

Perceptions of wellbeing in refugee
communities in North-Western Sri Lanka
– a preliminary study

Presented by

Chamindra Weerackody

At Psycho-Social Forum/CHA

20th June 2008

This study....

- ❖ Conducted under the research and capacity building 'Trauma & Global Health (TGH) Programme'
- ❖ Funded by Global Health Research Initiative – Teasdale-Corti Team Grants Programme
- ❖ Supported by Douglas Mental Health Institute & McGill University, Montreal, Canada
- ❖ Implemented in Sri Lanka by People's Rural Development Association (PRDA)

Core-Team

- Ananda Galappatti
- Ms. Harini Amarasuriya
- Dr. Gameela Samarasinghe
- Dr. Suman Fernando (Consultant)
- Ms. Shanti Fernando (Executive Director/PRDA)
- Chamindra Weerackody (Project Lead)

Partners

- Basic Needs
- Creative Action

Background

- 75,000 Muslims living in the North evicted by LTTE in October 1990
- Not allowed to take their belongings & properties
- A majority settled in the Puttalam district in welfare centres

Methodology

- Conducted with ‘camp refugees’ and ‘refugees living on private land’
- Applying Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) to elicit ‘insiders’ views’ (*emic*) – a qualitative assessment
- Using PRA tools
 - Wealth ranking
 - Wellbeing ranking
 - Venn diagramming

Social stratification of camp refugees

Middle/Average – 18%	Poor – 55%	Very Poor - 27%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thatched houses and only the floor area is cemented ▪ Own vehicles ▪ Run retail groceries ▪ Own land outside the Camp ▪ Engage in self-employment ▪ Family members work in the Middle-East countries ▪ Less than 5 family members ▪ Children pursue higher education ▪ Have private toilets ▪ Have political connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Houses are covered with thatched leaves ▪ Have only a push bicycle ▪ Dependent on casual labour work ▪ Children engage in casual labour work after school hours and during weekends ▪ Educational achievements of children are low ▪ Family size is in the range of 5-10 members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Houses are mostly temporary huts ▪ Dependent on aid/subsidies ▪ Children abandon schooling and engage in labour work ▪ Number of dependents is high ▪ There are disabled family members ▪ Do not receive the attention of government and non-governmental agencies

Social stratification of settled refugees

Rich – 10%	Average – 52%	Poor – 38%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Own vehicles ▪ Have land for cultivation ▪ Houses constructed with bricks ▪ Own TVs, radios etc. ▪ Family members are engaged in technical jobs ▪ Men work in the Middle-East countries ▪ Run small businesses ▪ Their children attend private tuition classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have only a push bicycle ▪ Houses are covered with thatched leaves and only the floor area is cemented ▪ Only men engage in casual labour work ▪ Some find work outside their settlements ▪ Monthly income is in the range of Rs.10, 000-12, 000 ▪ Able to find their day's meals ▪ Number of family members range between 5-11 ▪ Educational achievements of children are low 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Houses are covered with thatched leaves and the floor area is applied with clay ▪ Dependent on aid/subsidies ▪ Number of dependents are high ▪ Mostly the widows ▪ Children are not engaged in any productive activity ▪ Unable to send children to school ▪ Have disabled members in their families ▪ Have two meals a day ▪ Monthly income is less than Rs.2000/- ▪ They try to cover themselves from rest of the society

Reasons for socio-economic differentiation

- Entrepreneurial knowledge & experience brought by settlers
- Access to local networks through the use of Sinhala language
- Accumulated savings from family members
- Employed adult children
- Marriages with members of host community
- Loss of courage, initiative & will among some
- Self-pride and unwillingness to work

Differences between camp refugees & settled refugees

- Women of settled refugee families hardly engage in casual labour/Middle-East employment
- Settled refugee families have alternative land
- Children of camp refugees engage in casual labour work
- Children of settled families attend tuition classes
- Most settled refugee families speak Sinhala & access local networks
- Unity among camp families

