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# **Sex Ratio and Vulnerability in Northern and Eastern Provinces in Sri Lanka**

**Kalinga Tudor Silva**



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**Kalinga Tudor Silva**

## **Background Paper 2**

**Prepared by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies for the  
Socio-economic Assessment of the Conflict-affected Northern and  
Eastern Provinces Conducted by the World Bank**

## Sex Ratio and Vulnerability in Northern and Eastern Provinces in Sri Lanka

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### **Northern Province**

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## **Abbreviations Used**

DCS	=	Department of Census and Statistics
FGD	=	Focus Group Discussion
GOSL	=	Government of Sri Lanka
HIES	=	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
HSZ	=	High Security Zone
ICES	=	International Centre for Ethnic Studies
ICG	=	International Crisis Group
IDP	=	Internally Displaced People
KII	=	Key Informant Interviews
LTTE	=	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NGO	=	Non-Government Organization
PTSD	=	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SSA	=	Strategic Social Assessment
WHH	=	Women-Headed Households

## **Executive Summary**

Using results of the 1981 and 2012 population censuses in Sri Lanka, the current study examined the impact of the war on the population dynamics in the Northern and Eastern provinces with a focus on changes in the sex ratio. In the next phase of the analysis the results of Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews conducted as part of the Strategic Social Assessment were used to assess the connection between the imbalances in the sex ratio in the population and perceptions and experiences of vulnerability among women and communities in general.

The imbalances in the sex ratio were not uniform across all ethnic groups in the population. As a combined outcome of war-related mortality, selective outmigration of males and higher life expectancy among women, the Tamil communities consistently reported an excess of females over males, particularly in working ages and in elderly populations. In contrast, the Muslim and Sinhala communities, particularly in border areas, reported an excess of males over females and elderly over youth. This may be seen as an outcome of a strategic decision by the relevant families to split the family between relocated sites and resettlements in ways that enabled them to access better resources in relocated sites as well as access assistance for housing and resettlement in the resettlement areas. The female surplus in Tamil communities and elderly male surplus in Sinhala and Muslim communities generated specific challenges for post-war recovery and development as well as perceived and actual vulnerabilities at the community level.

The second part of this report explores these perceived and actual vulnerabilities on the basis of FGDs and KIIs. Given the female surplus in Tamil communities and their concerns about security, marriageability, unequal gender relations, and viable livelihoods, economic and social development policies must recognize and respond to their specific concerns and needs. While female surplus in the population may be strategically important from the angle of empowerment of women and addressing unequal gender relations, that potential is yet to be recognized and realized. The gender and generation imbalances in Sinhala and Muslims communities pose a different set of problems in terms of post-war recovery and policies relating to



resettlement of war-displaced people. Perhaps it would be desirable to revisit some of the policies relating to resettlement of people in the light of the findings of the current study. While the declared objective of encouraging displaced people to return to their original places is understandable from the perspective of community interests and the need to reconnect with ancestral lands and heritages, the tendency in the affected families to split for the purpose of accessing resources in two widely separated areas is neither desirable nor effective for post-war recovery, social harmony within the families, and building social capital.



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## **Introduction**

The civil war that devastated the country from 1983 to 2009 and the associated patterns of death, injury, and migration led to a number of demographic changes in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka. Thus far, a systematic exploration into the nature and extent of these demographic shifts has been hampered by the paucity of reliable population data. This problem has now been partially overcome by the release of the population census findings conducted by the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) in 2012. The census covered the country's entire population, including, for the first time since 1981, all parts of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The current report explores one aspect of the demographic changes caused by the war—namely, changes in the sex ratio of the civilian population—using available population census data and results from qualitative research studies conducted in the Northern and Eastern provinces in 2012 and 2017.

Possible demographic shifts and distortions include changes in the size and composition of the population, an imbalance in the sex ratio, a skewed age structure, a high ratio of military personnel in affected areas, a high rate of women-headed households, a high rate of disability in the general population, and the progressive disintegration of family structures. These demographic imbalances can be attributed to direct and indirect consequences of the long-drawn out war, including deaths and disappearances, injury, repeated displacement, conflict-induced human migration, early marriage as a means of escaping forced recruitment, and large-scale troop mobilization during and after the war (Somasundaram 2010a, Tambiah 2004, Kottegoda 1991). A distorted sex ratio—characterized by an excess of females over males—is one such demographic imbalance that has serious implications for social development, human insecurity, vulnerability and psychosocial stress in war-affected communities.

In preparing this report, the following sources of information were used:

1. The 2012 Census of Population and Housing conducted by the Department of Census and Statistics—This was conducted for the whole of Sri Lanka, for the first time after the war ended. To assess the prewar demographic profile and to establish the demographic baseline prior to the start of the war, we rely on the population census of 1981 which was the most-recent previous countrywide population census.
2. The findings of a qualitative study commissioned by CARE Sri Lanka in 2012, which sought to explore the underlying causes of poverty among select conflict-affected populations in the Northern and Eastern provinces—In this study, a total of 48 FGDs were conducted with youth, women-headed households, daily wage earners, small farmers and other vulnerable groups in selected districts in the Northern and Eastern provinces, as well as in some neighboring provinces.
3. The findings of the 2017 Strategic Social Assessment (SSA) commissioned by the World Bank and conducted by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) in all districts in the Northern and Eastern Provinces—From among the various qualitative research procedures used in this study, the most recent report primarily utilized data collected in FGDs with select stakeholder groups, which include youth, women and newly settled people. This data collection enabled the researchers to update information gathered during previous qualitative research and followed the political change which occurred in 2015 and the resulting developments in the Northern and Eastern provinces.

This report also benefitted from a comprehensive literature review conducted as part of this Strategic Social Assessment on social issues in the Northern and Eastern provinces since the end of war (See Silva et al. 2018).

