

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER AMONG SRI LANKAN TAMIL DIASPORA

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ABSTRACT

There has been a severe political turmoil in Sri Lanka for the past three decades with disastrous consequences for the Tamil ethnic minorities. The Tamil minority in the North Eastern part of Sri Lanka has been subjected to mass killing. "In April United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon released a report by a panel of experts that concluded that both government forces and the LTTE conducted military operations "with flagrant disregard for the protection, rights, welfare and lives of civilians and failed to respect the norms of international law." (The Human Rights Watch). The tragic history has been recorded as one of the worst events of human rights violation. Innocent civilians had been subjected to ruthless tortures and as a result of which the Sri Lankan Tamils fled from the island and settled in India, France, Switzerland, Norway, Canada, Australia, Germany and Malaysia since the 1983 pogrom. They suffer from post trauma stress disorders as a result of being subjected to or witnessing such horror. They also suffer from a cumulative trauma that are concomitant of the dislocation, such as 'identity crises', 'homelessness' and 'rootlessness'. These physical and psychological disturbances result in post trauma stress disorders, peculiar to the above mentioned situations, during war and post-war period. The current study aims at analysing the post traumatic stress disorders prevalent among the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora in select locations in Subramanyapuram refugee camp in order to make a comparative analysis of the two.

INTRODUCTION:

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood": Article 1

"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person." Article 3

- United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948

The ethnic cleansing of the Tamil minorities in Sri Lanka has led to exodus at different points of time. The Tamil minority in the North Eastern part of Sri Lanka has been subjected to torture mass killing. The tragic history has been recorded as one of the worst events of human rights violation. The article entitled "Human Rights Violations against Tamil minority in Sri Lanka since 1948" gives a clear picture of the situations that prevailed since 1948 till the end of the civil war and ethnic cleansing on May 9, 2009, bringing to light the violation of the various articles of United Nations Declaration of Human Rights 1948. "The World Report 2012" discusses the "Torture, Enforced Disappearances, and Arbitrary Detention" that had been forced on the minority Tamils in Sri Lanka. (Human Rights Watch)

Innocent civilians had been subjected to ruthless tortures as a result of which the Sri Lankan Tamils fled from the island and settled in India, France, Switzerland, Norway, Canada, Australia, Germany and Malaysia since the 1983 pogrom. The Refugee Action Coalition states that: Sri Lanka has seen a crippling civil war lasting over 25 years and ending with the army's victory in May 2009. A 2011 UN report found the Sri Lankan government guilty of committing horrendous war crimes that included mass killings of civilians and the denial of humanitarian assistance. The government's viciousness is only matched by its absolute denial of any wrongdoing or inhumane treatment of the ethnic minority Tamil population, despite some pressure from the international community.

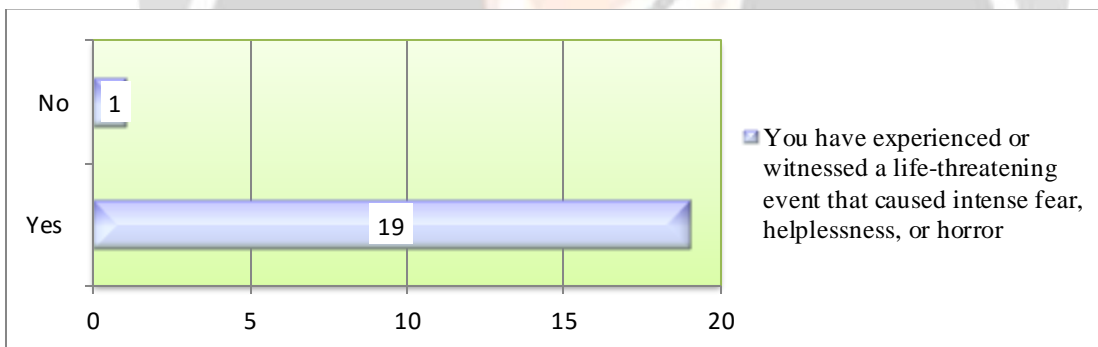
There are so many articles, books and documentaries that have recorded the acts of violence on the minority Tamils as a great crime against humankind. Article 5 of the UNHR 1948 says, "No one shall be

subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." The reports mentioned above also underscore the violation of human rights in different forms, leading the masses to stress and trauma. The war victims suffer from post traumatic stress disorders as they had been tortured or witness such horror. "In several studies of Western experience, researchers have found that who had more combat experience, who observed atrocities, and who actually participated in atrocities were most likely to experience PTSD". (Breslau & Davis, 1987) They also experience a cumulative trauma that are concomitant of the dislocation, migration and 'identity crises', 'homelessness' and 'rootlessness'. The term Post trauma Stress disorder has been developed to explain these effects. "The person suffering from PTSD has typically undergone a stressor of extreme magnitude. (Lapruecht & Sack, 2002) Probing into the persecution of the minority Tamils the RAC brings to light the employment of "heavy military control equating to continual harassment of communities, sexual violence, intimidation, and violent suppression of any dissent." These events have a long term effect on the victims. "When a person has been the victim of a highly stressful event, symptoms of the stress experience may persist long after the event is over... In the case of major traumas, these stressful after-effects may go on intermittently for months or years." (Shelley. E. Taylor, 2011)

A study was conducted among the inmates of the Subramaniapuram refugee camp in Tamil Nadu, India. The objective of the study is to check if the inmates of the camp suffer from post war traumatic stress disorders. The study was conducted by way of administering questionnaires to the inmates and through personal interviews, in order to effect a triangulation to ensure authenticity and also give a humanistic approach to the study. The respondents were 20 in number, including men and women. The results of the pilot study are furnished below using bar charts and a percentage analysis has been made.

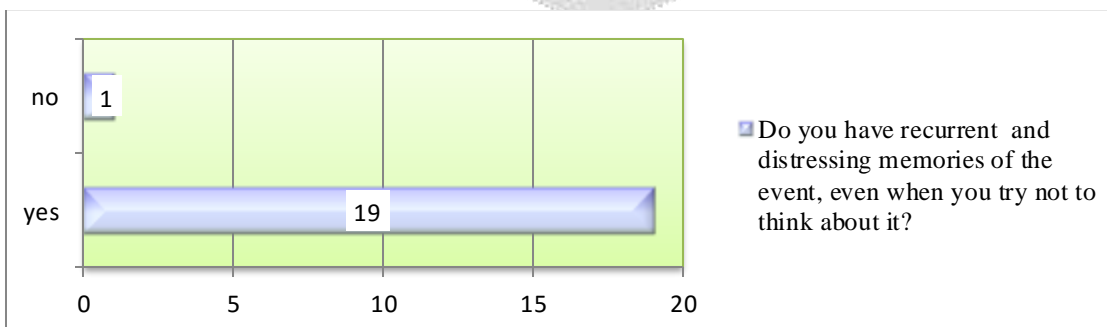
Data Interpretation and Analysis

Chart No. 1



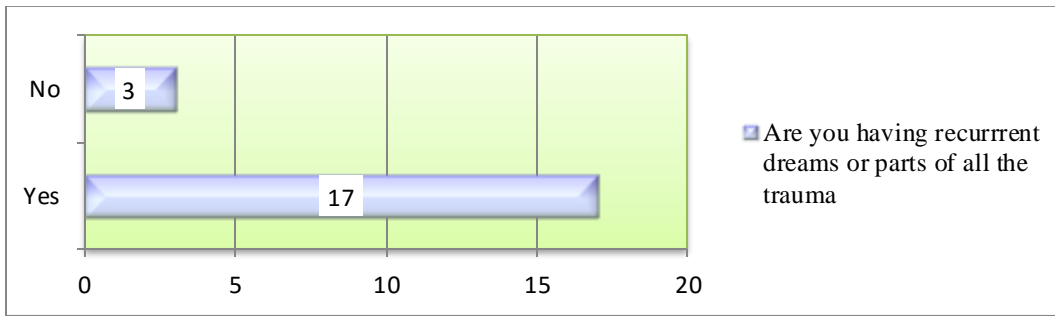
The above chart shows that 95% of the participants have responded that they had experienced or witnessed a life-threatening event that caused intense fear, helplessness or horror and 5% stated that they do not have such experiences..

