecek 2006). The idea of a dialogue suicide assumes that the suicidal behaviour is directed toward other people and may be carried out in the presence of others. Marecek (2006) asked Sri Lankan Sinhalese psychology and medical students to evaluate a variety of hypothetical suicide cases. Their responses showed a clear pattern of dialogue suicides to be regarded as “good” suicides (in comparison with monologue suicides), and they rated them as more understandable, braver, and more morally justified.

Third, the most common motives for suicides and acts of self-harm are anger, revenge, and the desire to “get back” at one’s antagonist. Suicides and acts of self-harm thus serve the purpose to communicate emotional pain, to protest ill treatment, to retaliate against bashed dignity, and to register moral claims about the victim and the wrongdoer. They are means to communicate what cannot be said in words: reproaches, disagreements, confrontations or condemnation. Moreover, self-harm is a means of expressing and enacting anger and other emotions. For example, expressing anger toward one’s parents or elders violates traditional norms of respect. As Marecek (2006) and de Alwis (2012) point out, suicide and acts of self-harm can be interpreted as a form of protest against everyday social structures and pressures they face. Acts of self-harm are a “cry for help” and an alarm signal. “... In a country with strong patriarchal power structures buttressed by cultural norms and ideals which impose a variety of pressures and stresses on women, normalise domestic violence and abuse and discourage divorce, it should not come as a surprise that women turn to suicide and self-harm as last resort...”(de Alwis 2012; 48).

Fourth, Marecek and Senadheera (2012) observe that in the narrative accounts of their interviewees they portrayed themselves as having little agency regarding their acts of self-harm. Marecek and Senadheera (2012) interpret this attitude as a means of “identity repair”: “By portraying themselves as not knowing their own thoughts, as unable to account for their actions, as not having an intention to hurt others, girls could re-position themselves as modest, docile, obedient daughters” (74).

Fifth, the victims (those who harmed themselves) were admonished for their “foolish act” by their families. Not only immediate and extended family members of the victims, but nurses and doctors in hospitals, teachers and principals in schools, police officers and journalists use this term. According to Marecek and Senadheera (2012) its use serves mainly two purposes: (i) To act “foolish” (even without thought) is considered indecent, but it is not as shameful as intentionally hurting another person, counter-attacking one’s parents or deliberately dishonouring one’s family. (ii) People using the term “foolish act” deflect attention from the fuller accounts that the victims themselves have brought forward such as strained relations within the family, parent’s failure to fulfil their obligations, betrayed confidence, false accusations or tarnished reputation. “If self-harm can be explained away as momentary foolishness, then parents’ physical violence, fathers’ drunkenness, assaults by siblings and the like recede from view. Sealing off family strife from further probing may enable family members to continue to co-exist; it may thus serve a collective need.” (77).

The episodes of self-harm that Marecek (2006) and Marecek and Senadheera (2012) describe in detail can be read as if harming themselves implies, though not necessarily with malice aforethought, harming others. We, now, briefly explore the concept of self and elaborate on a distinct foundational schema of self that organises behaviour, guides interaction and prescribes social relations.

Markus and Kitayama (2010) define a self as “a continually developing sense of awareness and agency that guides action and takes shape as the individual, both brain and body, becomes attuned to the various environments it inhabits” (421). According to this definition, selves develop through symbolically mediated, collaborative interaction with others and the social environment. Cultural variation across selves arises from differences in the images, ideas, norms, tasks, practices and social interactions that characterise various social environments and reflects differences in how to attune to these environments. Therefore, Markus and Kitayama argue, selves and culture mutually constitute each other: a person requires input from socio-cultural meanings and practices, and the self is the centre of awareness and agency that incorporates and reflects these socio-cultural patterns. People’s thoughts, feelings and actions, in turn, reinforce, and sometimes change the socio-cultural forms that shape their lives.

A particular powerful and important set of socio-cultural patterns is that which prescribe the normatively appropriate relations between a self (an individual) and others (other individuals). Markus and Kitayama distinguish between two types of social relations. The independent type assumes that social relations are



formed on the basis of instrumental interests and goals of participating individuals. The interdependent type assumes that individuals are inherently connected and made meaningful through relationships with others.<sup>38</sup> The two types of social relations indicate two different patterns of attuning to the social world and two different senses of self or agency which are called “schema of self”. When an independent schema of self organises behaviour, the primary referent is the individual’s own thoughts, feelings and actions. When an interdependent schema of self organises behaviour, the immediate referent is the thoughts, feelings and action of others with whom the person is in relationship. Markus and Kitayama claim that independence and interdependence are universally available, and every context recognizes both. Moreover, every individual self also carries elements of both schemas to varying degrees. Nevertheless, cultures vary systematically in how these schemas are developed, utilised, balanced and considered dominant or foundational.

In the Sri Lankan context, the concept of “self” would be incomplete without considering the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* (not-self, selflessness) which denies the existence of any self. According to Collins (1990) Theravada Buddhist tradition has constructed a philosophical and psychological account of personal identity on the apparently impossible basis of denial of self. Though much disputed and thus open to various meanings, *anatta* depends on advanced intellectual and spiritual education which can be expected from specialists (monks), but not from lay Theravada Buddhists. *Anatta* inspires meditative practices applied mainly by monks, and it does not provide for ritual practices of lay persons. Nevertheless, *anatta* is part of a particular and culture-specific form of religious, feeling, thinking and acting. *Anatta* belongs to the set of material and symbolic concepts that give direction to behaviour and action. We assume, in Sri Lanka, it is part of the interdependent schema of self.

Viewing suicidal behaviour and acts of self-harm from the perspective of an interdependent schema of self its banality can be explained. The girls’ episodes locate self-harm in a relational context, and the girls intended to accomplish a change in their social relations. Marecek and Senadheera (2012) report that not one story described non-fatal self-harm as having any negative consequences. On the contrary, “girls judged that engaging in self-harm had led to an improvement in the victim’s situation... girls had come to see self-harm as a serviceable and effective way to negotiate relational impasses” (77-78). Self-harming is a means of communicating anger and a sense of having been mistreated which otherwise would not have been possible to talk about. The modes of speaking about self-harm mitigated girls’ responsibility for the self-harm. “Girls’ practice of self-harm provided a way to respond to injury and injustice within the constraints of gender and generational norms of deference, obedience,

and emotional restraint” Marecek and Senadheera (2012; 78). Even many of the young women who burned themselves did so in the hope of bringing about a change in their relationships (Laloe and Ganesan 2002). This expectation from such a dangerous act of self-burning is very astonishing as it seems that these young women were not aware of or did not want to realise the risk of slow and very painful death or horrific disfigurement. Laloe and Ganesan (2002) report that most survivors go back to their families. The apparent scars on parts of their body, especially the face, let them feel ashamed to be seen in public and they become very reclusive.

Applying Merton’s modes of adaptation, we can assume that the individuals’ goal in Sri Lanka is to successfully obtain and maintain a well respected and recognised status position within given hierarchies (e.g. family, school, caste). As part of the cultural values the expectations of the individual as well as the members of various groups in which the individual is a member himself or herself are based on the interdependent schema of self. With an interdependent self, interaction with others produces a sense of self as connected to, related to, or interdependent with others. These interactions are guided by culturally prescribed tasks that require and encourage fitting in with others, taking the perspective of others, reading the expectations of others, adjusting to others, and using others as referents for action. In short, the self includes others. Although interdependence ensures that people are likely to be responsive to others, this does not imply harmony or affection among the people engaged in interdependent relationships as we have seen regarding suicide and acts of self-harm. If suicidal behaviour and acts of self-harm are socially accepted then they correspond with Merton’s category of “conformity”, and suicides and acts of self-harm are not considered deviant at all. Seen from the victim’s point of view, the act of self-harm can change social relations even for the better. The key intention of suicidal behaviour is the hope and the expectation of bringing a change in the relationships with others, and thereby change his/her own position for a better one. Through an act of self-harm, the interdependent self can be rescued. The purpose of suicidal behaviour is thus an attempt to “repair” the social relationships. The temporary condition of social deregulation in family and kinship relationships is described by Durkheim as “domestic anomie”. Divorce is discouraged by patriarchal power, but suicidal behaviour remains an option of last resort. The anomie suicide describes the resulting type of self-inflicted death that expresses a mood of anger and disappointment at aspirations unfulfilled.

Finally, let us assume suicide is viewed as socially unacceptable, for example, due to religious belief. If so, religion would exercise moral constraints on social behaviour. According to Delhey (2006), though Buddhist ethics is based on the holiness of life and the doctrine

of *ahimsa* (nonviolence), these views are given various interpretations in history and present. As Delhey (2006) concludes, the attitude of Buddhism towards suicide is ambivalent. For example, Theravada Buddhism, in principle takes a critical stance of suicide. Nevertheless, suicide can be justified, if it has commendable effects on the ultimate aim of salvation. Therefore, in a context in which suicide is viewed as culturally unacceptable, then it can be considered “innovative” and deviant behaviour.

We assume a high cohesiveness of groups, in which a member commits suicide or acts of self-harm. The connectivity and the conditional density of the group are presumably high. The relationships, however, especially the ones of the suicide or self-harmer, are assumed to be strained. As one of the most general functions of social groups is to provide a basis for calculability and regularity of behaviour, a lack of coordinating the goals and means of the group’s social structure leads to anomie (Merton 1938). Suicidal behaviour can be viewed as an extreme that indicates the limitations of predictability with anomie intervening. It is suggested that the cohesiveness of groups and its goals and means comprising the group’s social structure may be profitably analysed by social network theory and anomie theory as well.

## Suicide as Rebellion

As judgements on human affairs only achieve meaning in context, the suicides and acts of self-harm in everyday contexts differ from suicidal behaviour in the context of insurgency. As we have demonstrated, the LTTE wanted to establish an independent state in the North and East of the island. The ultimate goal was Tamil Eelam. The suicide attacks by the Black Tigers were not only a deadly weapon, and part of the LTTE military strategy. The cult of martyrdom including the devotional sacrifice allowed the LTTE to institutionalise and legitimise suicides as an indispensable means to achieve Tamil Eelam. Even acts of self-harm (e.g. fasting to death) were exploited by the LTTE as a weapon of political protest and resistance. Through reinterpretation and replacement of social values and norms, the LTTE tried to make suicidal behaviour acceptable for their fighters as well as the Tamil population in the LTTE controlled territory.

In conclusion, the LTTE fits very much in Merton’s category of rebellion as deviant behaviour. The ultimate new goal is *cutantiram* (independence) and among the new institutionalised means are suicide attacks (*uyirayutam*). The legitimisation of suicides by the LTTE through a cult of martyrdom and devotional sacrifice was an essential element of a failed state building process. The suicide attacks by the Black Tigers can be considered as “altruistic suicides” because it was their duty.

We would have assumed a high cohesiveness among the elite group of the Black Tigers. Moreover, a study of the interdependent schema of self in such a group may have revealed a significant ingroup–outgroup distinction that fighters do not move easily across this line, resulting in different behaviour toward ingroup and outgroup members. As a retrospective study may not be possible any longer, a comparative analysis of the connectivity and conditional density of armed groups including the study of the schema of self may reveal insightful findings.

## V. Outlook: Suicide and Schooling in Sri Lanka

Although research on suicidal behaviour in Sri Lanka has mentioned failure in examinations and school in general as a cause for suicides or acts of self-harm, we are not aware of any detailed study on the correlation between schooling, education and suicidal behaviour. The following considerations may serve as basis for such an investigation.

Competitiveness and exam-orientation in schools is one of the key characteristics of the education system in Sri Lanka. The limited opportunities for higher education cause high competition in the school system starting as early as kindergarten and pre-school. The competition intensifies the excessive focus of teaching and learning on examinations with extensive effects on knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. When students are required to compete with each other, they perceive that they can obtain their goals and be rewarded if the other students fail to obtain their goals and are less likely to be rewarded. This “negative interdependence among goal achievements” (Deutsch 2006) allows schools to grade students on a norm-referenced basis that require them to work better, faster and more accurately than their peers. In doing so, students deprive others of success, celebrate their failures, view resources such as grades as limited, recognise their negatively lined fate and believe that only the strong prosper. This competitive process has far-reaching effects on individual and group relationships, for example, regarding communication, helpfulness, coordination of efforts and conflict resolution. In fact, competitive processes and destructive processes of conflict resolution are similar. The competitive process stimulates the view that the solution of a conflict can only be imposed by one side on the other, which in turn leads to using coercive strategies such as psychological as well as physical threats and violence. The conflict becomes a power struggle or a matter of moral principle and is no longer confined to a specific issue at a given time and place. The practice of physical and psychological violence in schools has disastrous impact on students learning and wellbeing. The sensational media reports about ragging in popular schools are just the visible tip of the iceberg. Also, gender violence

is wide-spread and students and teachers have to cope with the aftermath of the war and recurring natural disasters.

In addition, the competitive and exam-oriented school system has created a shadow system of uncontrolled private tuition classes at high cost for parents. The extreme competition for higher education continues in the job market and is played out along ethnic lines.

Besides, the socialisation in school and in family corresponds in various ways. The school builds upon and reinforces a hierarchical model that is the outcome of a socialisation process in the Sri Lankan family. Chapin (2014) describes a model of ranked relationships in childhood<sup>39</sup> with key cognitive and emotional characteristics which are briefly summarised. The parent identifies and provides for the child's needs without solicit verbal input from the child and without justification and explanations of actions. Thereby, the parent's emotional orientation is supposed to be sensitive and responsive, kind, caring and committed, confident and powerful as well as restrained and judicious. The child is expected to offer compliance, passivity, service and respect behaviour, not to question or offer opinion, not to discuss thoughts and experiences. The child's emotional orientation is supposed to be acquiescent, expectant and patient as well as shy, properly ashamed and a little afraid. If the child violates the role expectation, the parent may ignore, tolerate or indulge a behaviour, physically control, threaten or promise, chastise or physically punish. The parent, however, may avoid to shame the child in public. The parent-child relationship and the interdependent role expectations find a close match and an extension in the teacher-student relationship and the organisational structure of schools. We do not expect a complete concordance of roles and relationships. However, the more the roles of parents and teachers are in accordance the better the children will understand their role as students and their relationships with adults and peers in school.