Population has been a sensitive subject throughout the war in Sri Lanka. According to some studies, both the state and the LTTE have played a role in

altering the population distribution in the Northern and Eastern provinces (Peebles 1990, Manoharan 1987, Pieris 2006). Until the post-war population census of 2012, a complete population census covering the entire island had not been possible for nearly thirty years, due to insecurity prevailing in the war-affected areas, the LTTE policy of non-cooperation with census-taking on the part of the Sri Lankan state (Peiris 2001, Pieris 2006, Department of Census and Statistics 2011), and the general logistical difficulties of conducting a population census among a largely displaced and unsettled population. On the other hand, from the colonial era onwards, scholars believe that politics of ethnicity influenced the ethnic categories officially employed in the census, as well as the ethnic identifications claimed by the respondents when interviewed by enumerators employed in censuses (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999, Brass 2007, Silva 2009b). Finally, for military purposes—as well as for humanitarian and development purposes—the state, security forces, humanitarian agencies and even the LTTE needed reliable population data; according to Somasundaram (2010a, 2010b) and Venugopal (2009), each agency sought to establish their own (more or less secret and largely unverified) databases throughout the war.

In the sections that follow, we review population census data relating to changes in sex ratio in the two provinces under consideration.

### **Changes in the Sex Ratio in the Northern Province**

Reported changes in the total population and sex composition of the Northern Provinces between 1981 and 2012 are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1: Size and Sex Composition of the Population in the Northern Provinces (1981-2012)**

Year	Male	Female	Total	Sex Ratio
1981	562,851	546,553	1,109,404	102.9
2012	520,760	550,555	1,061,315	94.6

Source: 1981 Census, 2012 Census

Overall, between 1981 and 2012, the total population of the Northern Provinces increased by approximately 4.33 percent. While the female population increased by around 0.7 percent in the same period, the male population declined by 7.5 percent. The decline among the male population may be partially attributed to excess mortality caused by the war, as well as excess outmigration from the Northern Province, which may be largely attributed to the insecurity and destruction caused by the war.

On the other hand, in 1981, the pre-war sex ratio in the Northern Province was 103, indicating a notable excess of males as compared to females.<sup>1</sup> This is in alignment with the typical trend for sex ratios in South Asia and many other third world countries, as widely documented in the literature (Sen 1992, 2003). Sen (1992, 2003) views such trends as a clear manifestation of discrimination against females throughout their life cycle, including the critical stages of pregnancy and child birth.

Apart from a substantial reduction of the total population in the province during the war, one of the key demographic impacts has been a significant change in the sex ratio of the population, whereby the sex ratio changed from a situation of excess males to one of excess females. In 2012, there was a surplus of 29,795 females in the Northern Province, corresponding with a sex ratio of 94.5, which indicates a deficit of about 4.5 males for every 100 females in the population.<sup>2</sup> This may be attributed to the excess mortality and reported 'disappearances' of males due to the war, in addition to the selective outmigration of males in order to avoid adverse consequences of the war such as insecurity caused by forced conscription and potential reprisals by armed actors (Korf and Silva 2003, Somadundaram 2010b). There is also significant inter-district variation in sex ratios, as evident from the 2012 Population Census.

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1 However, even in 1981, Jaffna District reported a sex ratio of 98.8, indicating that the pattern of male deficit in the district started well before the onset of the war, perhaps due to heavy male out-migration already well established at the time. In the Northern Province as a whole, there was a considerably higher sex ratio in 1981, due to the prevalence of a significantly higher sex ratio in other districts in the Northern Province. On the other hand, the pattern of male deficit in the population in the Jaffna District became much more pronounced by 2012, indicating the dual and cumulative impact of war and male outmigration during the war period.

2 Compared with an overall sex ratio of 93.8 for the entire country (2012), the reported sex ratio of 92.9 for the Northern Province may not be considered too low, especially when considering that there are lower sex ratios in some provinces outside the war zone. For instance, the Central Province reported a sex ratio of 91.6 in 2012. As also acknowledged in a report issued by the Department of Census and Statistics on changes in the sex ratio in Sri Lanka that occurred apart from the war itself, the primary reason for substantial changes in the sex ratio over the years is the relatively higher life expectancy for women (78.6 as against 72 per men in 2012). This, however, cannot be treated as a primary explanation for the decline in sex ratios in the Northern and Eastern Provinces during the period concerned, as health services in these two provinces deteriorated, and life expectancy for both females and males in these two provinces remained below the rates in other provinces.



**Table 2: Number of Males and Females and Sex Ratios in Districts of the Northern Province (2012)**

District	No of males	No of females	Sex Ratio
Jaffna	274,173	309,709	88.5
Kilinochchi	55,783	57,727	96.6
Mulaitivu	46,036	46,202	99.6
Vavuniya	84,715	87,400	96.9
Mannar	50,053	49,517	101.1