Chart No. 2



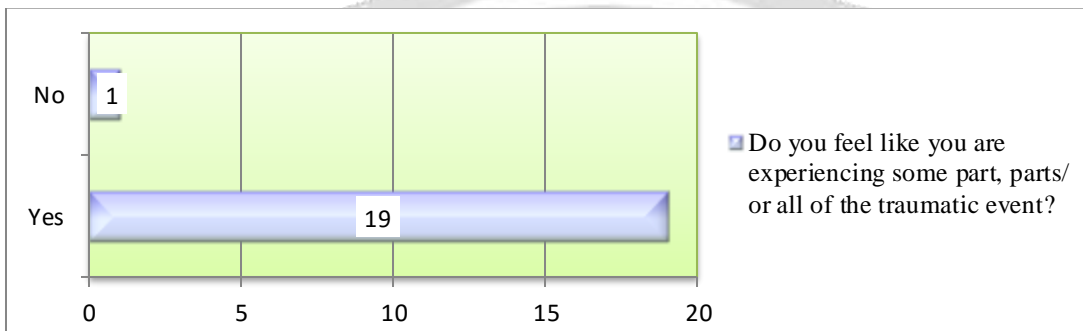
The above chart shows that 95% of the participants have responded that they have recurrent and distressing memories of the event, even when they try not to think about it and 5% do not have such memories..

Chart No. 3



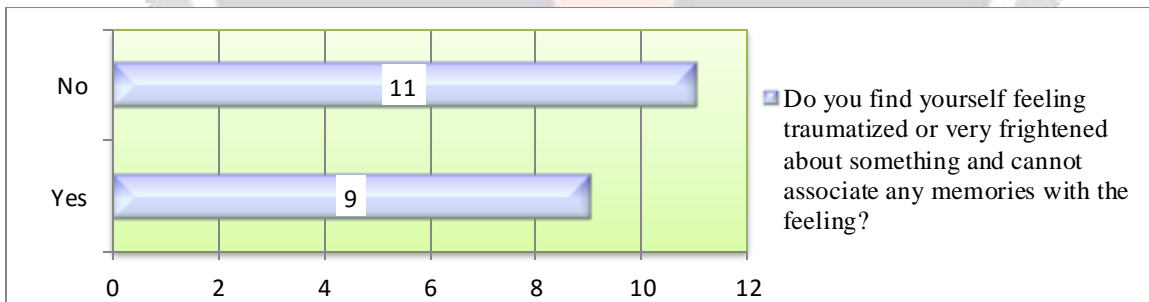
The above chart shows that 85% of the participants have recurrent dreams or parts of all the trauma and 15% of them do not have such dreams.

Chart No. 4



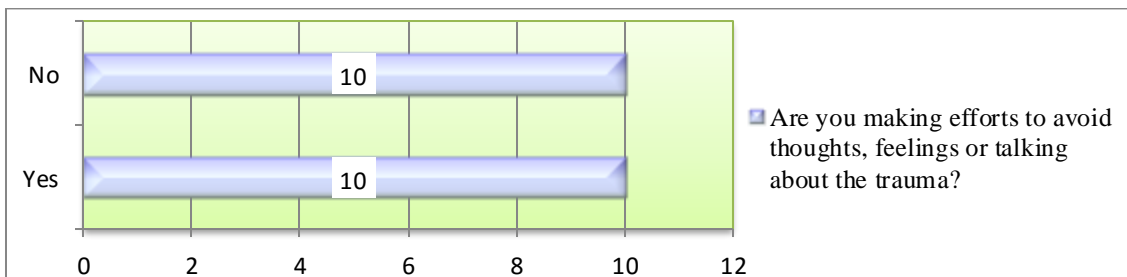
The above chart shows that 95% of the respondents feel like they are experiencing some parts/ or all the traumatic events and 5% of them do not have such experiences.