As much as education enjoys high social prestige in Sri Lanka, education has played an essential role in violent conflicts since independence. The Tamil minority<sup>40</sup> particularly in the North of the island, had been favored by the British colonial administration, enjoying relatively privileged access to education and to government employment in the first half of the 20th century. Families demanded education as a way of creating more livelihood opportunities for more of their children. Tamils also gained from the use of English as the official language where they outperformed the Sinhalese majority. After independence the Sinhalese majority came to power with a strong and exclusive Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. The Sinhalese dominated state sought to correct the horizontal inequalities perceived as a disadvantage to the Sinhalese majority through educational quotas including media wise standardisation of the secondary school leaving

qualification (General Certificate of Education Advanced Level, GCE-A level) results for entry to university, the introduction of Sinhala as the only official language and medium of instruction in schools and universities, and regional investment policies. In consequence, the horizontal inequalities changed its direction and extent. Tamil youth in the North and East as well as Sinhalese youth in the South did not benefit from increased education expansion. For the Tamil youth the standardisation of the GCE-A level results and the Sinhala language became a restriction for social mobility. Similarly, rural youth in the South who were educated only in Sinhala were not able to compete for access to scarce higher education and rare employment opportunities in the English dominated private job market. Their aspirations and expectations for upward social mobility were badly disappointed. The frustrated Tamil youth were mobilised by an increasingly violent Tamil separatism, and the Sinhalese rural youth were mobilised by a left movement led by the People's Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, JVP). "Cascades of violence" (Braithwaite and D'Costa 2016) resulted in two insurrections of the JVP against the state in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century and a violent conflict between Tamil separatists, chiefly the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the state which lasted for 26 years. As we have discussed already the LTTE not only challenged the state with military power, it also built state-like parallel structures in de facto LTTE controlled territories.

The economic liberalisation in the late 1970s led to an expansion of the economy that resulted in a significant reduction in unemployment in the country by creating employment in unskilled and semi-skilled, but not in high-skilled categories. Today, the unemployment rate is the highest amongst the group with GCE-A level and above educational qualifications (8.3 percent), especially graduates and university graduates (32.5 and 26.0 percent, respectively) compared to the overall unemployment rate (4.4 percent), suggesting a skills mismatch. The youngest job-seekers aged 15-19 years are seven times more likely than those aged 30-39 to be unemployed. While Sri Lanka is a regional leader in terms of primary and secondary education, it lags in tertiary education with only 20 percent out of about 450,000 GCE-O level cohort attending a higher education institution and only 33 percent attending Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes, leaving the remainder with no option other than exiting the education sector, entering the labour market or going abroad for further studies. Besides low enrolment rates in higher education institutions compared to peers, relatively few students in Sri Lanka are enrolled in science-related programmes. The TVET sector is important to ease the shortage of technically skilled labour, but it is fragmented with more than 30 statutory boards and 15 ministries, with a shortage of qualified teaching staff and limited quality assurance.

While the official unemployment rates in Sri Lanka have hovered around 4.4 percent between 2011 and 2016, there are employment challenges. Sri Lanka's labour market is characterised by a high share of the service sectors across the country, high informality, a low female labour force participation, a high share of workers in the public sector including state-owned enterprises, low average productivity in agriculture sector, and a high unemployment rates amongst young people and those with advanced degrees (see The World Bank 2018).

In Sri Lanka, a little more than half of the working age population is employed, and the regular employment ratio is still low with only 13 percent of the working age population holding a regular job. There exist strong regional disparities in the state of jobs and the job creation challenge in Sri Lanka. Progress is lagging especially in the post-conflict areas, i.e. in the Northern and Eastern Province affected by the armed conflict that came to an end in 2009.

Part of imbalances in the labour market can be explained by a persistently strong demand for public sector jobs over private sector jobs, especially amongst female graduates. Out of the labour force, 14 percent is employed in the public service. The recently completed Labour Demand Survey from 2017 (see The World Bank 2018), finds that nearly half a million vacancies exist in the private sector, with most of the labour demand stemming from the industry, services and trade sectors.

Sri Lanka's female labour force participation rates declined from 41 percent in 2010 to 36 percent in 2016. This trend stands in contrast to the country's achievements in human development outcomes that favour women, such as high levels of female education and low total fertility rates, as well as its status as a middle-income country. It is not venturous to explain gender gaps in labour market outcomes with household roles and responsibilities, which fall disproportionately on women, and the associated socio-physical constraints on women's mobility, a human capital mismatch, whereby women are not acquiring the proper skills demanded by job markets, and gender discrimination in job search, hiring, and promotion processes. Qualitative research (see The World Bank 2018) reveals women's preference for humanities and arts in their educational training, rather than in technical skills that better match with private sector jobs in growth industries. These educational and occupational choices are also strongly influenced by what girls and their parents consider to be gender appropriate - e.g., women with the highest educational attainments (university level or higher) still queue for a limited number of public sector jobs - which, unlike the private sector, uniformly offer regular working hours, maternity leave, and other women-friendly benefits - and thus contribute to elevated rates of female youth unemployment.

The skills mismatch emerges as a result of the discrepancies between the education and employment opportunities and the expectations and aspirations for education and occupation of youths and their parents. Between 2000 and 2003, Little and Hettige (2016) conducted a survey of youth and their aspirations and expectations for education and livelihoods in nine urban and rural communities of the country. They found that the educational aspiration among youth was the Advanced level as school leaving certificate or above, and their expectations were lower, falling between GCE-O and A levels. The authors report also that over half of the youth judged that they do not have the means to achieve their aspirations. Youth aspirations and expectations reflect the aspirations and expectations their parents hold for them. The majority of parents in every community aspired to a university education for their children. The traditional aspirations to medicine, law, management, accountancy and engineering persisted, but youth also aspire to high-level occupations in information and communication technology and marketing, reflecting the changing demands of the economy. In addition, the preference of youth and their parents for the public sector was very strong and evident, especially among disadvantaged respondents in remote locations.

Six years after the survey, Little and Hettige (2016) were able to trace some of the youth who had participated in the survey. They found that 50 percent were in work, of whom the majority was working in the private sector or were self-employed, 32 percent were housewives and not actively seeking work outside the home, and 13 percent were unemployed and seeking employment. The majority of these young people expressed their disappointments about unfulfilled educational and occupational aspirations and expectations. Despite this unfavourable situation, Little and Hettige (2016) observed that many youths have not given up hope for social mobility through qualifications.

These findings are confirmed by a more recent study on youth aspirations, social mobility and educational target achievement in Sri Lanka (Samarakoon et al. 2016). All 150 undergraduates who participated in the study, had high expectations regarding employment conditions and professional work after graduation. They decided their future target of education in the period of GCE-O level, and decision making on educational target creation was not fully based on performance and aspirations of the students, but influenced by their parents, teachers and friends as well as prospects open to them depending on their social status and financial means. The aspirations for "white collar jobs" and the public service influenced strongly the decision process. A considerable amount of students did not achieve their targets due to individual performance, lack of educational facilities, and financial constraints.

In the context of rapid and even accelerating social change (globalisation), the education system continuously faces the key challenge of providing for youth, especially young women, to acquire the proper competencies and skills demanded by the job market and required by a globalised knowledge based economy. As we briefly discussed, this challenge includes the need to bridge a double discrepancy, first, between expectations and aspirations for education by students and their parents and the limitations of an opportunity structure within the education sector (higher education, vocational training) and the job market, and second, between the actual qualifications of graduates and the opportunity structure within the formal and informal job market. This double discrepancy creates a constant pressure on the child and youth to constructively manage the expected task of social mobility in conformity with the institutionalised means, and achieve the expected cultural goal of a highly valued status position.

Teaching and learning towards examinations and the education and occupation opportunity structure are closely connected. A mismatch emerges between the factual acquired competencies of youth and their putative qualifications indicated by certifications. The expectations and aspirations for education and employment of youths and their parents are not necessarily based on performance and competencies, but on certificates. The increasing focus on examinations has far reaching consequences for teaching and learning, since training to pass examinations does not include critical, analytical, problem-solving thinking skills which are the higher learning outcomes necessary for employment in high-skilled sectors, advanced higher education and ultimately a knowledge-based economy. The certificates (O/L, A/L) are usually silent about these competencies. From a human development perspective, already the instrumental function of education to produce the next generation of the labour force, is undercut by competitiveness and heavy dependence on private tuition to prepare for examinations. The Sri Lanka National Human Development Report 2014 (UNDP 2014) expresses the concern that many students are forced by practical realities of passing examinations and obtaining jobs to become “strategic learners”. While education ideally remains the primary means of economic and social mobility, a moral and humanising force, and a human right, even “strategic learners” have to face the harsh reality of unequal or absent opportunities, competitiveness and frustrations. It comes as little surprise to find youth confused about the goals, means and outcomes of education. Consequently, individual behaviour may become less reliable and predictable.

We show great promise for studying in more detail the education and employment opportunity structures and comparing them with the aspirations and expectations for education and employment of students’ and their parents.

The discrepancies may be an entry point for investigating students’ behaviour, their modes of adaptation, and their relationships within their social networks. It seems not unrealistic to assume that the cultural goal of high status positions expected to be achieved through institutionalised means of education and employment will be widely recognised. We thus may find a correlation between unfulfilled expectations and aspirations for education and occupation of youth (e.g. school failure), strained relationships in social networks with impaired connectivity and density, and suicidal behaviour.

## Endnotes

- 35 Official suicide data are compiled from police reports kept at local level. The reliability of data is much debated due to poor data collection and processing as well as reporting biases, including underreporting of suicides by methods of classifying suicides as accidents (e.g. drowning, vehicular). Our main interest is on suicide trends that are confirmed by various sources. With regard to deliberate self-harm, there is no national method to record such data. The National Poisons Information Centre records poisonings, including self-poisonings. However, the reliability of reporting procedures from local to national levels is questionable as not all hospitals maintain records on patient admission. A scoping review of research on suicides in South Asia reveals that many studies (including Sri Lanka) are of poor quality and not representative (Jordans et al. 2014).
- 36 These suicide attacks are not included in the suicide statistics discussed above. For analytical purposes, we use the terms “suicide attacks” and “armed group” and avoid the terms “suicide terrorism” and “terrorist group”. Needless to say that the use of these terms does not indicate any sympathy with suicide attacks or armed groups at all.
- 37 Roberts (2007), though relying also on Swamy (2008), tells that Sivakumaran was captured after a failed attempt at assassinating a senior police officer.
- 38 Other labels for independent are „Gesellschaft”, egocentric and individualistic. Other labels for “interdependent” are “Gemeinschaft”, sociocentric, communal and collectivist.
- 39 Chapin (2014) conducted her ethnographic study on childhood in a Sinhalese dominated community in the Central Province of Sri Lanka. She claims that the described model and its application are “likely to differ across groups in Sri Lanka... However, many of the basic ideas about hierarchy and desire do resonate with similar models that people connected with this region hold.” (176)
- 40 We refer here to Sri Lankan Tamils in the North and East of the island. The administration has conserved a system of ethnic groups that combines language and religion. In this system, Sri Lankan Tamils, those settled on the island before the 19th century and Indian or up-country Tamils, those that migrated from India to the island from the 19th century onward are differentiated. In addition, religion takes the upper hand in the case of Tamil speaking Muslims, considered to be “Moors”. The various names for the communities have shifted from titles ascribed by the colonial and later government administration to those determined themselves.

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# Student Wellbeing in Sri Lanka

## Analysis of Current Scholarship, Certain Policy Measures and Lessons Learned

by Malathi de Alwis

### Executive Summary

The interest in student wellbeing has been increasing in light of mounting evidence that a large percentage of Sri Lanka's adolescent population, especially girls, are self-harming with a significant proportion of such acts, particularly among boys, being fatal. The interrogation of the scholarly literature on student wellbeing with particular reference to suicide and self-harm has shown that a wide range of causes and risk factors have been studied and analysed in an attempt to understand this troubling phenomenon. The views and opinions of a variety of stake holders with whom I met during the past several months as well as observations I have made during twenty-five years of fieldwork conducted in Sri Lanka have also been drawn upon for this study.

This chapter begins by reflecting on some key concepts such as wellbeing, mental health, childhood/adolescence/youth, and suicide/self-harm as they provide important frameworks for the ideas and issues that will be discussed while also helping to ground and guide theoretical arguments. Adolescence, which encompasses the years ten to nineteen, is perceived as being formative as well as impressionable years when substantial physical, psychological and behavioural changes take place. It is this vulnerability and volatility that also translates to increased incidents of self-harm among this population.

The second section which constitutes the core of the chapter analyses a large corpus of scholarly work that explores a multiplicity of stressors and risk factors that were often inter-related but nonetheless unique to students who self-harm: (1) National examinations (2) Romantic relationships (3) Corporal punishment and humiliation in school (4) Family problems, conflicts and insecurities (5) Addiction to soap operas and social media and (6) Substance abuse.

### Risk Factors

Competitiveness and exam-orientation in schools are two key characteristics of the education system in Sri Lanka. It is thus not surprising that the National Survey on Emerging Issues among Adolescents in Sri Lanka, published by UNICEF (2004), noted that fear of failing examinations was the most commonly cited worry among school-going adolescents. A doctoral research study of youthful suicide survivors at a hospital showed that

suicides among youth increased the most at the age of 17 years which coincides with when O' Level results are released. An education system that excessively focuses on examinations also has other repercussions such as students not having opportunities for critical analysis, independent research and forming their own opinions as well as pursuing hobbies, learning basic life skills and coping mechanisms. The lack of coping skills among adolescents has been noted as one of the major reasons why they are so swift to self-harm.

While romantic relationships are not only the preserve of adolescents, it is often the case that one's first romantic relationship takes place when one is an adolescent and the consequences of that can be far reaching particularly if it leads to family conflict, teasing or shaming in school or results in a break up. Such scenarios associated with romantic relationships were found to be the second most frequent cause of suicide among youth. Studies have shown that many instances of self-harm among young girls though directed at a parent was precipitated by the discovery of what was perceived as a breach of sexual propriety on the girl's part and the assumption that she was involved in a romantic liaison.