Source: 2012 Population Census

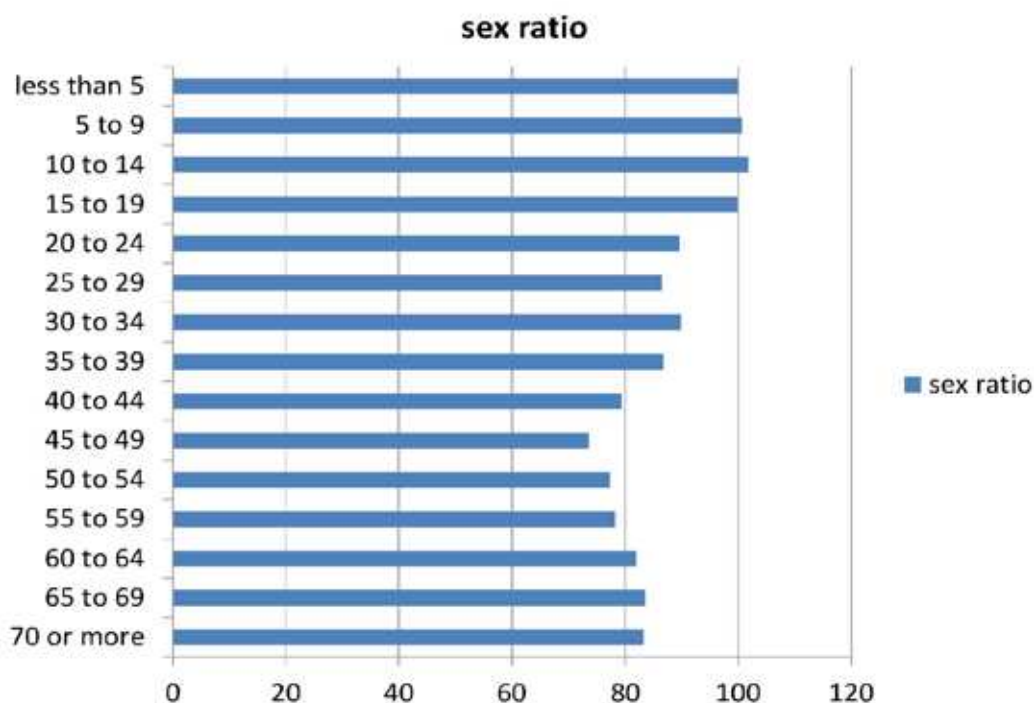
In 2012, Jaffna District reported the lowest sex ratio—not only in the Northern Province—but across the entire country. All the other districts in the province have a higher sex ratio, but three of them also have a female excess in the population. In Mannar, the pattern has actually tipped in favor of males, probably due to the selective in-migration of Muslim and Sinhala IDP males from Puttalam and other places (this will be explored in detail later in this report).

On the whole, changes in the sex ratio and the deficit of one gender within and among districts in the post-war era are complex consequences of war-related deaths, disappearances, and population movements on the one hand, and ethnicity and sex-related patterns of in-migration and out-migration in the post-war era on the other hand. As far as the Northern Province is concerned, the pattern of male deficit is firmly established among the Sri Lankan Tamils in all districts, while the pattern is reversed among the Sinhalese, Muslim IDPs, and new settlers who have moved into the Province in varying numbers following the end of the war. As we will discover later, gender imbalances in the population have varying implications for development, employment patterns, social stability, marital status, and the stability of marital relations.

### **Age-Specific Sex Ratios by District in Northern Province**

In order to better understand their causes and social consequences, it is important to examine the variations in sex ratio by age group and ethnicity.

**Figure 1: Age-Specific Sex Ratios in the Jaffna District, 2012**



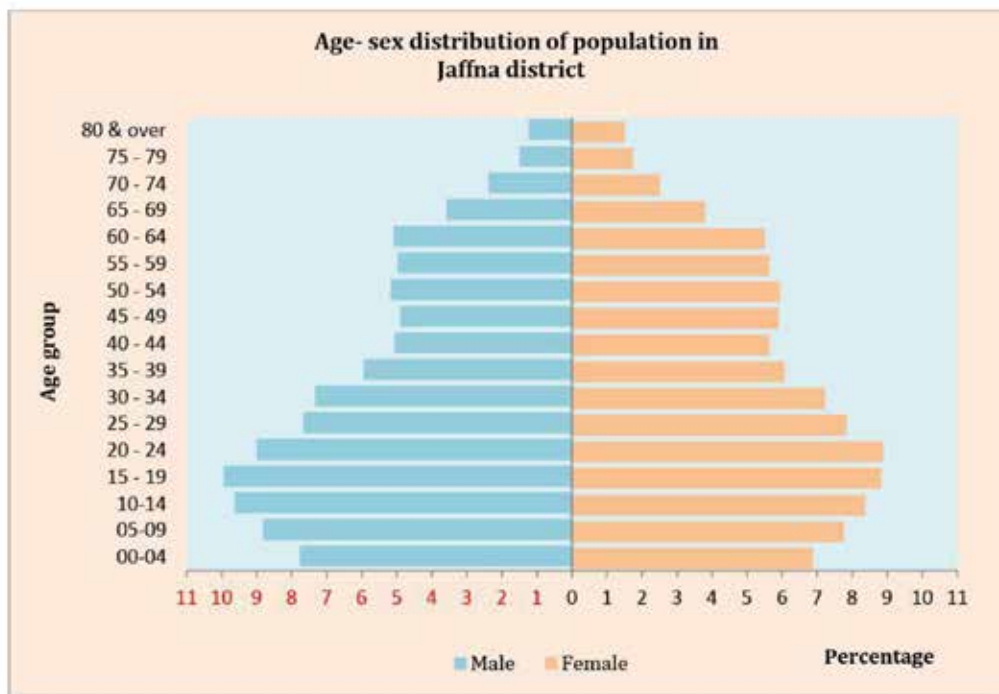
Source: 2012 Population Census

There is an excess of males in the 10-14-year-old age bracket, followed by a progressive decline in sex ratios up to 45-49 years of age, with the exception of the 30-34-year-old age group. The sex ratio tends to increase slightly among the older age groups, but it remains significantly below 100, even in the oldest groups. This indicates that the progressive loss of males in the population occurred among those aged 15 to 49—the more politically, economically, and militarily active ages of the life cycle. The male deficit is reduced among the older age groups, who were less likely to have been killed during combat operations, but the female surplus remains consistent due to a higher life expectancy among females, which is broadly applicable to the general Sri Lankan population.