Chart No. 5



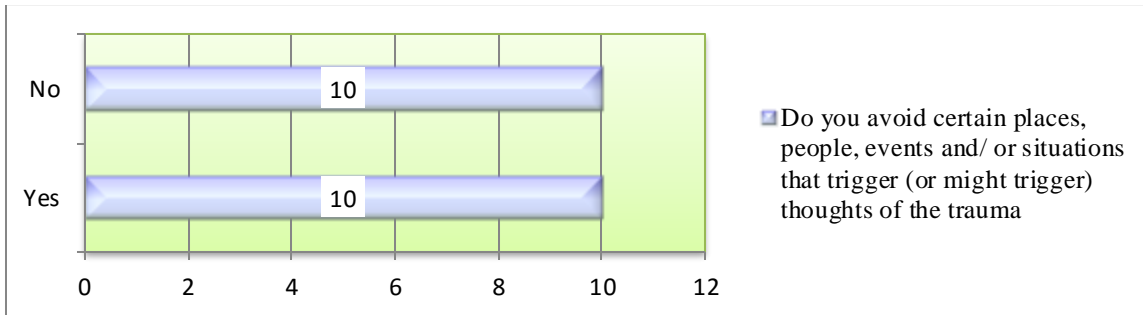
The above chart shows that 45% of the respondents feel traumatized or are very frightened about something and cannot associate any memories with the feeling and 55% of them do not feel that way.

Chart No. 6



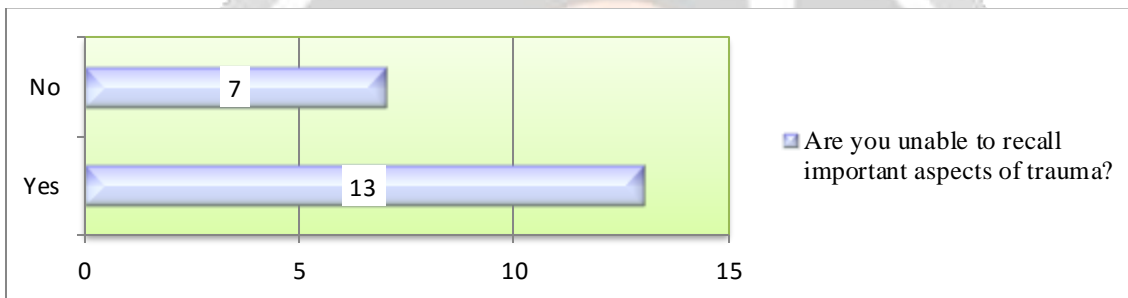
The above chart shows that 50% of the respondents take efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings or talking about the trauma, while 50% do not.

Chart No. 7



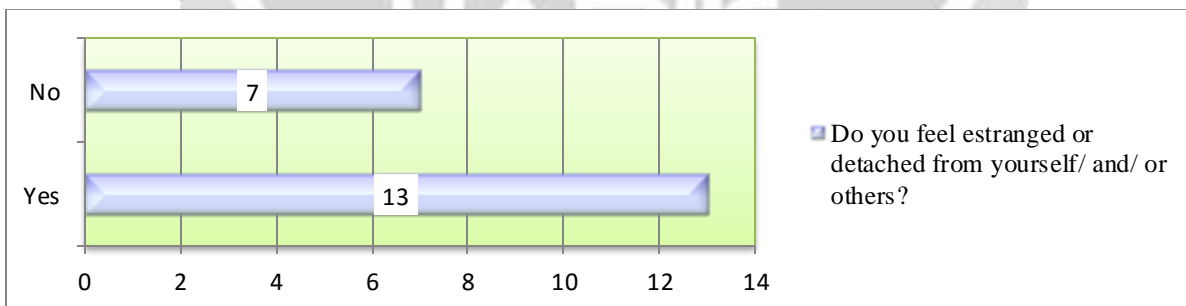
The above chart shows that 50% of the respondents avoid certain places, events and/ or situations that trigger thoughts of trauma and 50% do not.