Corporal punishment is defined as any punishment in which physical force is used with the intention of causing some degree of pain or discomfort. It is often supplemented with forms of non-physical punishment that are also cruel and degrading such as belittling, humiliating, ridiculing, denigrating, threatening, frightening or makes the child a scapegoat. A recent study confirmed that the most common reasons for corporal punishment and psychological harassment were non-completion of homework, not adhering to the school dress code, and love affairs and that students appeared to tolerate corporal punishment, possibly even at abusive levels, if it was done by teachers whom they viewed as skilled in teaching. Often times, students have referred to verbal insults and slights as being more injurious than physical assault and corporal punishment.

Family problems, conflicts and insecurities were the number one cause of self-harm among adolescents but when analysing the reasons leading to such conflicts it became clear that parental disapproval of actual or assumed romantic relationships had a significant effect along with the absence of the mother (usually due to her migrating as a domestic aide to the Middle East), father's alcoholism, domestic violence, divorce/separation/re-marriage of parents, economic instability, war trauma

and pressure being exerted on children to perform well in school. Studies have shown that parents traumatised by war and natural disasters are more prone to alcoholism and physically abusing their children. Nonetheless, the UNICEF study (2004) found that 75% of adolescents thought they could depend on their families and admitted they would love to spend time with them.

The proliferation of smart phones which offer quick and easy access to the internet, is increasingly making adolescents addicted to social media and became the focus of much public debate with the social media-related suicides of two young girls, in February 2014. There is now convincing evidence that social media increases the risk of exposure of adolescents to pornography, cyber-bullying and unwanted sexual solicitation. They also run the risk of being targets of hate speech, of being increasingly alienated from their families and having lower motivational levels. According to the Grassrooted Trust which focuses on sexual health and sexually marginalised communities, they were approached by seventy young girls from different schools in Colombo, in 2014 alone, who reported being blackmailed over nude pictures and videos they had shared with their boyfriends.

The only factor that did not seem to correlate with self-harm was substance abuse among students which is increasing nation-wide. However, its deleterious effect on student wellbeing continues to be a source of great anxiety for parents, teachers and counsellors. Studies have indicated that substance abuse is particularly high among adolescents living in former conflict zones and its ingestion is mainly due to peer pressure and the desire for peer acceptance. Recently, a senior official at the Police Narcotic Bureau acknowledged that most of their cases involved suspects who had failed their O'Level examinations and dropped out of school as a result.

## Learning Suicide

There is a significant body of work that argues that suicide is a 'learned behaviour' and that children and adolescents are particularly open to such forms of learning. Three different 'learning environments' for Sri Lankan adolescents were discussed under the following themes: (1) Exposure to suicidal behaviour and suicide play (2) Cluster suicides and (3) War and political conflict.

Children are invariably enfolded in cycles of 'knowing and doing' as they are growing up in an environment where a family member, neighbour or classmate has sought to self-harm. Tom Widger, the only anthropologist to write an ethnography of suicide in Sri Lanka reports that in the region where he did research, suicides occurred on a monthly basis while acts of self-harm occurred on

a weekly basis and suicide threats were part of everyday discourse. This is often how suicide becomes normalised among children, adults and society at large. Further, self-poisoning, due to its ubiquity in Sri Lanka, has been described as being 'cognitively available' to children and is expressed through the games they play, according to Widger.

Cluster suicides are primarily prevalent among youth and Sri Lanka has experienced two such clusters; the first began with the death of two schoolgirls in Jaffna, in 1982, who ate yellow oleander seeds (*Thevetia peruviana*). There had been no reports of this form of poisoning previously but spurred on by the media publicity received by the first two cases, this form of poisoning began to be used across the country over the years and remains a major cause of fatality among young people in particular. The second cluster began with the suicide of a schoolgirl in Colombo, in 2009, but was fortunately contained.

War and political conflict not only have devastating effects on adolescents but the civil war in Sri Lanka resulted in many Tamil adolescents, as young as ten years, joining or being forcibly conscripted to the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) resulting in them participating in combat. Such youth are now struggling to make a living in post-war Sri Lanka. The LTTE also master-minded the phenomenon of 'suicide bombers' - those who seek to annihilate the enemy while also killing themselves. The LTTE abhors the term 'suicide bombers' preferring to refer to them as 'Those who have gifted their life for the Tamil Nation.'

## Policy Measures

The third section focuses on a selection of policy measures adopted by the Sri Lankan state which have impacted adolescents who self-harm both directly and indirectly.

The de-criminalising of suicide, banning of lethal pesticides and safer storage of pesticides have all had very positive effects and the percentage of fatalities through the ingestion of pesticides has drastically decreased now. However, there has been a concomitant increase in self-harm with overdosing on Paracetamol and other drugs, particularly among adolescents.

While the state has attempted to introduce more counsellors in schools, the role they play has been perceived to be problematic and they have not been able to gain the trust of students.

Education reform especially a move away from examination-focused curricula and the provision of

opportunities for students to hone their research and analytical capabilities along with more class periods that focus on stress management, problem-solving and other life skills is urgently needed. However, such reforms require political will and cooperation both at the national and local level, an aspect that has been severely lacking across the decades.

Legal provisions to prosecute corporal punishment in schools has been ineffective not only because of the many loopholes in the law but because there is still a strong belief among parents, teachers and even some students, especially prefects, that it is necessary to instill discipline.

Prohibiting mothers with children below 5 years migrating as domestic workers has been a very paternalistic and short-sighted policy measure as the state has failed to recognise why women seek higher-paying jobs abroad. Neither has any thought been given to how the state could support fathers to be better carers and nurturers.

## Lessons Learned

The fourth section seeks to highlight some research findings that bear further reflection while also offering some suggestions regarding future research directions.

Student wellbeing must be understood within social networks of power such as the family, school and community while also being sensitive to the long-term effects of politico-economic processes such as political unrest and wars, natural disasters, economic liberalisation, displacement, modernity etc. Structural inequalities and marginalisation due to caste, class, ethnicity, language usage, gender and sexual orientation must also be taken into consideration.

Analysing child rearing practices was central to understanding how children become socialised into hierarchical and patriarchal relationships while learning dispositions of *lajja-bhaya* or 'shame and fear of ridicule'. Hierarchical relationships between parents and children and teachers and children, as well as a dysfunctional educational system that is overly focused on studying for and passing examinations have been perceived as depriving adolescents from learning important life skills and coping mechanisms.

It is also crucial to understand how adolescents perceive continuums between life and death, the self and other and individualised and collective protest. The former two continuums have not yet been the focus of any research studies and would require explorations of how students learn and interpret religious concepts of karma and re-birth.

By focusing on 'adolescent or student suicide' as the subject of inquiry, many studies discussed in this chapter have missed the gendered, ethnic, class, caste and regional dimensions of this issue. Additionally, by studying an anomalous population - adolescents who self-harm - we lose sight of the broader category of adolescents of which they are a part. This is why this chapter has sought to consider a much broader swathe of scholarly literature that has focused on student wellbeing.

While the most useful research studies have been those that have sought to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, studies based on long-term, situated ethnographic research have been the most productive. These studies, though few, have been able to illuminate how adolescents are enmeshed in wider social networks of family, school, neighbourhood and nation while also providing fine-grained analyses of their everyday life. This is crucial towards providing a better understanding of the socialisation, psychic formation and worldview of adolescents more generally and adolescents who self-harm more specifically.

## Introduction

The primary focus of this study is the documentation and analysis of the scholarly literature on student wellbeing in Sri Lanka. Interest in student wellbeing has been increasing in light of mounting evidence that a large percentage of Sri Lanka's adolescent population is self-harming or attempting suicide with a significant proportion of such acts being fatal (Jayawardena 2014; Knipe et al. 2017a and 2017b; Ryder 2017 and Widger 2013).

An additional cause for concern is that the majority of those who are self-harming are young girls (de Alwis 2012; Jayawardena 2014; Knipe et al. 2017a; Marecek 2006; Marecek and Senadheera 2012; Ryder 2017; Senadheera et al. 2010; Senadheera 2013 and Senarathne 2013).

While special attention will be paid to scholarly work that addresses the relationship between student wellbeing and self-harm, literature on other aspects of student wellbeing will also be discussed if they are perceived as offering important insights on suicide/self-harm among students. This analysis will also draw on the views and opinions of a variety of stake holders with whom I have met during the past several months as well as observations I have made during twenty-five years of fieldwork conducted in Sri Lanka. Additionally, certain policy measures and lessons learned with regard to the prevention of suicide and self-harm, more broadly, will be analysed.

This chapter will begin by exploring some key concepts central to the study such as wellbeing, mental health, childhood/adolescence/youth, and suicide/self-harm. The second section will analyse a large corpus of scholarly work that have focused on a variety of risk factors unique to students who self-harm as well as certain forms of learned behaviour. The third section will discuss a selection of policy measures and their repercussions, the fourth section will reflect on lessons learned, and the fifth and concluding section will re-iterate some key arguments and offer some concluding thoughts.

An extensive bibliography is also provided at the end of this chapter. The scholarly work has been categorised under two main subject areas, Suicide and Students, with references for Students being further sub-divided according to various key categories such as substance abuse, suicide/self-harm, violence/abuse etc., to enable easy access.

## Section I: Key Terms and Concepts

Understanding key terms and concepts is a crucial component of this study as they provide important frameworks for the ideas and issues that are discussed here. They also help to ground and guide theoretical arguments.

### Wellbeing

The concept of 'wellbeing' is a relatively new term that slowly gained a foothold in Sri Lanka during three decades of civil war and in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami as scholars and practitioners sought to provide a conceptual framework through which the burgeoning psycho-social needs of war-affected and disaster-affected populations could be addressed.

Wellbeing is a "composite term" that "contains a range of meanings" (Abeyasekera et al. 2008: 11). Most simply, it refers to a person's "positive state of being" in terms of his/her "sense of health and wellness" and "feelings of happiness or general satisfaction with her/his quality of life" (Ibid). However, the feeling or experience of wellbeing cannot only be understood through a mere analysis of one's emotions as one's psychological state is also influenced and determined by one's social/cultural context and lived environment. This is a key reason for this term being preferred to 'mental health' which places an emphasis on the psychological (Nastasi and Jayasena 2014).

A perusal of the work of Nastasi et al. (1998, 2004, 2014) and Jayasena et al. (2016) shows the shift they have made from the usage of 'mental health' as a category, to 'wellbeing'. The latter study mobilises the 2001 definition of 'psychological wellbeing' introduced by the WHO: "[T]he state in which an individual is capable of being a positive, contributing member of his or her own society, while working toward his or her potential and adaptively coping with one's stressors" (quoted in Jayasena et al: 201). Abeyasekera et al. (2008: 11) refer to 'psychosocial wellbeing' to stress the inter-twining of the psychological with the social.

Note how the WHO definition stresses the active, agentive nature of wellbeing which requires one to work towards one's potential and coping abilities. The importance of "agency in achieving wellbeing" is also emphasised by Abeyasekera et al who note the need for active engagement with the following domains:

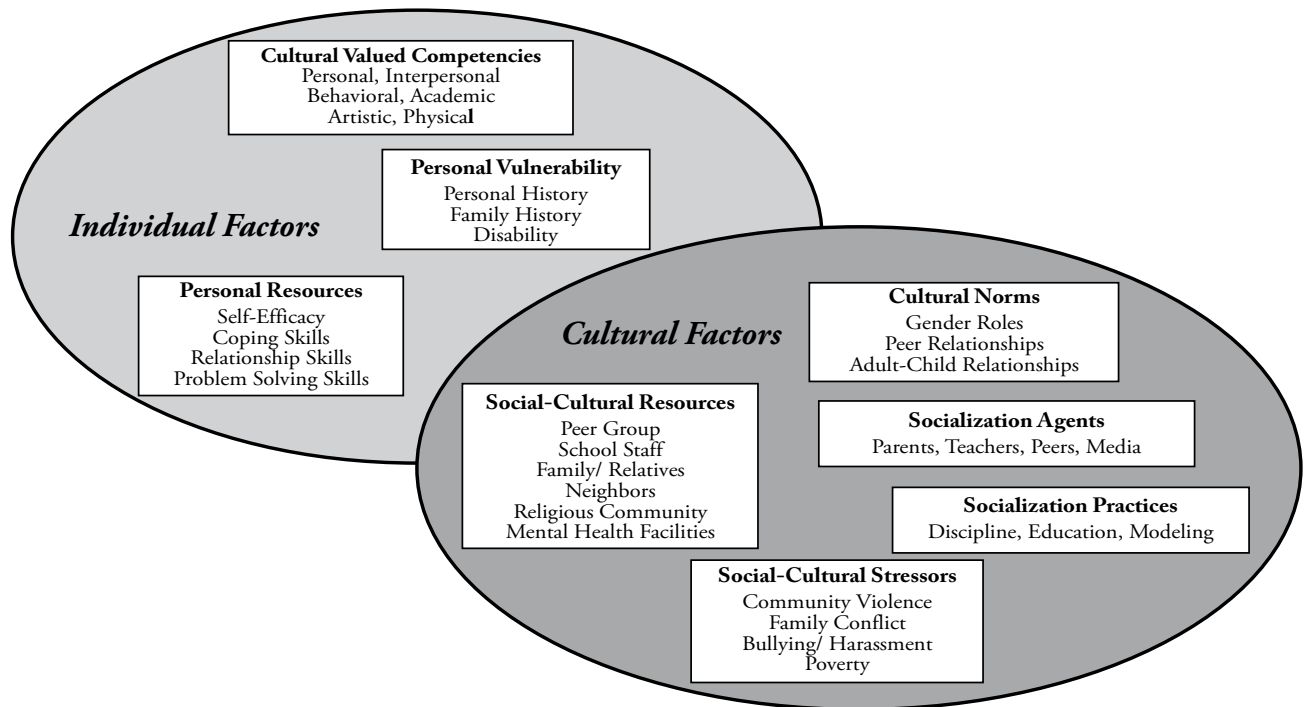
- (i) access physical, material and intellectual resources;
- (ii) experience competence and self-worth;
- (iii) exercise participation;
- (iv) build social connections; and
- (v) enhance physical and psychological wellness.