As further evidenced in Figure 1, the male deficit actually begins in the 20-24-year-old group—those who were likely attending school during the last phase of the war, between 2006 and 2009. The male deficit peaks in the 45-49 age group, with a small but steady increase in the sex ratio of subsequent age groups. Apart from war-related

deaths and disappearances, the selective outmigration of males is more likely to affect skilled individuals with outside contacts in the 25 to 49-year-old age group.

**Figure 2: Population Distribution in the Jaffna District by Age and Sex, 2012**



Source: Department of Census and Statistics, 2012

The population distribution of the Jaffna district clearly deviates from the pyramidal shape expected of a normal population distribution by age and sex. It has a bimodal shape with a population bulge from age 15 to 19 years, and a notable break in the population size from age 20 to 44. The population size marginally increases thereafter until natural pattern of increased mortality sets in from age 65 onwards. The dip in population size from 20 years to 44 years can be seen as a cumulative outcome of war-related deaths, disappearances and outmigrations as described earlier. There is a clear pattern of male surplus in the population up to age 20 and a progressive reversal of the pattern thereafter. This can be attributed to possible gender gaps in war-related population decline and life expectancy.

The war’s differential impact on ethnic groups in the district is explored in Table 3.

**Table 3: Sex Ratio by Ethnicity, Jaffna District, 2012**

Ethnicity	% of the Total Population	Sex Ratio
Tamil	99.2	88.2
Sinhala	0.4	247.6
Muslim	0.4	101.3
Other	0.1	63.5
Total	100.0	88.5

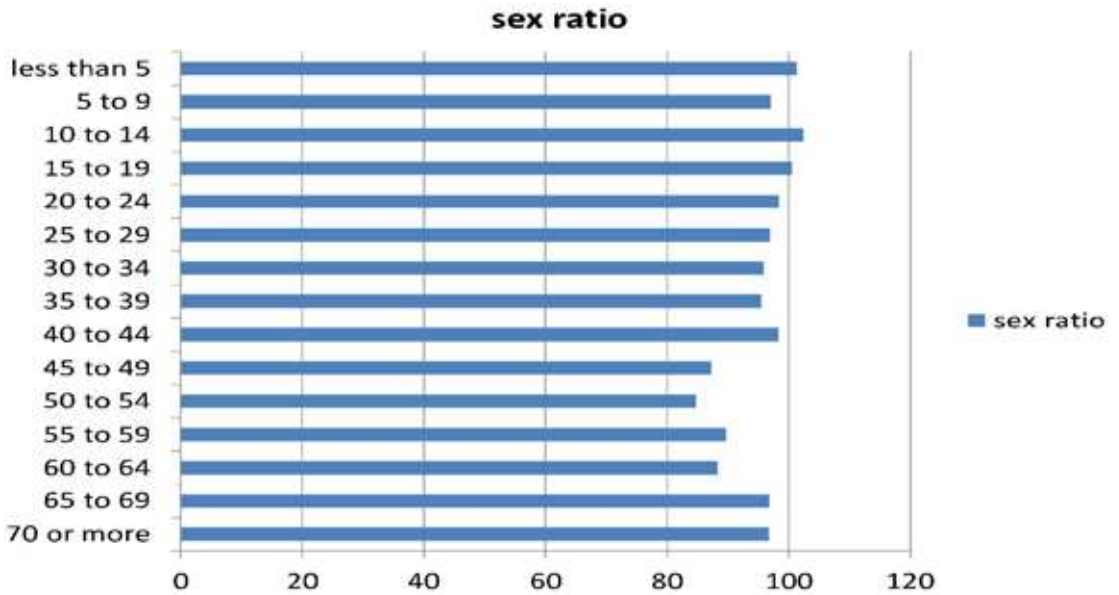
Source: Department of Census and Statistics, 2012

Interethnic variation in sex ratio in the Jaffna District is substantial. It varies from a high of 247.6 among the Sinhalese, who comprise a mere 0.4% of the total district population, to a low of 63.5 among smaller ethnic groups inclusive of Burghers, Malays, and Sri Lanka Chettis whose numbers are too small to influence the overall trends. The Tamils<sup>3</sup> who comprise 99.2% of the district population have a sex ratio of 88.2, while the Muslims, a small minority in the district population, tend to have the least imbalanced sex ratio. The war-related decline in male population is most pronounced among Tamils and some of the smallest ethnic communities in the district.

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3 We have merged Sri Lanka Tamils and Indian Tamils for the analysis pursued here due to reported tendency among Indian-origin Tamils in the Northern and Eastern Provinces to declare themselves as ‘Sri Lanka Tamils’ during census enumerations (Bass 2007, 2013) and a reported targeting of Indian-origin Tamils in these districts in LTTE recruitment drives that probably made them equally or more vulnerable to the demographic impact of the war (Muthulingam 2017).