Chart No.8



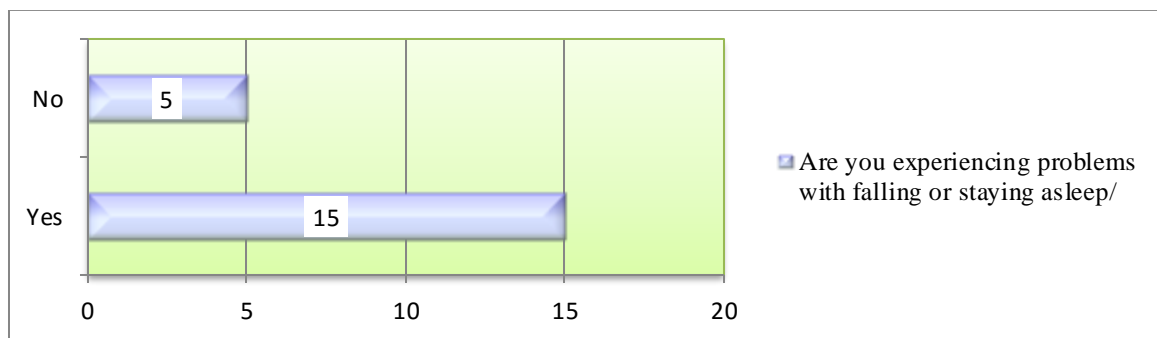
The above chart shows that 65% of the participants are unable to recall important aspects of trauma and 35% are say that they are able to.

Chart No. 9



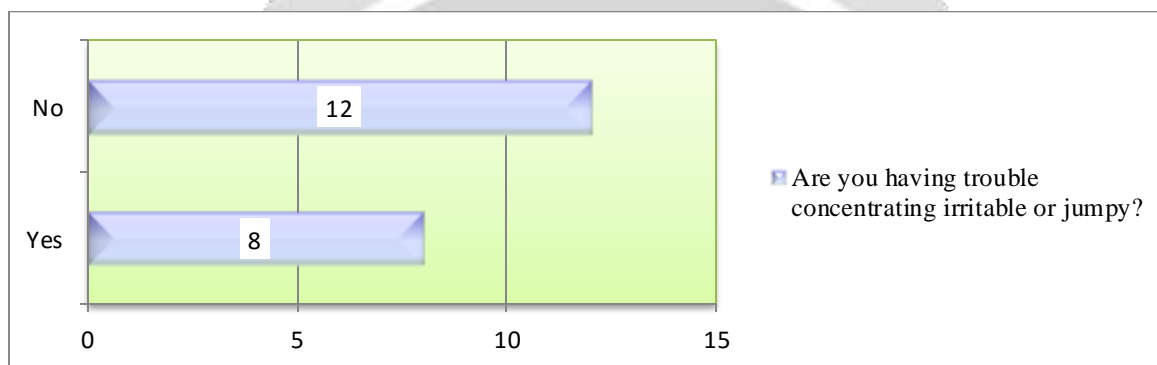
The above chart shows that 65% of the participants feel estranged from themselves and / or others and 35% do not.

Chart No. 10



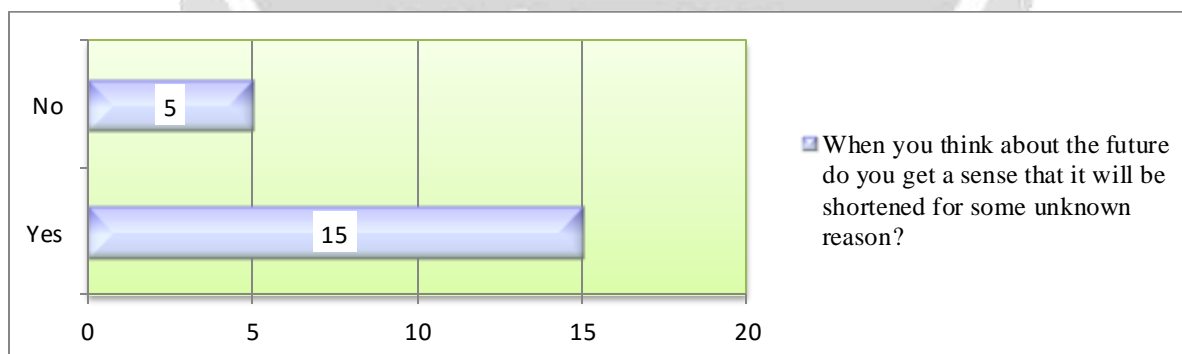
The above chart shows that 75% of the participants experience problems with falling or staying asleep and 25% of them do not have such problems.