Abeyasekera et al. (2008: 13, emphasis in original)

Nonetheless, several research articles and reports discussed here continue to use the category of 'mental health' (Catani et al. 2008; Navodani 2017; Perera 2004; Rodrigo 2014; Senaratna 2007; Senaratna et al. 2007 and WHO 2017). Many studies have also used more specific terms such as 'depression,' 'suicide' and 'deliberate self-harm' (see below), 'psychological maladjustment' (de Zoysa et al 2010) and 'behavioural problems' (Athauda et al. 2000; Hewage et al. 2011; Prior et al. 2005 and Samarakkody et al. 2012) which clearly indicate their narrower focus. Jayasena et al. describe such studies as being "deficit based" as they zoom in on only "predominant adolescent adjustment difficulties" (2016: 205).

The interconnection and co-constitution of psychological/individual and socio-cultural/collective aspects is aptly captured in the following diagram (see Fig. 1) based on extensive research conducted among Sri Lankan students, from the mid 1990s onward (Nastasi et al. 1998, 2000, 2004, 2014).

Fig. 1: Conceptual model of wellbeing. Source: Nastasi and Jayasena (2014)



The individual and socio-cultural factors are explained in detail in Jayasena et al. (2016: 8-9):

## Individual Constructs

- Culturally valued competencies refer to personal characteristics, abilities, aptitudes, skills or behaviours that are valued in the culture, that is, valued by key socialisation agents (e.g., parents, teachers, peers) in the child's ecological system and/or the society.
- Personal vulnerability refers to the risk factors specific to the individual and reflected in personal or family history, for example, prior school failure, disability, or genetic predisposition to depression (as reflected in familial history of depression).
- Personal resources refer to the competencies or capacity of the individual that enable adaptation to the demands of the environment (ecological system) and facilitate coping with stressful situations.

## Cultural Constructs

- Social-cultural stressors refer to situational factors in the child's ecology that increase risk for psychological distress and related adjustment difficulties; these factors generally challenge the individual's existing coping abilities (personal resources).
- Social-cultural resources refer to the situational factors that serve as protective factors against stressors, facilitate coping and adaptation, and reduce the likelihood of developing adjustment problems.
- Cultural norms refer to the shared standards of behaviour within a particular group or cultural context that may influence personal development (e.g., gender norms).
- Socialisation agents refer to the significant stakeholders in the child's ecology who influence development and functioning, such as key individuals in the child's microsystems (e.g., parents, peers, and teachers).
- Socialisation practices refer to the methods used by socialisation agents to influence the child, for example, modeling, discipline strategies, teaching strategies.

Clearly, this framework offers a very broad canvas for a discussion of wellbeing among students. However, many of the scholarly work I discuss below rarely address all these factors due to the usage of a narrower lens. Some studies that do list many of these factors tend to miss/ignore their inter-connections due to the adoption of a quantitative methodology.

Finally, none of the work I discuss actively engages local notions of wellbeing though the unpublished study by Jayawardena and Thoradeniya (n.d.) which was commissioned by Abeyasekera et al who sought to “capture local understandings around wellbeing” within their framework (2008: 4). It is important to note that until new words were coined recently to translate ‘wellbeing’ into Sinhala and Tamil - yaha pavathma (S) and Nanmeikkaha (T)-Sinhala and Tamil terms addressed a much broader semantic field that encompassed mental equilibrium, spiritual contentment, economic security and the balancing of the three biological humours or life forces of vata, pitha and kapha commonly used in Ayurvedic discourses.

## Childhood/Schoolchildren/Adolescents/Youth

The variation in the usage of these terms is associated with specific population segments as well as certain worldviews and methodologies that are mobilised.

Childhood is the broadest category in usage in the literature discussed here and encompasses infancy to adulthood (Amarasuriya 2010; Chapin 2014). Thanks to the pioneering work of Phillipe Ariès (1962), notions of childhood are now understood to be both socially and historically specific. Ariès argued that ‘childhood’ was a relatively new concept that emerged in seventeenth century Europe concomitant with such developments as a decrease in infant mortality, increase in class stratification, changes in educational policies and the gradual withdrawal of the family from a wider web of social relations.

Ariès work has spawned the ever-growing field of Childhood Studies resulting in for example, explorations of how the concept of childhood has been globalised by policy makers (Boyden 1997), investigation of diverse cultural constructs of childhood (Behera 2014; Chapin 2014) and the recognition that children should be seen as actively “constructing and determining their social lives, the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live” (Prout and James 1997: 8).

During the war years, in Sri Lanka, the definition of a child and childhood was hotly contested by the LTTE who were often accused of forcibly conscripting children ([http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/bul28.htm#\\_Toc282123](http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/bul28.htm#_Toc282123), <http://www.island.lk/2004/01/23/news01.html>).

The LTTE’s frequent response was that they considered a child to be below eighteen years of age, not sixteen, as stipulated by UNICEF (<http://www.lankabusinessonline.com/tigers-slam-unicef-over-child-soldier-claims/>).

Psychiatrist Daya Somasunderam makes a very valid point when he observes that it is inadequate to merely condemn or prohibit the recruitment of children rather, “we need to ask why children join armies” (2002: 1268). Somasunderam offers a variety of ‘push and pull factors’ that draw children to the LTTE. Some of these aspects are discussed and complicated in arrested suicide bomber Menake’s interview with Jan Goodwin (2007), former child soldier Niromi de Soyza’s memoir (2011), the posthumous publication of nineteen-year-old LTTE-er Malavaran’s diary (2013) and the observations of anthropologist Margaret Trawick (2007).

The term, ‘school children’ (Catani et al 2010; de Zoysa 2006, de Zoysa et al. 2010; Hamaththagama 2016; Hamilton et al. 2016; Kanakarathna 2018; Katulanda et al. 2015 and Rupasinghe et al. 2010) clearly encompasses those enrolled in school and would thus be synonymous with ‘students’, the term used in this chapter (see also Hewamalage 2010).

The terms ‘adolescence’, ‘adolescents’ and ‘youth’ are broader categories that encompass both school-going and non-school-going populations (Navodani 2017; Pathirana 2016; Perera 2005; Rodrigo 2014a; 2014b; Senadheera et al., Silva and Pushpakumara 1996; UNICEF 2004). However, Perera (2004), Rodrigo et al. (2010), Wilkes et al. (1998) and World Health Organisation (2017) focus on adolescents who attend school.

The World Health Organisation, in its study of Mental Health Status of Adolescents in South-East Asia (2017), describes adolescence as the transition phase from ‘child’ to ‘adult’ which extends between 10 and 19 years of age. It further notes that these are “formative as well as impressionable years when substantial physical, psychological and behavioural changes takes place” (Ibid: 1, see also Caldwell et al 1998).

Adolescents constitute an important social and demographic group accounting for almost 7.9% of the total population of Sri Lanka (World Health Organisation 2017: 41). However, this statistic is compiled from the age group 13-17 years based on the latest data collected via the Global School-based Health Survey which was conducted in 3,157 schools (Ibid: 44). The term ‘teenager’ has often been used synonymously with ‘adolescents’ as in Dissanayake (2009), Wijeratne et al (2014a and 2014b) and Warushahennadi (2017).

UNESCO describes ‘youth’ as a fluid category that cannot be associated with a fixed age group (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/>

youth/youth-definition/). However, due to the need “for statistical consistency across regions”, the UN defines youth “as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years” (Ibid).

Rodrigo (2014a) notes that in Sri Lanka, those falling between the ages of 15 and 29 years are defined as youth who constitute approximately 26% of the population. Youth populations are the “future contributors of economic development to the country”, notes Rodrigo, hence “it is important that their needs are met and ensured by government development policies in all sectors” (2014a: 19). Jayasena et al. mobilise the category of ‘youth’ to encompass pre-adolescents and adolescents (2016: 201).

Interestingly, ‘youth’ interests are represented by the Ministry of Youth Affairs as opposed to those of ‘children’ who come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Child Development and Women’s Empowerment (2006). The most recent incarnation of the latter ministry is labeled Women and Child Affairs (2015).

## Suicide/Self-Harm

‘Suicide’ is a term that is usually used to refer to a death “that is deliberate and self-inflicted” while the term ‘self-harm’ refers to acts of deliberate harm to one’s body (Marecek 2006: 67). The phrases ‘suicide attempt’ and ‘attempted suicide’ are now avoided as much as possible because “they presume that the act of self-harm was intended to lead to death” which may or may not be the case (Ibid).

Indeed, self-harm, even when it leads to death, has many possible motives. Moreover, the term ‘suicide attempt’, Marecek importantly notes, “inadvertently implies that individuals who survive an act of self-harm have failed and those who die have succeeded, an implication to avoid” (Ibid).

Many of the scholarly work discussed below make a clear distinction between suicide deaths and survived acts of self-harm. This is also reflected in the statistical accounting that usually precedes any analysis of these acts. It is therefore crucial to keep in mind that “we cannot impute motives on basis of outcome. Those who die may not have intended to die and those who survive may not have intended to survive” (Marecek 2006: 68).

## Section II: Students and Wellbeing

As noted in Section I, ‘wellbeing’ is a complex term that encompasses many dimensions of psycho-social life. In this section, I will discuss several different dimensions

of wellbeing that have been addressed in the scholarly literature on Sri Lankan students with particular emphasis being paid to dimensions that are perceived as influencing suicide/self-harm among students.

## Suicide and Self-harm

Suicide and self-harm are topics that have been long debated in Sri Lanka, particularly after Sri Lanka was listed as having the highest suicide rate in the world, in 1995. While the suicide rate has decreased significantly due to the government imposing a ban on the import of lethal pesticides and herbicides as well as improving emergency medical services in rural areas (Gunnell et al. 2007; Pearson et al. 2013; Widger 2013), the rate of self-harm, especially among adolescents, has increased at an alarming rate. Additionally, more young girls than boys are self-harming.

In previous work (de Alwis 2012), I emphasised the inadequacy of providing overarching, mono-causal explanations and stressed instead that we should seek to understand suicide/self-harm in conjunction with broader social phenomena within the country such as political conflict, displacement and re-settlement, economic liberalisation and land alienation, urbanisation, and constraining kin and other social networks.

I will not re-hash those arguments here but do wish to point to how even the most hegemonic work on this subject to date, Emile Durkheim’s *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1951) can enable contradictory readings depending on which Sri Lankan social segment, social phenomenon and angle of argument one seeks to mobilise.

For example, Durkheim’s categorisation of ‘anomic suicide’ could be applied to high rates of suicide among re-settled populations that “lack binding rules of behaviour” and “regulatory mechanisms needed for orderly social life” (Silva and Pushpa Kumara quoted in de Alwis 2012: 36). Whereas, a complete inversion of this same argument could be applied to many young women, lower status men and adolescents who self-harm through the categorisation of ‘altruistic suicide’ - when the integration of the individual and the group is so close and intimate that “suicide may occur for seemingly trivial causes” (Straus and Straus quoted in de Alwis 2012: 35).

It is the latter category of suicide and self-harm that has most often and variously been described as a “cry for help,” an “attempt to gain sympathy,” an “expression of personal distress,” “despair over loss of face,” a “venting of frustration or helplessness,” a “desire for revenge or redress,” an “alarm signal,” or a way of saying “you haven’t heard me.” I preferred to view them as a “form of protest



against everyday social strictures and pressures” within patriarchal and hierarchical households and kin networks (Ibid: 47-8).

Marecek (2006) refers to such suicides and self-harming acts as being ‘dialogic’ as they seek to communicate with others and presumably receive a response in turn. This is why acts of suicide and self-harm often take place in the presence of others with the suicidee/self-harmer actively seeking out the person s/he seeks to blame/punish/scare/change, on most occasions, before consuming poison (Ibid, de Alwis 2012). Jonathan Spencer quite rightly refers to this aspect as the “perils of affective excess in personal relations” (1990b: 186).

Marecek (2006) notes that dialogic suicides were viewed as ‘good’ suicides by Sinhala medical students whose opinions she canvassed. They rated such deaths to be more brave, understandable and morally justified. Widger (2013) sought to make a distinction between such dialogic acts which he described as ‘protest suicides’ and ‘withdrawal suicides’ where the act takes place in isolation and doesn’t seek to lay blame. The latter acts, he noted are less talked about within the community.

I concluded my previous article (de Alwis 2012) by sharing some reflections on how we might think about suicide and self-harm from an even broader, philosophical perspective. My first point was that the Sri Lankan self must be understood as “co-constituted within a powerful, dynamic and complex web of kin and other social relationships” (p. 48). So much so, that “one’s intimates are perceived as extensions of one’s self so that harming oneself is tantamount to harming them; they must watch you suffer, they must bear the moral burden” (Ibid, see also Blumör n.d: 15). This is also a form of “karmic entrapment” observes Spencer (1990a) as one’s relatives are not only made to suffer for the hurt they have caused you but they now must also bear an awful karmic burden, which has a bearing on their future lives, for being the cause of your death.

My second point was that much more serious thought should be given to Buddhist and Hindu beliefs in rebirth and karma - the effects of a person’s actions which determine her/his next incarnation - which facilitate the thinking that “one can put an end to one’s life and not regard it as the final step” (Bolz quoted in de Alwis 2012: 49). The possibility of future lives, I would argue, outweigh the fact that suicide is considered to be a ‘sinful’ act. In fact, Widger categorically states that “suicide is not regarded as much of a sin and any de-merit (pav) accrued can be removed during merit-giving (pin denava) ceremonies” (2013: 21). Many Buddhists - of varying ages and classes in several regions of Sri Lanka - with whom I discussed this issue often disagreed with Widger’s assertions but the opinions they offered in turn also diverged greatly thus

making it clear that suicide and its karmic consequences were open to multiple interpretations.