**Figure 3: Age-Specific Sex Ratios in the Kilinochchi District, 2012**

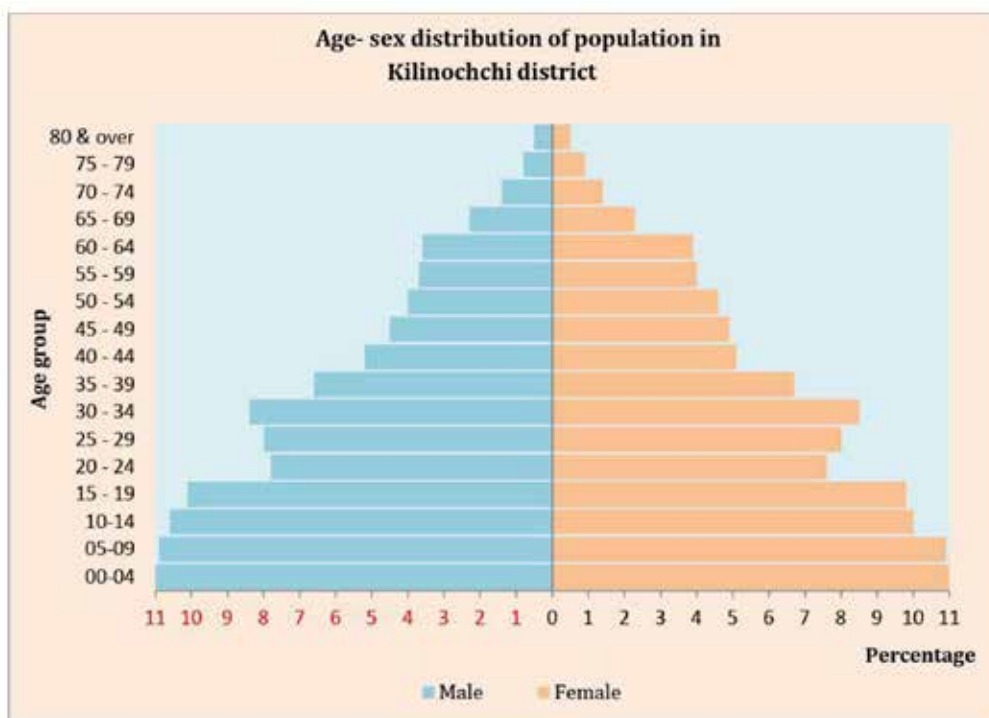


Source: 2012 Population Census

Age-specific sex ratios in the Kilinochchi District more or less conform to the pattern observed in Jaffna District. The only difference in the Kilinochchi District, as also confirmed by 2012 census data, is the higher sex ratio in the youngest and oldest age groups.<sup>4</sup> This indicates that the distortion (in what might be described as a “normal pattern” in the age-specific sex ratio) is clearly confined to the 20 to 54-year-old age group, as males in this group presumably experienced the brunt of war-related violence. While women were as active as males in the LTTE during much of the war period, as reported by Schalk (1994) and Coomaraswamy (1996), it is possible that rates of death, disappearances, and outmigration were much higher among males due to the nature of their engagement (or deliberate non-engagement) in combat operations. The female surplus in the oldest age groups observed in other Northern and Eastern provincial districts appear to be less pronounced than the Kilinochchi District, presumably due to the role of war in reducing life expectancy among both males and females.

<sup>4</sup> The reported male excess in the elderly population in the Kilinochchi District is quite unusual as compared to the rest of the country, where females tend to outnumber males in the elderly population—owing to a number of factors—including higher longevity among females as reported by Silva (2012). Whether this is an effect of the war or some other demographic process (such as elderly males opting to remain in the conflict zone due to strategic or welfare reasons) must be determined through future research.

**Figure 4: Population Pyramid in the Kilinochchi District in 2012**



Source: Department of Census and Statistics, 2012

A notable hiatus in the population in the age groups 20 to 29 is visible in the Kilinochchi District. An important feature in the population pyramid is that this hiatus seems applicable to both males and females in the relevant age group. Consequently, the sex ratio in the district is not imbalanced to the same extent as in the Jaffna District.

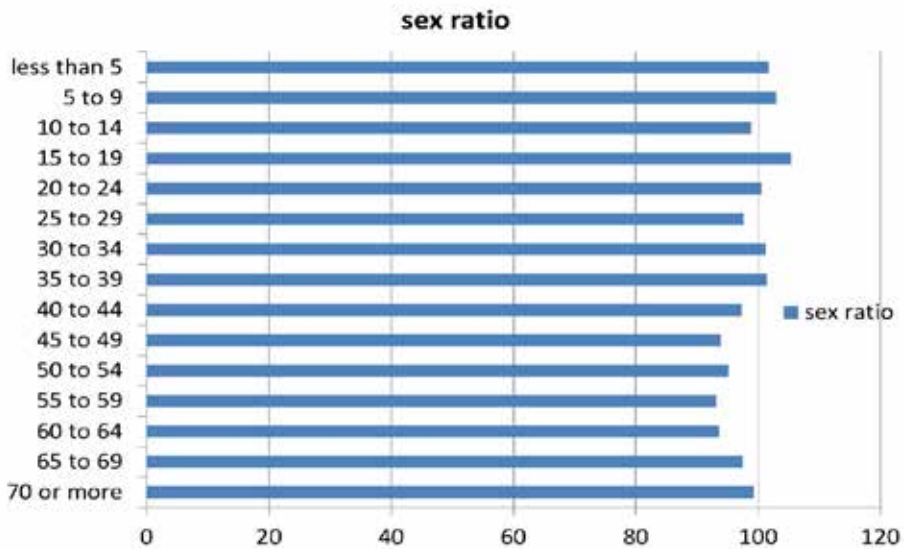
**Table 4: Sex Ratio by Ethnicity, Kilinochchi District, 2012**

Ethnicity	% of the Total Population	Sex Ratio
Tamil	98.3	95.1
Sinhala	1.2	379.6
Muslim	0.5	154.3
Other	0	--
Total	100.0	96.6

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, 2012

In the Kilinochchi District, the pattern of sex ratio in the population is clearly different across ethnic groups. While the Tamils, who comprise an overwhelming majority of the population in the district, report an excess female population, the Sinhalese and the Muslims, who together constitute less than 2 percent of the total population, have a notable surplus of male population. This can be attributed to the fact that while the Tamils lost many male lives during the war, there has been selective in-migration of Sinhala and Muslims males during the resettling process in the post-war period.