Perceived wellbeing of camp refugees before and after displacement

Level of wellbeing before displacement (scoring)		Wellbeing criteria/conditions	Level of wellbeing after displacement (scoring)	
Men	Women		Men	Women
9	9	Having good health	3	1
8	9	Having adequate money/cash (women)/having a good income (men)	2	3
-	7	Living without being a burden to others	-	3
-	8	Having unity within the community	-	8
-	7	Having security in the community	-	3
-	8	Mental happiness within family	-	2
9	8	Having a good educational standard	6	6
9	-	Having a free environment	4	-
9	-	Living with a light mind	3	-
9	-	Having an independent life	7	-
9	-	Having nutritious meals	3	-

Perceived wellbeing of settled refugees before and after displacement

Level of wellbeing before displacement (scoring)		Wellbeing criteria/conditions	Level of wellbeing after displacement (scoring)	
Men	Women		Men	Women
-	10	Having good health	-	5
8	7	Having adequate money/cash (women); having stable income source (men)	3	3
-	8	Good behaviour	-	3
-	10	Having good cooperation with neighbours	-	4
6	9	Having security within the community (women); having a secure environment (men)	4	5
7	10	Having a good family environment (women); having a good family life (men)	4	4
-	8	Having self-initiative and courage	-	6
5	-	Having education and knowledge	2	-
8	-	Health and sanitation	1	-
4	-	Having recreation and enjoyment	7	-
8	-	Having one's own house	4	-
9	-	Having adequate land	2	-
2	-	Having transport facilities and improved roads	5	-

Material wellbeing

- Sufficient cash incomes
- Access to one's own land
- Permanent houses

Social wellbeing

- Good education for children
- Bringing up children in a good environment e.g. privacy
- Living in an environment free of alcohol and other forms of abuse
- Unity and cooperation within community
- Improved infrastructure & other facilities
- Sense of security

Physical, mental & moral wellbeing

- ❖ Living in a cleaner environment
- ❖ Living without illness
- ❖ Peace of mind/mental happiness
- ❖ Harmonious relationships within family
- ❖ Living without being a burden to others
- ❖ Having a good moral life

Key characteristics/ issues

- Muslim refugees arrived with no significant assets
- Families with better human & social assets were able to elevate their positions
- Differences exist between camp & settled refugee families
- Wider & all-encompassing approach to wellbeing
- Different dimensions of wellbeing are inter-dependent & inter-related
- Communities have experienced wellbeing in different scales depending on their social circumstances
- Achievements in certain aspects of wellbeing are higher than some others
- Reduction of wellbeing is related to the change of circumstances resulting from migration

Cont.

Key characteristics/ issues

- Roles of both men & women have changed significantly
- Children become vulnerable to deprivation and neglect
- Living close to each other has affected privacy and overall wellbeing
- Feelings of insecurity to live among outsiders
- Sense of unity within camp families is higher

Conclusions

- ❖ Two distinct socio-economic groups - Camps Vs Settled refugees
- ❖ Social stratification is complex and specific to the community
- ❖ Differences are created by a variety of social circumstances
- ❖ Perceptions of wellbeing are
 - diverse and complex
 - determined by particular social settings in which communities are placed at a particular time, factors and processes influencing their community and their frame of mind

Cont.

Conclusions

- ❖ Refugees remain frustrated, insecure & unhappy
- ❖ Lack of opportunity to pursue livelihoods
- ❖ Drug/alcohol abuse affects on children
- ❖ Perceptions of wellbeing provide a clear indication of the sort of interventions that may be planned for improving wellbeing
- ❖ This study is a starting point in evaluating the needs of refugees in terms of their socio-economic differentiation and assistance and help

On-going activities

- Participatory assessments on wellbeing in conflict and tsunami affected communities in Batticaloa, Hambantota, Puttalam (refugees) and Jaffna (?)
- Participatory assessments on (a) coping strategies and (b) institutional support networks of communities affected by conflict and tsunami (Hambantota, Puttalam and Batticaloa) supported by Oxfam America
- Developing methodologies/process-tool-kits for psychosocial interventions (Pilots in Hambantota & Batticaloa)
- Developing a community based Mental Health Care Model