Indeed, there is, notes Widger, “a widespread acceptance that both young and old people suffering from incurable illnesses including those who are not terminally ill, might ‘legitimately’ kill themselves in order to be reborn a healthy person” (2013: 21). I have encountered similar sentiments being expressed when an individual has suffered great personal loss, for example, a mother losing her children. That she would wish to kill herself is perceived as acceptable as this is an un-bearable loss but tied to this acceptance is also the hope that she can be re-united with her children in a future birth. A common sentiment expressed when a compatible marriage ends in the natural or accidental death of a spouse is also ‘may you be a couple in future births as well.’ Similarly, if a couple is deeply in love they would often express that love by commenting that they must have been a couple in previous births as well. Such motifs are reiterated in romantic Sinhala songs, novels and movies as well.

Thus, a continuum between life and death, is mirrored by a continuum between the self and the (intimate) other. The third continuum I sought to posit was between individualised protest and political protest. I would like to position my discussion of suicide and self-harm among students within these three over-arching continuums.

# Suicide and Self-harm among Students

As noted above, adolescence, which encompasses the years ten to nineteen, is perceived as being “formative as well as impressionable years when substantial physical, psychological and behavioural changes takes place” (UNICEF 2004: 1). Child advocates in Sri Lanka too argue that teenagers are “extra defensive or aggressive, and quick to react” because they are particularly vulnerable to “dramatic biological and psychological changes” (Jagath Wellawatte, Chairman, National Child Protection Authority quoted in Dissanayake 2009).<sup>41</sup>

It is this vulnerability and volatility that also translates to increased incidents of self-harm among this population, notes Wellawatte (Ibid). Not surprisingly, this concern is also reflected in the majority of scholarly work on suicide among youth which focus on adolescents of school-going age. However, I will also briefly discuss some important insights offered about pre-schoolers and those below ten years who also seek to self-harm.

Many of the research studies on suicide and self-harm and wellbeing in more general, among adolescents, have pointed to multiple stressors and risk factors that are unique to this population: (1) National examinations (2) Romantic relationships (3) Corporal punishment and humiliation in school (4) Family problems, conflicts and insecurities (5) Addiction to soap operas and social media and (6) Substance abuse. The implications for students, of each of these factors, will be discussed next though it must be kept in mind that many of these factors are also inter-related.

## (1) National examinations

As Rüdiger Blumör, has aptly noted, “competitiveness and exam-orientation in schools” are two key characteristics of the education system in Sri Lanka; the limited opportunities for higher education causes excessive competition within the school system starting as early as kindergarten and pre-school (n.d.: 17). It is thus not surprising that the National Survey on Emerging Issues among Adolescents in Sri Lanka, published by UNICEF, notes that fear of failing examinations was the most commonly cited worry among school-going adolescents (2004: no pagination).

Sri Lankan students sit for three highly competitive national examinations, in their lifetime. At the tender age of ten years, they sit for the Grade 5 Scholarship exam. If they procure high marks at this exam, they have the opportunity to win scholarships to prestigious schools in Colombo or failing that, other key towns in the country. At sixteen years, they sit for the General Certificate of Education (G.C.E), Ordinary Level, or O’Level. Depending on how well they fare in this exam, they can

opt to continue their education in the Science, Arts or Commerce streams. Those who fail this exam either try to re-sit it or drop out of school. Those who pass the O’Levels get to sit the General Certificate of Education, Advanced Level or A’Level, usually at the age of eighteen years. Entrance to a government university and the discipline one seeks to study at university level, are determined by how well you fare in this exam.

E. A. R. Perera, who conducted her doctoral research among youthful suicide survivors at the Homagama hospital discovered that suicides among youth increased the most at the age of 17 years (17.7% of her sample).<sup>42</sup> This is the age, she argues, which coincides with when O’ Level results are released. Indeed, out of Perera’s sample of 124 youth who had self-harmed, 66.6% had failed their O’ Levels (2005: 117).

Such a correlation is not to be found in any of the other studies that were consulted though newspaper reports sometime do make this connection. For example, in May 2010 it was reported that a seventeen-year-old schoolgirl in Pussellawa set herself on fire because she realised her O’Level results were inadequate to get her into the A’Level science stream (Sunday Leader, May 2nd 2010). On March 27th 2012, the Daily Mirror reported that an eighteen-year-old girl in Norwood had hung herself because she had failed her O’Levels for the second time while a seventeen-year-old girl in Kalutara had attempted to take an overdose of medication as she had not procured the desired results. Hiru News reported on August 9th 2015 that an eighteen-year-old girl in Vavuniya had jumped into a well because her school principal had refused to hand her an A’Level application form thus foiling her chances to sit for the exam.

Many studies on Sri Lankan adolescents have noted that most students interviewed or surveyed did confess to ‘examination pressure’ (Rodrigo et al 2010), an aspect that will also be discussed in the policy section. Tharindi Udalgama who researched Facebook usage among Sri Lankan youth shares a revealing comment made by one of her respondents who was attempting to pass his A’Levels for the second time: “Facebook helps me to forget the terrible stress of A/Ls. When I log in, it is a different world. It keeps me away from studies” (quoted in Udalgama 2012/2013: 23).

An education system that excessively focuses on examinations also has other repercussions such as students not having opportunities for critical analysis, independent research and forming their own opinions as well as pursuing hobbies, learning basic life skills and coping mechanisms (Blumör n.d, Jayasena et al. 2016; Nastasi et al. 2014; Perera 2004; Senarathne 2013).

## (2) Romantic relationships

Clearly, romantic relationships are not only the preserve of adolescents. However, it is often the case that one's first romantic relationship takes place when one is an adolescent and the consequences of that can be far reaching particularly if it leads to family conflict, teasing or shaming in school or results in a break up.

Abeyasinghe (1997) and de Silva et al. (2000) point out that these kinds of scenarios associated with romantic relationships were the second most frequent cause of suicide among youth. Athukorale (2003) notes such a correlation with 84% of young girls self-harming due to broken relationships. Perera (2005) cites 74% of young girls in her sample as acknowledging that the break-up of a romantic relationship was the cause for self-harm.

Abeyasekera and Marecek (forthcoming), Marecek et al. (2012); Senadheera (2013) and Senadheera et al. (2010) note that many instances of self-harm though directed at a parent was precipitated by the discovery of what was perceived as a breach of sexual propriety on the girl's part and the presumption that she was involved in a romantic liaison. For example, a neighbour had informed the girl's parents about a supposed romantic liaison; parents or elder siblings had checked a girl's cell phone register and discovered calls from an unknown party; or a mother's suspicions were aroused when her daughter's return from school was delayed.

Rupasinghe et al. (2006) share two case studies from Moneragala district where romantic relationships have led the students into complicated scenarios that also involved their families resulting in them being caught in a difficult bind. The first case study was of a fifteen-year-old schoolgirl, Seetha, from an economically prosperous family who was in love with a poor school drop-out. Her parents were against the affair and it seems so was the boy's mother who came to the girl's home and scolded her blaming her parents for encouraging this affair, resulting in Seetha ingesting pesticides. Fortunately, she survived as her parents rushed her to hospital. Seetha confessed that the reason for self-harming was due to her parent's losing status in the village because she was scolded by a poor, lower class woman (p. 31). In the second case study, an eighteen-year-old boy, Nimal, committed suicide because his father was constantly chastising him for having a love affair with an older relative whose sisters were believed to be in an incestuous relationship with their father (p. 41).

Romantic relationships or the more common term, 'love affairs,' have also precipitated suicides when teachers or school principals have admonished or even slapped promising female students for having boyfriends, confiscated love letters or their peers have teased them for

being in a relationship.<sup>43</sup> Other times, such relationships have been merely imputed because the girl has been seen with a boy (often her brother or a relative) or posted a photograph of herself with one (see also Blumör and Licht 2018). The most discussed case, via the press and social media, in this regard, occurred in February 2014 when fifteen-year-old Venusha Imandi Bandara from Kurunegala hung herself because she was caned by her school principal for posting photographs of herself with a boy, on Facebook, a fact which she repeatedly disputed.

In her suicide note, Venusha also mentions how she was also still struggling to forget how she has been humiliated before 5,000 of her peers, a few months previously, when the principal had called her onto the stage during school assembly and labelled her a wesi (prostitute) for going to see a film with a boy when in actuality Venusha had gone to the movie theatre with her sisters and a neighbouring family (Kannangara 2014).

## (3) Corporal punishment and humiliation in school

Corporal punishment is defined as any punishment in which physical force is used with the intention of causing some degree of pain or discomfort. It is often supplemented with forms of non-physical punishment that are also cruel and degrading such as belittling, humiliating, ridiculing, denigrating, threatening, frightening or makes the child a scapegoat (Karunaratne 2018).

The incident mentioned above has already introduced the risk factor of corporal punishment and humiliation in school. A recent study has confirmed that the most common reasons for corporal punishment and psychological harassment were "non-completion of homework, not adhering to the school dress code, and love affairs" (de Silva et al 2017: 3). The comprehensive study by de Silva et al (2017) which was based on interviews with 949 students and 459 teachers from a variety of different districts in Sri Lanka revealed that 80.4% of students had reported having experienced at least one episode of corporal punishment during that school term.

De Silva et al (2017) also noted that 53.2% students had been subjected to physical punishment and 72.5% of students reported at least one form of psychological intimidation during the term. Further, 69.1% teachers admitted to using at least one form of corporal punishment with 13.1% reporting the use of at least one form of physical punishment and 65.8% reporting the use of psychological aggression (Ibid: 3). It was particularly troubling to discover that students appeared to "tolerate corporal punishment, possibly even at abusive levels, if it

[was] done by teachers whom they viewed were skilled in teaching” (Ibid, see also Blumör and Licht 2018). Their parents too did not complain against such teachers (Ibid). Further, Buddhist teachers reported using more corporal punishment than Hindu and Muslim teachers (Ibid: 60) and Muslim students reported significantly less physical abuse than Sinhala or Tamil students (Ibid: 65).

The previous government’s introduction of compulsory military training for school principals (thankfully, no longer in effect) in order to make them better leaders and disciplinarians has also increased the usage and virulence of corporal punishment in schools. As a leading educationist (who wished to remain anonymous) observed with regard to the humiliation and caning of Venusha Imandi Bandara: “This is the mentality the principals who have undergone the introductory training courses conducted by the National Cadet Corp have...Some of those with low attitude who have gone through this training course think that they are military officers and try to implement military rules in schools” (quoted in Kannangara 2014). When asked to comment on this incident, Deputy Minister of Education, Mohan Lal Gero noted that corporal punishment has been banned in schools and “no teacher or student is allowed to assault a student” (quoted in Kannangara 2014). However, this is far from the reality and most schools continue to use corporal punishment (this will be discussed further in the Policy section).

Corporal punishment has received close scrutiny due to concerns regarding how it affects student wellbeing as well as the fact that it encourages students to assume aggression and violence is acceptable thus producing future abusers (de Silva et al. 2017; de Zoysa et al. 2010; Karunaratne and Chinthaka 2012; Karunaratne et al. 2012; Karunaratne 2018; Lakshman 2018; Lucas 2014; Mahanamahewa 2014). Several research studies have also linked it with increased in peer violence (Hewamalage 2010; Ramanayake 2018; Wijeratne et al. 2014a, 2014b and 2015). A troubling correlate discovered in many of these studies as well as two studies which focused on aggression among pre-schoolers (Athauda et al. 2000; Pathirana 2016) was that the absence of mothers, due to them being employed abroad, significantly increased aggression among the children they left behind. Many studies that have focused on various other aspects of psycho-social wellbeing of ‘left behind’ children are listed as a sub-section of the bibliography and speaks to a larger national preoccupation which will be discussed in the policy section.

Clearly, corporal punishment doesn’t only occur in schools but within the home as well where such forms of abuse is often hidden unless serious injuries or even fatalities occur (Chandrasiri et al. 1998; de Silva 2000; de Zoysa 2006; de Zoysa et al. 2008; Mahendrarajah et al. 1993). However, de Silva et al. (2017) note that physical

abuse at home is much less than at school (p 58). Catani et al. (2008 and 2010) as well as Sriskandarajah et al. (2015a) have observed that parents traumatised by war and natural disasters are more prone to alcoholism and physically abusing their children.

Other forms of abuse such as sexual harassment, rape and incest also affect the psycho-social wellbeing of children but they continue to be hidden issues that are sensationalised by the media, from time to time, but rarely prosecuted (de Silva 2000; Ranasinghe et al. 2016). However, I could not locate any research studies that had specifically focused on their association with the psycho-social wellbeing of students in Sri Lanka though it has been confirmed that this is a population segment that is greatly affected by such abuses (de Zoysa 2002; UNICEF 2004).

One study conducted among 1322 undergraduates did indicate that 44% of the sample had experienced some form of sexual abuse and 36% had been physically maltreated during childhood (Fernando et al 2000). Ranil Thillekeratne, Manager of the suicide prevention helpline, CCCLine on 1333, acknowledged that they receive approximately 120 calls a day, 60% of them from young girls aged between 12-25 years (Ryder 2017). Most conversations, he noted, revolve around romantic relationships, sexual abuse and bullying (Ibid). Sexual harassment and abuse through social media will be discussed below.

Psychological harassment in the form of humiliation, teasing and bullying is rampant in schools and much more difficult to research and study as it is not only more subtle and hidden but is frequently normalised and is a central component of everyday interactions among students as well as teachers and students. Students have been humiliated and teased because of their poverty, lower caste and class status, supposed sexual promiscuity or lack of it, disability, sexual orientation, body shape or colour, for supposedly contracting STDs or AIDs, lack of a parent or a parent’s behaviour etc.

Often times, students have referred to verbal insults and slights as being more injurious than physical assault and corporal punishment (personal communication, see also Blumör and Licht 2018). In her suicide letter, mentioned above, Venusha Imandi Bandara dwelt much more on her public humiliation before her entire school, than the private caning she received from her principal (Kannangara 2014).