**Figure 5: Age-Specific Sex Ratios in Mulaitivu District, 2012**

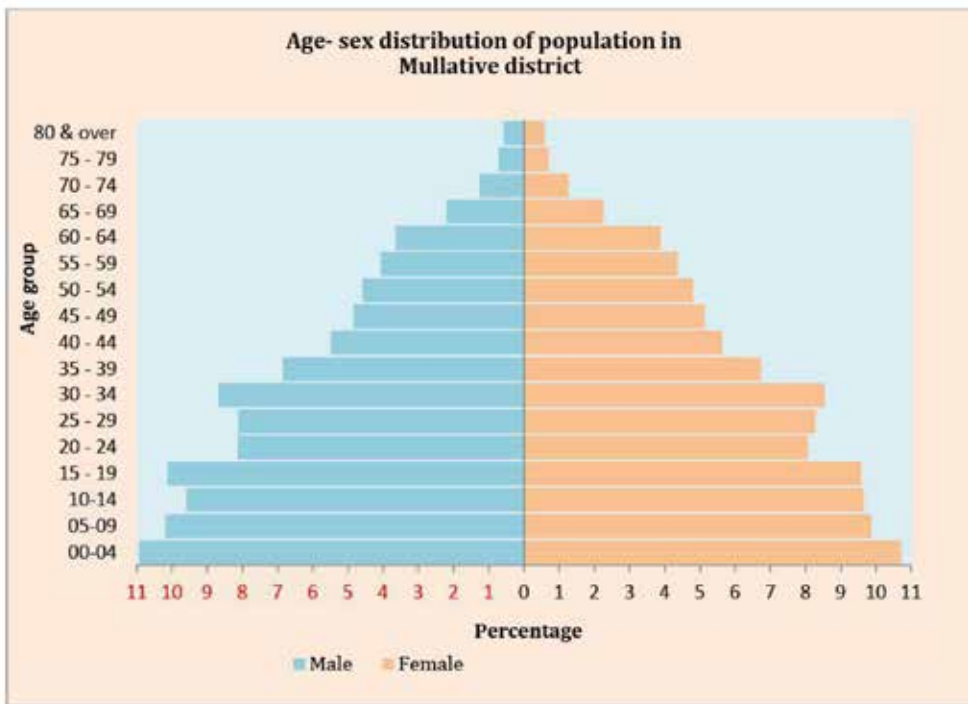


Source: 2012 Population Census

In examining the age-specific sex ratios in Mulaitivu District, we have to bear in mind that part of this district formed the final battleground in the ethnic war. Interestingly, among all of the districts examined so far, Mulaitivu presents the least consistent pattern of age-specific sex ratios. Unlike in other districts, there is no significant male deficit in most age groups. The reasons for this are unclear. One can only speculate that during the last phase of the war, male-bias in war-induced deaths was perhaps not pronounced as civilians too died in significant numbers, often as victims of cross fire (Somasundaram 2010a, 2010b). Furthermore, of all the districts in the Northern Province, the 2004 tsunami had the greatest death toll in

Mulaitivu District. Considering that the tsunami often led to excess mortality among females and children, one can assume that the excess of male deaths caused by the war was, to some extent, offset by the opposite pattern of mortality caused by the tsunami (Silva 2016). Another possible complicating factor is the administrative annexation of part of the original Anuradhapura District, comprising mainly Sinhala population, to the Mulaitivu district in 2011, which resulted in a change in size and composition of the district population. In any case, even though Mulaitivu was severely affected by population movements and deaths caused by the last phase of war, it does not exhibit a female surplus in the population to the same extent found in the northern districts of Jaffna and Kilinochchi.

**Figure 5: Age and Sex Distribution in the Population of Mulaitivu District in 2012**



Source: Population Census, 2012

The Mulaitivu district, too, has a break in the population size in the 20 to 29 age group. But the break in the pyramidal shape of population distribution is less evident compared to other districts in the two provinces. There is a tendency



towards a female excess in the population from age 40 onwards, but this pattern is less pronounced relative to the Jaffna and Kilinochchi Districts.

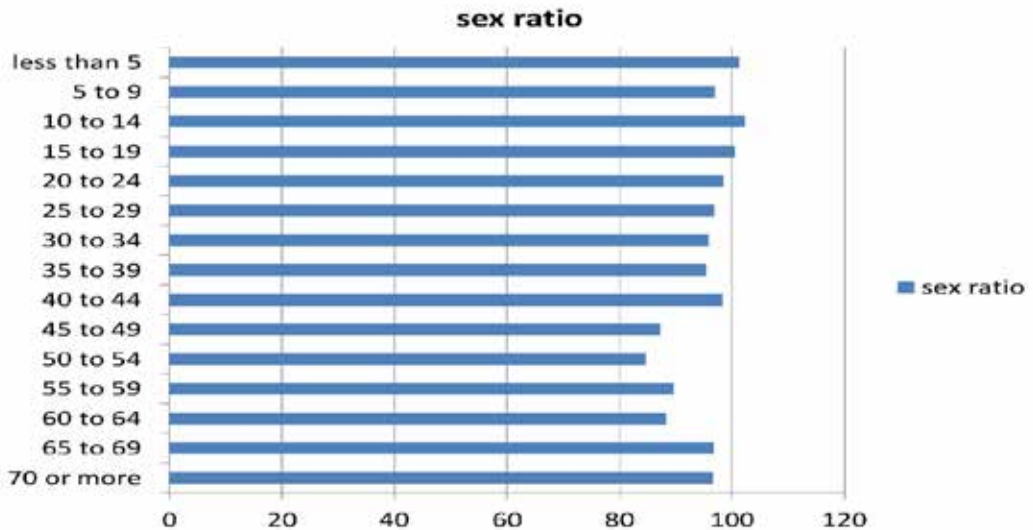
**Table 5: Sex Ratio by Ethnicity, Mulaitivu District, 2012**

Ethnicity	% of the Total Population	Sex Ratio
Tamil	88.2	96.5
Sinhala	9.7	128.7
Muslim	2.0	115.5
Other	1.0	137.0
Total	100.0	96.6

Source: Population Census, 2012

Thus, in the Mulaitivu District only the Tamil population has a female excess. In all the other, smaller ethnic groups in the district there is a clear male excess, possibly due to a pattern of excess male immigration. Male immigration was typical among non-Tamil immigrants returning to these districts following the end of the war.