Chart No. 11



The above chart shows that 60% Of the respondents have trouble in concentrating and are irritable or jumpy and 40% of them do not have such troubles.

Chart No .12



The above chart shows that 75% of the respondents feel that their future will be shortened for some unknown reason and 25% of them do not feel so.

Interview Observations:

Most of the respondents in the Subramaniapuram refugee camp have cumulative post traumatic stress disorders due to the war and dislocation. A higher percentage of the participants show symptoms like nostalgia, post memory, 'rootlessness', 'homelssness', longing to get home back, identity crisis and insomnia and other physical and psychological issues. Most of the participants showed eagerness to share their trauma and narrated their

traumatic events with sorrow, tears and unendurable agony. The above data shows that the inmates of Subramaniapuram refugee camp are affected by post war trauma stress disorders.

Discussion

"In several studies of Western experience, researchers have found that who had more combat experience, who observed atrocities, and who actually participated in atrocities were most likely to experience PTSD". (Breslau & Davis, 1987). The indicators in the questionnaire have proved that the inmates of the Subramaniapuram Refugee camp suffer from PTSD. "The person suffering from PTSD has typically undergone a stressor of extreme magnitude. (Lapruucht & Sack, 2002). The respondents have problems of re-enacting the memory. It is obvious that their memory functions are not normal. This affects their thought process and decision making "Even thinking of flashback as 'memories' is inaccurate and misleading. When someone experiences a flashback, they do not remember the experience, they relive it" (Sandra, 1999.). Van der Kolk and Ducey observe that a PTSD victim "... produces not as a memory, but as an action; he repeats it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating...he cannot escape from this compulsion to repeat; and in the end we understand that this is his way of remembering." (Van der Kolk and Ducey, p 271, 1989) The respondents state that they are unable to come out of their trauma and feel that they relive their past. It is highly essential that they are given medical assistance in order to cope up with their trauma. The neuro-scientist Joseph LeDoux (1992) has called this "emotional memory" and has shown that emotional memory is imprinted deep in the psyche and is impossible to erase it off completely, though we can try to over write on them. (Van der Kolk, 1996) calls this "engraving" of trauma. Sandra rightly observes defines memory associating it with flashback as a "sudden intrusive re-experiencing of a fragment of one of those traumatic, universalized memories. During a flashback, people became overwhelmed with the same emotions that they felt at the time of trauma. " (Sandra). Many respondents have stated that they get parts or fragments of their traumatic experiences as memories or dreams in sleep. Sandra also states that traumatized victims "...may shut off more and more of our normal functioning...dampen down any emotional experience that could lead back to the traumatic memory....may withdraw from relationships that could trigger off memories.... may curtail sensory and physical experiences that could remind us of the trauma. ... may avoid engaging in any situations that could lead to remembering the trauma. At the same time,... may be compelled, completely outside of our awareness, to re-enact the traumatic experience through our behaviour." (Sandra) Some of the respondents have stated that they feel like keeping away from others, shut off in their own world and feel dissociated with themselves and / or others. "People who had been traumatized lose their capacity to modulate arousal". They tend to stay irritable, jumpy and on - edge." (Sandra) Many of the respondents had this problem of being irritable and jumpy. Ronnie Janoff - Bulman has shown (1992), "the experience of trauma, shatters - often irrevocably some very basic assumptions about our world., our relationship to others, and our basic sense of identity and place in the world. A sense of meaning and purpose for being alive are shaken." Some of the respondents have stated that when they think about their future, they feel that for some reason their life will be shortened. This shows that they have lost hope in life due to trauma.

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