#### **(4) Family problems, conflicts and insecurities**

E. A. R. Perera notes that family conflicts were the number one cause of suicide among adolescents. Similar arguments have also been made by Abeysinghe (1997) and de Silva et al (2000) while Keerthisinghe (2003) has observed that 92% of his sample did not share healthy communications within the family. Family problems and insecurities appear as a predominant risk factor in most of the other studies of suicide and self-harm among adolescents as well (see for example, Perera 2005; Marecek and Senadheera 2012; Rupasinghe et al. 2006; Senadheera 2013; Senadheera et al. 2010; WHO 2017).

Family problems, conflicts and insecurities could vary from war trauma and poverty that affects the entire family to lack of communication between parents and children and/or among siblings, conflicts with the mother or father, lack of parental supervision and nurture particularly due to the mother working overseas, domestic violence within the home, father's alcoholism, sexual abuse, parent's separation/divorce/re-marriage etc. (de Silva et al. 2000; Keerthisinghe 2003; Perera 2005; Rupasinghe et al. 2006; WHO 2017).

A study by Pathirana (2016) found that girls experienced excessive parental control if they were in a romantic relationship resulting in them becoming more distant from their parents. Most of the episodes of self-harm analysed by Marecek and Senadheera (2012) and discussed above also involved accusations and disputes regarding the sexual comportment of girls which clearly points to how women, especially young girls, chafe against patriarchal, familial and cultural norms. A broader discussion of such gendered and hierarchical family structures will be offered in Section IV.

Nonetheless, the UNICEF study (2004) found that 75% of adolescents thought they could depend on their families and admitted they would love to spend time with them. "Mothers were identified as the most trusted and liked personal confidantes of adolescents irrespective of age and sex and socio-economic status" (Ibid: no pagination). However, a "significant proportion" of adolescents also confessed to having "constrained relationships with their families" (Ibid). Sriskandarajah et al (2015b) found that parental care has been crucial in protecting war-traumatised children (aged seven to eleven) in the Northern Province, from internalising behavioural problems (p. 2).

#### **(5) Addiction to soap operas and social media**

Addiction to South Indian soap operas by students in the Northern Province is an anxiety that is constantly expressed by parents, teachers and counsellors whom I have met since the civil war was ended in 2009. The primary reasons for such anxiety were expressed in terms of concern that (1) extensive consumerism was being encouraged (especially a desire for the latest brand of mobile phone and motorcycle) through these dramas as well as the advertisements that accompanied these dramas and (2) that children were being encouraged to have false, fantastical expectations regarding romantic relationships. Many of the female protagonists in such dramas were also very quick to resort to suicide if their love was thwarted or rejected. Correlation of soap opera viewing and suicides among young Tamil women are currently only anecdotal.<sup>44</sup>

The watching of North Indian teledramas dubbed in Sinhala in other parts of the country have also been addressed on Sinhala social media and in newspaper reports that have described them as a "danger to Sri Lankan culture" as they promote violence against women; they encourage families who have recalcitrant young wives or who are dissatisfied with the dowries they have received, to force these women to kill themselves (Gunatilleke 2007; Kumudu and Priyadarshani 2008).

However, with the proliferation of smart phones which offer quick and easy access to the internet, the greater danger to students, nationwide, is now perceived to be the lure and addiction of social media (ColomboPage 2014; de Costa 2018; de Silva and Peliarachchi 2008; Weerasundera 2014; Wijekoon 2017). Brad Huddleston recently coined the term "digital cocaine" to describe the various digital technologies that lure and pre-occupy both adults and adolescents during most of their waking hours (quoted in Fernando 2018).

There is now convincing data that social media increases the risk of exposure of adolescents to pornography, cyber-bullying and unwanted sexual solicitation (Groundviews et al. 2018; Ryder 2014; Weerasundera 2014; Wickramatunga and Tennekoon 2018). They also run the risk of being targets of hate speech (de Costa 2018), of being increasingly alienated from their families (Udalagama 2012/2013; Wijekoon 2017) and having lower motivational levels (Wijekoon 2017).

Public discussion on adolescent usage of social media increased exponentially with the suicide of two young girls in February 2014. The death of a nineteen-year-old female student from Elpitiya was believed to have been connected to a Facebook entry about her while the death of a fifteen-year-old female student from Kurunegala was

linked to her being reprimanded by her principal for a Facebook photograph (ColomboPage 2014, the latter incident has been discussed in further detail under risk factor #2). As psychiatrist Weerasundera has pointed out, in a conservative country like Sri Lanka, “any fallout as a result of interactions with social media, especially if they were to be of an intimate nature, is perceived as public humiliation. This is the context that drives users towards self-harm” (2014: 2).

According to the Grassrooted Trust, which focuses on sexual health and sexually marginalised communities, they were approached by 70 young girls from different schools in Colombo, in 2014 alone, who reported being blackmailed over nude pictures and videos they had shared with their boyfriends (Ryder 2014). These images and videos were being used as leverage for money or sex, in return for not publicly shaming the girls. The blackmailers were threatening to publish the content online and/or send to family/community members. There was also the threat that once their images and videos were online, they could also appear on porn websites (Ibid). As the founder of Grassrooted Trust observed: “Cyber exploitation is a clear reflection of how we continue to routinely objectify and sexualise women and girls in Sri Lanka. It speaks of male entitlement over women” (quoted in Ibid).

## **(6) Substance abuse**

No correlation has been found between substance abuse and suicide (see for example, WHO 2017) but the possibility of such a correlation along with its more general, deleterious effect on student wellbeing, continues to be a source of great anxiety for parents, teachers and counsellors in the Northern, Central and Western Provinces (personal communication).

Studies have indicated that substance abuse is particularly high among adolescents living in former conflict zones (Jayawardena 2014) and its ingestion is mainly due to peer pressure and the desire for peer acceptance (Chathuranga 2013; Hemaththagama 2016; Katulanda et al. 2015 and Liyanage et al. 2013). A recent newspaper article quoted a senior official at the Police Narcotic Bureau as acknowledging that most of their cases involved “suspects who had failed the GCE O/L exams” and dropped out of school as a result (Ismail 2018).

# Learning Suicide

Now that we have a sense of what is considered some of the key risk factors unique to students and have also been apprised of the scholarly research that has contributed to our understanding of such associations, it would be helpful to also consider certain learned suicidal behaviour that seem unique to students who self-harm. I am deliberately using the term 'learning' here, pace Widger (2010), because I think it is important for us to understand the broader contexts and environments within which adolescent suicide and self-harm takes place. These contexts, I would argue, are 'learning environments' for practices of self-harm in Sri Lanka. I will discuss this nexus of behaviour and environment under three themes: (1) Exposure to Suicidal Behaviour and Suicide Play (2) Cluster Suicides and (3) War and Political Conflict.

## (1) Exposure to Suicidal Behaviour and Suicide Play

I have written previously (de Alwis 2012) of the 'cycle of knowing and doing' (Jeganathan 2006) within which the self-harming individual is often enfolded- a young boy or girl who knows others who have self-harmed or killed themselves, I observed, is more prone to self-harm. About 68% of the self-harming girls, whom Marecek and Senadheera (2012) interviewed, were acquainted with one or more persons who had engaged in self-harm (see also Athukorale 2003; Eddleston et al. 1998; Perera 2005; Rupasinghe et al. 2006; Thalagala 2000; Widger 2015a, 2015b).

Tom Widger (2015) reports that suicides occurred on a monthly basis, in the Puttalam district where he was conducting research, while acts of self-harm occurred on a weekly basis and suicide threats were part of everyday discourse. This is often how suicide becomes normalised among children, adults and society at large. Rupasinghe et al note that local schoolchildren in the Moneragala District gleefully informed them that their villages were famous for two things, ganja farming and suicide (2006: 30). These children were also privy to conversations among adults about suicide (usually through the ingestion of pesticide) as the "ultimate solution" to escape their problems and suffering with regard to "broken love affairs, loss of harvest, family and social conflicts" (Ibid). So, it was not surprising if the children chose a similar route out of their own problems.

Widger (2010 and 2015a) argues that the choice of suicide method is also socially significant. In Sri Lanka, self-harming through self-poisoning is what has become "cognitively available" (2015a: 4). A "cognitive schemata of poison" or a "poison complex" - a core pattern of linguistic, emotional, social, and spatial practices clustered

around poisonous substances - develops from childhood and "is a necessary condition for suicide schemata" (Widger 2015a: 4).

Such schemata are chillingly well illustrated in Widger's descriptions of 'suicide play' among children between the ages of four and seven, in Madampe, a village in the North-Western Province where he was conducting research:

...in several cases the children had mixed kanēru seeds [yellow oleander, *Thevetia peruviana*] with water and sugar as 'the correct way to prepare kanēru.' Then, children had subsequently gone on to tell a parent or older sibling what they had done, in much the same way as adult self-poisoners do when they wish to lay the blame for their actions on a specific third party. Reflecting adults' narratives, both girls and boys told me that the point of suicide was to make somebody who had shamed them feel 'afraid' (baya), so [as] to affect a change [in] their beliefs or behaviours (p.19).

...two children - a boy and a girl aged eight and seven years respectively - had apparently been playing 'families,' during which the father came home drunk and shouted at mother; following this the children adopted the roles of the parents' children who then swallowed kanēru to stop them fighting. Equally, a common cause of young women's self-harm in Madampe was the violent abuse of the mother by the father, wherein the daughter swallowed poison to express solidarity with the mother. In these examples, children were clearly engaging in kinds of suicide play that explored the contexts of older teenagers' suicidal practices (Widger 2015a: 19).

The seemingly contradictory stance adopted by young girls who had self-harmed, in the hospital study conducted by Marecek and Senadheera (2012), could also be interpreted as a kind of complicated play that seeks to re-negotiate their circumscribed social positioning within their families: "By portraying themselves as not knowing their own thoughts, as unable to account for their actions, as not having an intention to hurt others, girls could re-position themselves as modest, docile, obedient daughters" (Ibid: 74). Marecek and Senadheera interpret this behaviour as "identity repair" (Ibid).

## (2) Cluster Suicides

In 1980, two schoolgirls in the Northern Province died after ingesting yellow oleander (*Thevetia peruviana*) seeds. There had been no reports of this form of poisoning previously (Ganeshamoorthy 1985: 9). In the following year, 23 cases of yellow oleander poisoning were admitted to the Jaffna Hospital, presumably spurred on by the media publicity received by the first two cases (Ibid).

There were 46 cases reported in 1982 and 103 in 1983. By the end of the decade, hundreds of cases were being admitted to hospitals island-wide (Widger 2013). Suicide by ingesting yellow oleander seeds remains a major cause of fatality among young people in particular.

According to Romeo Vitelli (2012), while copycat suicides are not as common as feared, the existence of “suicide clusters” is more prevalent and most commonly seen in those under 25-years of age or younger. A 1987 study of youth suicide by the Centres for Disease Control, found that 1-5% of suicides worldwide occur in suicide clusters (Ibid). Other high-risk groups include minority groups experiencing economic or cultural discrimination, soldiers, prison inmates and psychiatric in-patients (Ibid).

A second suicide cluster occurred in Sri Lanka in July-August 2009 when six students self-harmed within the space of two weeks resulting in two fatalities (de Alwis 2012; Dissanayake 2009). All six were schoolchildren while three were from the same school. The original incident of suicide was precipitated by the supposed discovery of pornography on the student’s mobile phone, a banned item in her school. This cluster engendered an extremely heated debate in the print, electronic and social media as the first three incidents took place at a prestigious Buddhist girls’ school in one of the wealthiest neighbourhoods of Colombo (see also Lye 2009; Mathews 2009; Mohammed 2009; Paranamanna 2009; Perera 2010).

Vitelli (2012) notes that suicide clusters are primarily prevalent among youth because “the suicide of a friend or age peer is often a traumatic experience for adolescents... the death of one teen might influence other teens feeling suicidal.” Media influences, including the suicide of a well-known celebrity or personal idol, known as the Werther effect, can have similar influences on adolescents (Ibid). Anniversaries of such events or of other traumatic events can also trigger further suicides (Ibid).

### **(3) War and Political Conflict**

War and political conflicts have a devastating effect on all those who experience them but young populations who have not as yet developed skills to cope with such situations become particularly vulnerable and traumatised. Witnessing the death of loved ones and the destruction of one’s home, constant displacement, shelling and military presence can have long-lasting psycho-social effects (Somasunderam 1998).

Tudor Silva argues that the sharp rise in suicide rates in Sri Lanka concomitant with political violence points to a possible correlation between the two figures, despite the “conventional view” that suicides decline in times of war

(Silva 1993: 5). Indeed, suicide and armed conflict “are related manifestations of an escalating social stress” argues Silva, pointing to a marked rise in suicides since the late 1960s which was precipitated by the JVP youth uprising in 1971 and a similar upsurge since 1979 coinciding with the escalation of political violence in the north and east, due to the ethnic conflict, and in the south, due to a second JVP uprising (Ibid). This is further substantiated with the highest suicide rate being among the “politically volatile 20–24 age group” (Ibid). Silva thus points to a certain affinity between political violence and suicide as they both contain an element of protest (Ibid).

Silva expands his contextual framework of suicide to consider a variety of political discourses and practices - exemplified by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Sri Lankan military and the Sinhala nationalist youth movement, JVP - which have all mobilised this category. While the LTTE is considered the ultimate exponent of ‘suicidal politics’, the military is expected to display a similar commitment to suicidal self-sacrifice with those dying such ‘heroic’ deaths being greatly feted by the state; deaths of soldiers resorting to suicide to escape the horrors of combat or as a result of it, are rarely listed as such. The JVP, which was also motivated by slogans such as ‘Motherland or Death’, led one political analyst to describe their second uprising, in which over 40,000 youth lost their lives within a span of a few years, as “the collective suicide of a generation” (Chandraprema quoted in Silva 1993: 7).