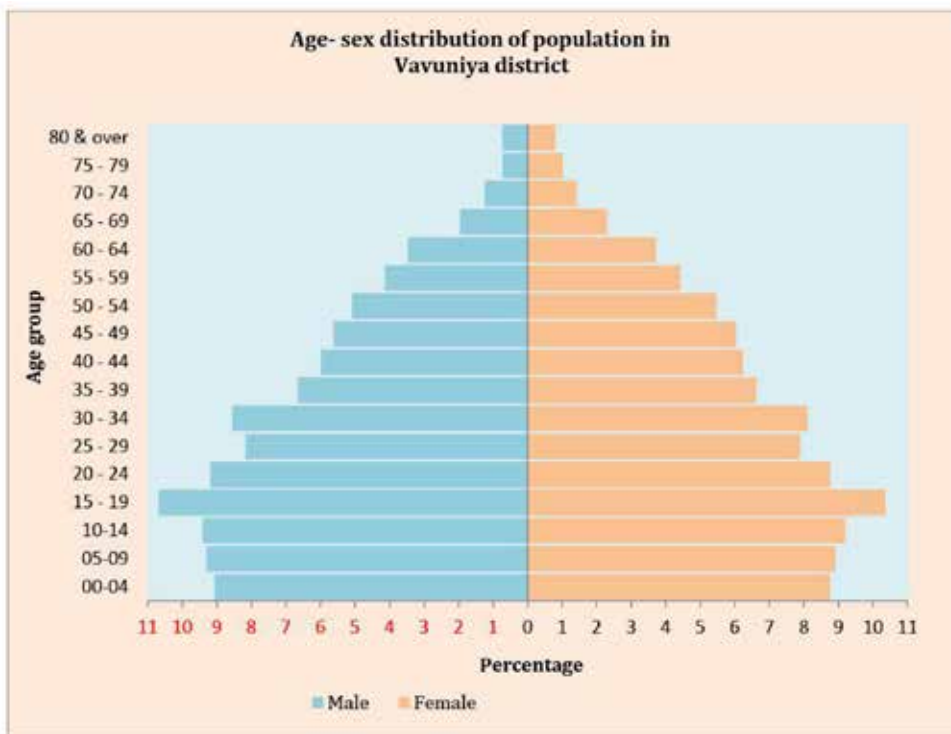
**Figure 6: Age-Specific Sex Ratios in the Vavuniya District, 2012**



Source: Population Census, 2012

Age-specific sex ratios in the Vavuniya District indicate a marginal deficit in the male population since age 20 onwards and accelerated after age 44. This is a district with considerable influx of displaced people from surrounding districts, including the Jaffna district, during and after the war. Also, direct exposure to war-related violence was largely restricted to Vavuniya North Divisional Secretary Division during much of the war. Therefore, the demographic impact of the war in this district was possibly different relative to the northernmost districts in the province.

**Figure 7: Age and Sex Distribution in the Population in Vavuniya District, 2012**



Source: Population Census, 2012

The reduction of population in the 20-29 age group in this district is marginal. Moreover, the population distribution is more characteristic of the pyramidal shape particularly from age 15 onwards. A female excess in the population is only visible in the oldest age groups (60 onwards), which the gender disparity in life expectancy typical of the Sri Lankan population explains.

**Table 6: Sex Ratio by Ethnicity, Vavuniya District, 2012**

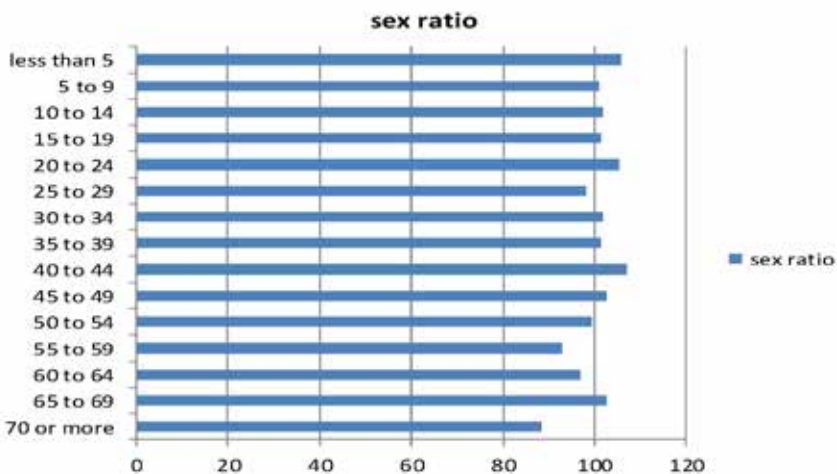
Ethnicity	% of the Total Population	Sex Ratio
Tamil	83.2	93.3
Sinhala	10.0	128.8
Muslim	6.8	102.1
Other	0.1	195.6
Total	100.0	96.9

Source: Population Census, 2012

As in the Mulaitivu District, in the Vavuniya District too, there is a contrasting pattern of sex ratio between Tamil community and all other communities. While the Tamil community, comprising 83.2% of the total district population, shows a marginal excess in female population, in all other ethnic groups there is an excess of male population. While the Sinhalese (10% of the population) and other smaller ethnic groups (0.1% of the population) in the district display a significant deficit of female population, the Muslims (6.8% of the population) tends to have a more balanced gender composition.

The Mannar District is clearly an outlier in terms of sex ratio in the population. It is the only district in the Northern Province to have an aggregate sex ratio of over 100.