Silva is sensitive to the kind of ‘suicidal’ language mobilised in both Sinhala and Tamil political discourses which intertwines nationalism with self-sacrifice - *atma parithyagaya* (self-sacrifice), *jivitha pujawa* (offering of life) (Silva 1993: 10). This is exemplified, he notes, in Benedict Anderson’s formulation that the “idea of ultimate sacrifice comes only with the idea of purity, through fatality” (cited in Silva 1993: 11). This heady combination also led Anderson to comment that “the great wars of this [20th] century are extraordinary not so much in the unprecedented scale on which they permitted people to kill, as in the colossal numbers persuaded to lay down their lives” (quoted in Ibid).

A similar link between political violence, suicide and protest is made by psychiatrist Daya Somasunderam (1998). Somasunderam, like Silva, disputes Durkheim’s thesis that the reason the rate of suicide decreases during wars is because it increases social cohesion against a common enemy, to posit that the reason for such a drop is more likely because war provides an alternative channel for suicidal behaviour and an opportunity to externalise aggression (Somasunderam 1998: 205). Somasunderam argues that youths who would normally have committed suicide - due to intense frustration or interpersonal conflict - “often said that they would rather join the militants and



die in combat where at least their lives would be honoured on posters (a common method of commemorating dead combatants)” (Somasunderam: 204; see also Spencer 1990: 612). Tudor Silva (1993) suggests that such an attitude was probably also prevalent among some Sinhala youth who joined the JVP.

However, a focus on the LTTE revolutionary offers additional complications as all cadre were required to commit suicide by biting on a cyanide capsule they always wore around their necks, if captured by the Sri Lankan armed forces - ostensibly to avoid giving information under torture. A large billboard on the A-9 road to Jaffna, during war-time, encouraged LTTE women cadre to exploit their death to maximum effect if wounded in the battlefield: They should play dead until enemy soldiers approached them and then blow up as many soldiers as possible, along with themselves (Waldman 2003). An estimated one-third of the LTTE’s combat deaths during 1983 - 1990 were due to such forms of suicide (Somasunderam 1998: 205).

The LTTE also holds the world record for the highest number of ‘suicide bombings’. About 30-40% of these suicide bombers were women (Waldman 2003). The ‘Black Tigers’, those who have volunteered to be a suicide bomber and been accepted by LTTE leader Prabhakaran as being fit to be one, were greatly revered within the movement and without (de Soyza 2011). They always appeared in public in black uniforms, boots and face covering so that their identity could be concealed. Many of their suicide attacks were filmed and shown in schools and at public meetings while CDs valourising their death were widely available in many shops and often disseminated free to adolescents, according to a former LTTE cadre (personal communication). New York Times reporter Amy Waldman (2003) recalls visiting a “mini-museum of sorts” at the Kantharuban Arivucholai orphanage (named after suicide bomber Kantharuban who blew himself up in 1991) which is plastered with pictures of suicide martyrs so that the children who reside in the orphanage become well versed in their heroism. It should also be kept in mind that many Tamil adolescents, as young as ten years, joined or were forcibly conscripted to the LTTE and participated in combat (see Section I for a further discussion).

The LTTE has consistently rejected the usage of the term ‘suicide bomber’. In an interview with Waldman (2003), Tamilchelvam, the head of the LTTE political wing, sought to make a distinction between the Tamil word *thatkolai*, ‘to kill yourself’ and *thatkodai*, ‘to give yourself,’ stressing that every Black Tiger gifts him or herself to the nation. Thamilini, the head of the LTTE Women’s Wing confirmed this belief by noting that Black Tigers had to “be strong in spirit and firm in purpose” and thus stood apart from copycat suicide bombers in other countries. Additionally, “a deep humanitarianism [was]

very necessary –a love of others, for the people” (quoted in Ibid).

Both these suicidal practices, along with fasts-unto-death, are similar to the altruistic suicide typology identified by Durkheim, notes Somasunderam, where an individual is so closely identified with a group committed to a particular cause that he is willing to sacrifice himself/herself for the greater good (Somasunderam 1998: 205). Somasunderam thus rightly points out that if one were to count all these incidences of altruistic suicides within the LTTE, then one could not say there has been a significant drop in suicide rates in the Jaffna district, during the war, as he himself had previously argued in a co-authored article (Somasunderam 1998: 205).<sup>45</sup>

Recent, post-war studies that have been conducted on the mental health and wellbeing of children in former war zones and former JVP conflict areas (as well as tsunami-affected regions) have not found a direct correlation with war and conflict experiences and self-harm but there is much speculation and debate regarding them spurring psycho-social impairment (Elbert et al. 2009; Hamilton et al. 2016; Samarasinghe 1998; Siriwardhene et al. 2013) and suicidal ideation (Ganeshamoorthy 1985; Lawrence 2003; Miller et al. 2009; Somasunderam 1998 and 2010 and Somasunderam and Sivayokan 2013).

The prevalence of alcoholism and domestic violence was also seen to increase in situations of war and conflict leading to corporal punishment and other forms of physical and psychological aggression being directed at children, by parents (Catani et al. 2008 and 2010, Sriskandarajah et al. 2015a and 2015b). Increased substance abuse and teen pregnancies have also been detected among children from former war zones (Jayawardene 2014).

The longer terms effects on minority students’ wellbeing through discriminatory educational practices and services must also be taken into consideration (see for example, Little 1999; Meertens 2013 and Sørensen 2008).

### Section III: Policy

This section will briefly consider the impact of some policy measures adopted by the Sri Lankan state to address practices of suicide and self-harm more generally and among students more specifically. Some measures have had a direct effect while others have had a more indirect effect.

- **De-criminalising Suicide, Banning Lethal Pesticides and Safe Storage of Pesticides**

The listing of Sri Lanka as having the highest suicide rate in the world, in 1995, immediately resulted in a Presidential Commission of Inquiry being appointed to look into this matter. This resulted in an extremely favourable policy decision being taken - the de-criminalisation of suicide in May 1998, by an Act of Parliament (de Alwis 2012). Particular attention was paid to the primary method of suicide, the ingesting of lethal pesticides and herbicides, resulting in an island-wide, awareness raising campaign being launched about the harmful effects of poisons, making sure that access to pesticides and herbicides was restricted and that less lethal forms of these products would be imported to the country, in future (Ibid).

The involvement of international actors working in conjunction with state officials to put these policies into effect has been very usefully documented by Pearson et al. (2013). I also noted, at the beginning of this chapter, that these policy measures have been quite successful, along with better emergency care being made available in rural hospitals, resulting in a marked decrease in suicides from pesticide poisoning (Gunnell et al. 2007; Pearson 2013; Widger 2013. Cf., Sariola and Simpson regarding better medical care and resources).

However, as I, and many other scholars have noted, there has also been a significant increase in self-harm, particularly among adolescents. Overdosing on Paracetamol and other drugs have also increased exponentially (de Silva et al. 2012; Hanwella 2013). I thus reiterate the criticism I made previously that the Presidential Commission of Inquiry “failed to address the much more important question... of why such a large percentage of the population, especially youth, were trying to kill themselves” (de Alwis 2012: 31).

- **Counselling Services in Schools**

Though P.R.D. Chaturika notes that counselling services have been offered in Sri Lankan schools since the 1960s (2015: 381), educators have long noted a dearth of counsellors in schools with Pathirana pointing out that only 1086 guidance counsellors are available in government schools to provide psycho-social services to 4,004,086 students; making the counselor student ratio to be 1: 3687, far below the US norm of one counsellor for 25 students (2017: 42). It must also be kept in mind that there continues to be a great deal of stigma and shame surrounding those who are perceived as needing mental health counselling and support.

The Institute for Health Policy (IHP), Ministry of Health however, notes that an important step has been made to rectify this imbalance through the creation of the

National Institute for Social Development (NISD) by an Act of Parliament in 1992. One of its main objectives is to “enhance human resources for social development through the preparation of competent manpower in social work at all levels” (IHP: 1). The NISD began an eighteen-month Diploma in Counseling, in 2001, to specifically produce more counsellors for schools (Ibid).

While these have all been steps in the right direction in addressing student wellbeing in schools, what happens in practice in these schools has been below par. Two recent studies on students’ perceptions of such counsellors (Chaturika 2015 and Pathirana 2017) as well as many conversations I’ve had with students have highlighted extremely troubling outcomes when students have sought help from counsellors: the betrayal of confidences, attempts to ‘correct’ homosexual tendencies, ridiculing students rather than advising them etc.

MP Rohini Kumari Wijeratne was particularly critical of teachers who doubled as counsellors noting that they shared confidential information about students among other teachers, resulting in students facing embarrassment and shame (Ranawana 2018). Therefore, it was not surprising that counsellors failed to gain the trust of students resulting in students preferring to seek help and advise elsewhere (Pathirana 2017). Such troubling perceptions and outcomes should be taken into consideration and used to review and re-think the role of counsellors in schools.

- **Shifting the focus away from Examinations**

The availability of counselling in schools only addresses the tip of the iceberg as there are many more structural changes that need to be set in place. For example, a re-evaluation of school curricula is urgently needed: There must be a shift away from examinations and the honing of student’s research and analytical capabilities along with more class periods that focus on stress management, problem solving and other life skills.

The promise made by the previous Minister of Education, Akila Viraj Kariyawasam to rescind the government circular that made the Grade 5 scholarship exam compulsory, was a step in the right direction. However, that is moot, in the current context of political ferment and regime change.

The work of Lewin and Little (1982) as well as Little (2010 and 2011) and Little et al. (2011) has clearly shown that examination reform, in particular, is an arduous process that requires a great deal of political will. Even minor educational reforms require the support of local bureaucrats and politicians who often sabotage such processes if they do not perceive any benefits accruing to themselves.

## • Banning corporal punishment in schools

Corporal punishment takes place in government-run as well as private and international schools. In 1992, “Sri Lanka ratified and signed Article 43 (1991), established in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, which proposed to end corporal punishment” (Karunaratne 2018). The Sri Lankan Penal Code was also amended in 1995 to expand and strengthen the legal mandate against corporal punishment but unfortunately, it continues to offer a variety of loopholes to circumvent prosecution (de Silva et al. 2017: 16-17; Karunaratne 2018). As a result, no one has been prosecuted for corporal punishment in Sri Lanka, to date (Karunaratne 2018).

In 2001, the Ministry of Education sent out a circular banning corporal punishment in all schools (Ranawana 2018). In yet another circular in 2005, the Ministry drew attention to the fact that all physical and psychological forms of punishment were prohibited and also outlined positive measures to maintain discipline in schools (Ibid). In April 2016, yet another circular was sent out to all schools cautioning against the use of corporal punishment and once more, listing positive disciplinary methods. It also requested the forming of disciplinary committees in schools to discourage punishment methods that would be harmful to children (Ibid). Unfortunately, corporal punishment continues unabated and there have also been accusations leveled at certain politicians for supporting principals who are particularly abusive to students despite repeated complaints made by parents (Ibid, Kannangara 2014).

In August 2012, UNP MP Rohini Kumari Wijeratne, who was on the Parliamentary Committee on Education and Human Resources Development, sought to reinforce positive disciplinary methods in schools by introducing a Private Member’s motion in Parliament entitled, Preparing and Implementing a Programme to Properly Carry out Disciplinary Enquiries by Student Discipline Committees of Schools. One of Ms. Wijeratne’s proposals was that counsellors with an education in child psychology or a similar background be appointed to these committees noting that most often, “students engage in behaviour that is natural for that particular age, and it must be dealt with appropriately, in a manner that does not harm the child” (Ranawana 2018). Ms. Wijeratne further opined that, in the 19 years she had worked as a teacher, most disciplinary issues in schools were carried out in a manner that protected the ‘good name’ of the school rather seeking to address the student’s problem (Ranawana 2018).

However, the greater challenge is to change social perceptions regarding corporal punishment in Sri Lanka as most teachers, parents and even students continue to believe that corporal punishment is essential for discipline

(Blumör and Licht 2018; de Silva et al. 2017; de Zoysa et al. 2010; Karunaratne and Chinthaka 2012; Karunaratne et al. 2012; Karunaratne 2018; Lakshman 2018; Lucas 2014; Mahanamahewa 2014). Hopefully, social movements such as The Stop Child Cruelty Movement founded by Dr. Tush Wickramanayaka, whose own child was subject to corporal punishment at an international school in Colombo (Kumarasinghe 2018), will be able to raise social awareness regarding the debilitating consequences of this practice.

## • Prohibiting mothers with children below 5 years migrating as domestic workers

On July 15<sup>th</sup> 2013, a policy decision was made by The Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare of Sri Lanka to implement the Family Background Report (FBR) - a clearance certificate that has to be completed by all female migrant-hopefuls seeking overseas employment as domestic workers. The FBR circular effectively banned women with children under the age of five from migrating overseas for work and required all women with children over the age of five years to “guarantee the protection of [her] children” by nominating a substitute caregiver. The circular also set a higher minimum age requirement than 18 for women hoping to migrate overseas for domestic work (quoted in Abeyasekere and Jayasundera 2017: 3, emphasis in original).

This policy decision was directly related to concerns regarding children ‘left behind’ given the proliferation of national discourses regarding such children becoming more aggressive, dropping out of school and being vulnerable to sexual abuse. Such a paternalistic policy has engendered a great deal of debate in Sri Lanka among those who seek to vehemently uphold this policy and others who have severely criticised it.

An important point to keep in mind here is that this policy places the consequences of migration squarely on the shoulder of mothers without recognising why they must seek higher-paying jobs abroad. This points to policy formulation that seeks to take the moral high ground at the expense of a hard-working, poverty-stricken population rather than offering more viable economic opportunities for women within the country. Neither has any thought been given to how the state could support fathers to be better carers and nurturers.

## Section IV: Lessons Learned

In this section I will highlight some research findings that bear further reflection while also offering some suggestions regarding future research directions.

There is a clear distinction to be made with regard to epidemiological studies that have focused on patterns of method, distribution and medical consequences and treatment of suicide and self-harm among students and aetiological studies that have offered sociological and psychological explanations of incidences, causes and prevalence of suicide and self-harm among students. While epidemiological studies have frequently sought to isolate a specific method, risk factor or treatment, aetiological studies have sought to examine a broader canvas of phenomena by placing the student within social networks of power such as the family, school, community etc., and attempting to understand the long-term effects of politico-economic processes such as political unrest and wars, natural disasters, economic liberalisation, displacement, modernity etc. Structural inequalities and marginalisation due to caste, class, ethnicity, language usage, gender and sexual orientation have also been taken into consideration to some extent.

Aetiological studies could be further improved if key areas of social life, more generally, were also scrutinised in order to better understand the psychic structuring of students. In this regard, the work of Chapin (2014) and Obeyesekere (1984) are particularly useful as they offer important insights into child rearing practices in Sri Lanka. Chapin (2014) ponders the seeming contradiction she notices in how Sinhala toddlers are showered with affection and greatly indulged but are then gradually socialised into becoming compliant, obedient and respectful children who rarely question parental authority. A child who rebels against such authority is either chastised or punished through the use of physical violence, ostracism, and the withholding of affection or favourite foods and toys.

However, it is a pity that Chapin does not engage with Obeyesekere's astute arguments regarding how children are also shamed into compliance and accepting of authority, instead of brushing off these arguments for not being based on "systematic observation" (McGilvray cited in Chapin 2014: 184, fn. 30). Clearly, Obeyesekere's arguments were formulated by living in Sri Lanka and observing social practices for many decades; they resonated with observations I have made during countless interactions between Sinhala parents and children during my own fieldwork. I think the nuance that Chapin misses is in not paying attention to how children are socialised regarding intimate behaviour and comportment such as playing with dirt/faeces/genitalia, bed wetting, picking noses, lifting one's dress, pulling down one's panties etc., rather than focusing on how children are not disciplined in public for 'being naughty' such as climbing trees or demanding ice cream. In the latter situations, she is quite right that it is the parent's self-esteem and respect that is at stake rather than the child's and that is why the parent remains quiet or acquiesces.

In his now landmark study on the Pattini Cult in Sri Lanka, Obeyesekere provides a masterful analysis of the Sinhala practice of *lajja-bhaya* which he translates as "shame and fear of ridicule" (1984: 504).<sup>46</sup> Children's bad behaviour, notes Obeyesekere, is frequently corrected with the following ridicule: *lajja nadda, mokada minissu kiyanne* – "aren't you ashamed, what'll people say?" Such statements as well as revelations of a child's idiosyncrasies are often made before a 'public' of other family members or kinsmen and even outsiders and "all will laugh." (Ibid: 505). This "socialisation of shame affects the self in such a drastic manner," that it leaves the individual "particularly vulnerable to loss of self-esteem" (Ibid: 504).

Obeyesekere further notes that such modes of socialisation are also continued in school "where shaming through ridicule is the most common method of control employed by teachers, particularly for the control of 'brashness,' 'forwardness,' or 'impudence'" (1984: 505, see also Jani de Silva 2005). Recall how humiliated Venusha Imadini Bandara felt when her principal called her a prostitute before the entire school (see Section II). Similarly, the comment made by a student in the study conducted by GIZ, Sri Lanka with regard to their failure at national examinations is very telling: "...we have always been called fools, which mentally discourage us and we also start feeling that we can't" (Blumör, and Licht. 2018: 26).

Shaming through ridicule, observes Obeyesekere, is also why socialised adults have an added 'fear' of authority figures; a fear that is reinforced by "authority figures, who like to 'pull up' subordinates in the presence of others" (1984: 505). Obeyesekere goes on to discuss various Sinhala terms as well as vocalisations such as hooting that are crucial components of shaming practices, which I will not rehearse here, but wish to emphasise makes essential reading for anyone seeking to explore injurious language and gestures.

These forms of socialisation within the family and at school also reinforce relationships of hierarchy and subordination as pointed out by both Chapin (2014) and Obeyesekere (1984). Because education in Sri Lanka is still such a crucial vector of social progress and upliftment, corporal punishment and humiliation in school have also been accepted as responses from principals and teachers that have to be endured and are an everyday component of school life.

However, there have also been parents who have stormed into school and confronted principals and teachers for inflicting injuries on their children, reported them to the police, leaked information about such incidents to the press and even filed cases against them in the Supreme Court (Blumör and Licht 2018; Kannangara 2014, personal communication). If such incidents increase and

the Stop Child Cruelty Movement gathers momentum it might lead to changes in social perceptions regarding corporal punishment which would have more powerful effects than any policy change.

Attitudes regarding the behaviour and comportment of young girls is another aspect that needs a change in perception within Sri Lankan society but that possibility seems much more distant in the current context where parents and teachers are placing schoolgirls under even greater surveillance citing their susceptibility to new forms of corruption such as soap operas, social media and drugs (personal communication). Therefore, it seems very likely that self-harming among young girls will keep increasing in the years to come. However, Abeyasekera and Maracek's recent work to explore how shame becomes embodied by young girls is a step in the right direction.

Systematic studies on adolescent conceptions of life and death, self and the other as well as resistance and protest would offer important insights to better understanding suicide and self-harm among this population. The former two continuums have not yet been the focus of any research studies and would require explorations of how students are socialised into religious understandings of karma and re-birth. Blumör and Licht's (2018) research finding that student parliaments are perceived as a useful mechanism through which students can collectively suggest ways to improve their school's development offers a ray of hope regarding a non-violent form of activism that is not perceived as a threat by those in authority.

The perusal of a very comprehensive body of research on student wellbeing has clearly shown that while the most useful research studies have been those that have sought to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, studies based on long-term, situated ethnographic research have been the most productive. These studies, though few, have been able to illuminate how adolescents are enmeshed in wider social networks of family, school, neighbourhood and nation while also providing fine-grained analyses of their everyday life. This is crucial towards providing a better understanding of the socialisation, psychic formation and worldview of adolescents more generally and adolescents who self-harm more specifically.

## Section V: Conclusion

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, interest in student wellbeing has been increasing in light of mounting evidence that a large percentage of Sri Lanka's adolescent population, especially girls, are self-harming with a significant proportion of such acts, particularly among boys, being fatal. The interrogation of the scholarly

literature on student wellbeing with particular reference to suicide and self-harm has shown that a wide range of issues and risk factors have been studied and analysed in an attempt to understand this troubling phenomenon. The views and opinions of a variety of stake holders with whom I met during the past several months as well as observations I have made during twenty-five years of fieldwork conducted in Sri Lanka was also drawn on.

The chapter first sought to reflect on some key concepts such as wellbeing, mental health, childhood/adolescence/youth, and suicide/self-harm as they provided important frameworks for the ideas and issues that were being discussed while also helping to ground and guide theoretical arguments. Adolescence, which encompasses the years ten to nineteen, is perceived as being formative as well as impressionable years when substantial physical, psychological and behavioural changes take place. It is this vulnerability and volatility that also translates to increased incidents of self-harm among this population.

The second section which constituted the core of the chapter analysed a large corpus of scholarly work that explored a variety of risk factors that were often inter-related but nonetheless unique to students who self-harm: National examinations, romantic relationships, corporal punishment and humiliation in school, family problems, conflicts and insecurities, addiction to soap operas and social media and substance abuse.

It was noted that family problems, conflicts and insecurities were the number one cause of self-harm among adolescents but when analysing the reason for such conflicts it became clear that parental disapproval of actual or assumed romantic relationships had a significant effect along with absence of the mother, father's alcoholism, domestic violence, economic instability, war trauma and pressure being exerted on children to perform well in school. The only factor that did not seem to correlate with self-harm was substance abuse though its deleterious effect on student wellbeing continues to be a source of great anxiety for parents, teachers and counsellors.

The second section also considered certain forms of 'learned behaviour' that seemed unique to students who self-harm. The notion of 'learning' was highlighted here as it was important to understand the broader contexts and environments within which adolescent suicide and self-harm takes place. These contexts, I argued, were 'learning environments' for practices of self-harm in Sri Lanka. This nexus of behaviour and environment was discussed under three separate sub-headings: Exposure to suicidal behaviour and suicide play, cluster suicides and war and political conflict.

Children are invariably enfolded in cycles of 'knowing and doing' as they are growing up in an environment

where a family member, neighbor or classmate has sought to self-harm. Therefore, suicide becomes normalised. Self-poisoning due to its ubiquity in Sri Lanka has been described as being 'cognitively available' to children and is expressed through the games they play according to Tom Widger, the only anthropologist to conduct sustained field research on suicide in Sri Lanka. Cluster suicides are primarily prevalent among youth and Sri Lanka has experienced two such clusters; the first beginning with two students in Jaffna, in 1982, and then gradually extending across the country over the years and the second beginning with a student in Colombo, in 2009, but fortunately, not extending beyond five other students, all located in Colombo.

War and political conflict not only have devastating effects on adolescents but the civil war in Sri Lanka resulted in many Tamil adolescents, as young as ten years, joining or being forcibly conscripted to the LTTE resulting in them participating in combat. Such youth are now struggling to make a living in post-war Sri Lanka. The LTTE also master-minded the phenomenon of 'suicide bombers' - those who seek to annihilate the enemy while also killing themselves. The LTTE abhors referring to them as 'suicide bombers' preferring to call them 'Those who have gifted their life for the Tamil Nation.'

The third section focused on a selection of policy measures adopted by the Sri Lankan state and the different kinds of repercussions they have had. The de-criminalising of suicide, the banning of lethal pesticides and attention being paid to the safe storage of pesticides have all had very positive effects and the percentage of fatalities through the ingestion of pesticides has dropped drastically. However, there has been a concomitant increase in self-harm, with overdosing on Paracetamol and other drugs, particularly among adolescents. This is clearly because the state has not addressed the more pressing issue of why such a large percentage of its citizenry are trying to self-harm.

While the state has attempted to introduce more counsellors in schools, the role they play has been perceived as problematic. Counsellors, particularly those who double up as teachers, have failed to gain the trust of students in most schools that offer counselling. There also continues to be a great deal of stigma and shame surrounding those who are perceived as needing mental health counselling and support. Education reform especially a move away from examination-focused curricula and the provision of opportunities for students to hone research and analytical capabilities along with more class periods that focus on stress management, problem-solving and other life skills is urgently needed. However, such reforms require political will and cooperation both at the national and local level, an aspect that has been severely lacking.

Legal provisions to prosecute corporal punishment in schools has been ineffective not only because of the many loopholes in the law but because parents, teachers and even some students, especially prefects, are convinced that it is necessary to instill discipline. Prohibiting mothers with children below 5 years migrating as domestic workers has been a very paternalistic and short-sighted policy measure as the state has failed to recognise why women must seek higher-paying jobs abroad. Neither has any thought been given to how the state could support fathers to be better carers and nurturers.

The fourth section sought to highlight some research findings that bear further reflection while also offering some suggestions regarding future research directions. It was emphasised that student wellbeing must be understood within social networks of power such as the family, school and community while also being sensitive to the long-term effects of politico-economic processes such as political unrest and wars, natural disasters, economic liberalisation, displacement, modernity etc. Structural inequalities and marginalisation due to caste, class, ethnicity, language usage, gender and sexual orientation must also be taken into consideration.

Analysing child rearing practices was central to understanding how children become socialised into hierarchical and patriarchal relationships while learning dispositions of *lajja-bhaya* or 'shame and fear of ridicule'. Hierarchical relationships between parents and children and teachers and children, as well as a dysfunctional educational system that is overly focused on studying for and passing examinations have been perceived as depriving adolescents from learning important life skills and coping mechanisms.

It is also crucial to understand how adolescents perceive continuums between life and death, the self and other and individualised and collective protest. The former two continuums have not yet been the focus of any research studies and would require explorations of how students learn and interpret religious concepts of karma and re-birth.

While the most useful research studies have been those that have sought to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, studies based on long-term, situated ethnographic research have been the most productive. These few studies have been able to illuminate how adolescents are enmeshed in wider social networks of family, school, neighbourhood and nation while also providing fine-grained analyses of their everyday life. This is crucial towards providing a better understanding of the socialisation, psychic formation and worldview of adolescents more generally and adolescents who self-harm more specifically.



## Endnotes

- 41 A similar point was made by a mental health counsellor (personal communication) regarding the recent incident reported in the press (Daily Mirror, November 26th 2018), of a 15-year old boy attending a school in Beruwala who pushed a prefect (causing him to fall backwards and hit his head on the floor resulting in his death two days later) who had scolded him for not being silent after the school bell was rung: “I don’t think he meant to kill the prefect but these boys are at a dangerous age and can fly off the handle at the slightest provocation.”
- 42 The other peak in suicides occurred at the age of 24 years (15.3%), notes Perera, thus coinciding with youth first attempting to find employment, another major stressor in their lives (2005: 117. See also Blumör n.d, Little and Hettige 2016). I will not be addressing stressors related to employment procurement as that is primarily associated with youth, not students
- 43 Peer teasing and a forged love letter is widely believed to have precipitated the forcible disappearance of 36 young boys attending the Embilipitiya Maha Vidyalaya, during the height of the JVP uprising in the late 1980s (see de Alwis 1998 and de Silva 2005).
- 44 A greater concern now seems to be suicides associated with micro-finance debts. More than 60 suicides in the Eastern Province, during the first six months of this year are reported to have been due to family disputes that have arisen due to debt owed to micro-finance companies (Sunday Times, July 1st 2018. See also Ali 2018 and Daily Mirror, May 2nd 2018).
- 45 The discussion of the work of Tudor Silva and Daya Somasunderam has been excerpted from de Alwis (2012: 42-5).
- 46 Several other anthropologists have extended these insights in a variety of different directions, see for example, Spencer (1990b), de Alwis (1997) and Jeganathan (2000).



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In recent years, the term “social cohesion” became popular within academia, politics and the international development community. Education has been identified as a potentially important policy lever for enhancing social cohesion. Since 2005, the German Development Cooperation supported the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka in the development and implementation of the national policy on education for social cohesion and peace. While trying to find ways to strengthen social cohesion through and within the education system the authors realised that potential negative aspects have to be considered as well – namely anomie. This collection brings together four papers on school networks, monitoring social cohesion in schools, the relationship between education and suicide, and student wellbeing which are loosely connected by this dialectical twist of social cohesion and anomie.