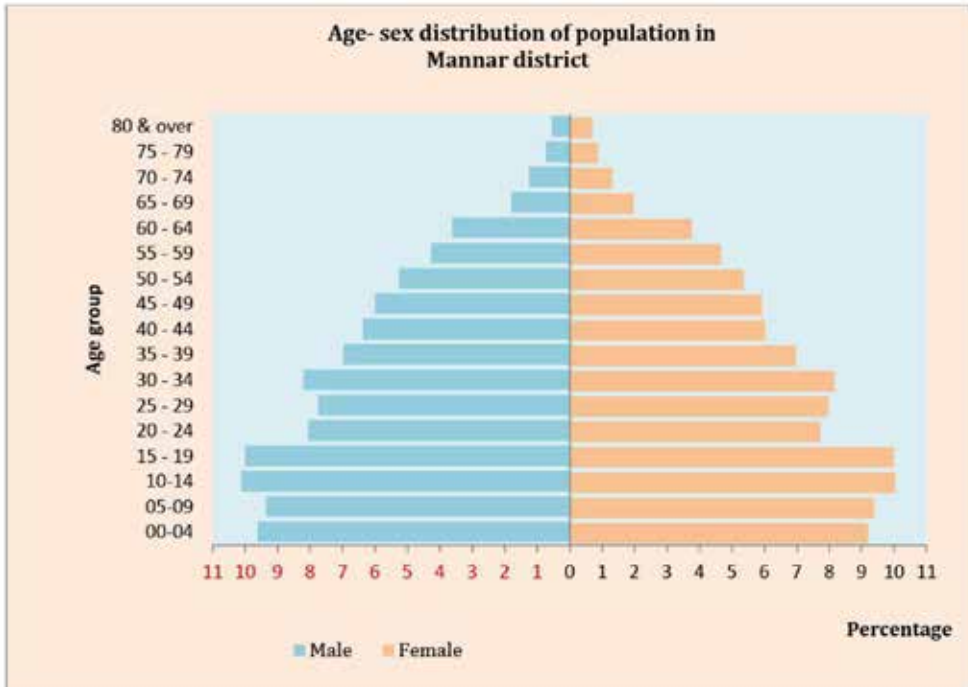
**Figure 8: Age-Specific Sex Ration in Mannar District, 2012**



Source: Population Census, 2012

Age-specific sex ratios in the Mannar District do not show any gender related imbalance in the population until after age 55. The male deficit in the population after 55 years can be attributed to higher life expectancy among women as applicable to populations outside the war zone as well.

**Figure 9: Age and Sex Distribution in Population in Mannar District, 2012**



Source: Population Census, 2012

The population distribution by age and sex, however, point to a notable break in size of population from ages 20 to 29, as is the case in other districts in the Northern Province. There is no notable imbalance in the sex composition of the population, with the exception of an excess of female population in the older age groups (65 or older).

**Table 7: Sex Ratio by Ethnicity, Mannar District, 2012**

Ethnicity	% of the Total Population	Sex Ratio
Tamil	84.5	97.4
Sinhala	2.3	473.3
Muslim	16.5	103.7
Other		---
Total	100.0	101.1

Source: Population Census, 2012

Thus, in Mannar District too, there is a significant difference in the sex ratio between Tamils and the two other ethnic groups. While Tamils have an overall deficit in male population, the pattern is reversed among Sinhalese and Muslims, with Sinhalese having a significant excess in male population and Muslims reporting a marginal excess in male population.

In all five districts in the Northern Province, there are some gender, age and ethnicity related imbalances in the population. In all five districts, there is a male deficit in the Tamil population, particularly in middle and older generations. There may be multiple reasons for this situation, but excess mortality and out migration among males must be seen as contributory factors. By contrast, among the Sinhalese and, to a lesser extent, among the Muslims, there is male excess in the population. This may be attributed to a possible male excess in in-migration from these communities after the end of war.

### **Changes in Sex Ratio in the Eastern Province**

Between 1981 and 2012, the demographic profile of Eastern Province was affected by a number of factors, including war-induced population changes, the fallout of the tsunami in 2005, and state policies relating to human settlement (McGilvray 2008, Spencer et al. 2015). These factors obviously had a significant impact on the sex ratio of the general population. For instance, while the war resulted in higher mortality among males, the pattern was reversed in the case of the tsunami—a phenomenon

well established in the literature (Silva 2009a, 2016). Thus, between 1981 and 2012, a more complex set of factors were likely influential in the Eastern Province as compared to the Northern Province.

**Table 8: Size and Sex composition of the population in Eastern Province, 1981 and 2012**

Year	Male	Female	Total	Sex Ratio
1981	508,641	466,610	975, 251	109.0
2012	752,500	803,010	1,555,510	93.7

Source: 1981 and 2012 Population Censuses

Between 1981 and 2012, the population in the Eastern Province changed from a markedly surplus male population to a surplus female population. The sex ratio in the province changed from 109.0 in 1981 to 93.7 in 2012. This epitomizes the significant impact of the war on the composition of the surviving population in the post-war era. This occurred despite a significant loss of female lives during the tsunami of December 2004, the absence of a significant pattern of selective outmigration of males from the Eastern Province during the war, and any selective in-migration of females during and after the war.<sup>5</sup> The observed demographic shifts must, therefore, be understood largely in terms of the impact of the war in combination with the higher life expectancy of females nationwide.

**Table 9: Number of Males and Females and Sex Ratios in Districts of the Eastern Province (2012)**

District	No of males	No of females	Sex Ratio
Trincomalee	187,472	192,069	97.6
Batticaloa	250,676	275,891	90.8
Ampara	314,352	335,050	93.8

Source: 2012 Population Census

As of 2012, in the Eastern Province, the sex ratio was lowest in Batticaloa District and Paduwankarai (part<sup>6</sup> of which was most severely affected by the war), followed

<sup>5</sup> There is, however, a reported selective out-migration of females from the province for employment in the middle-east.

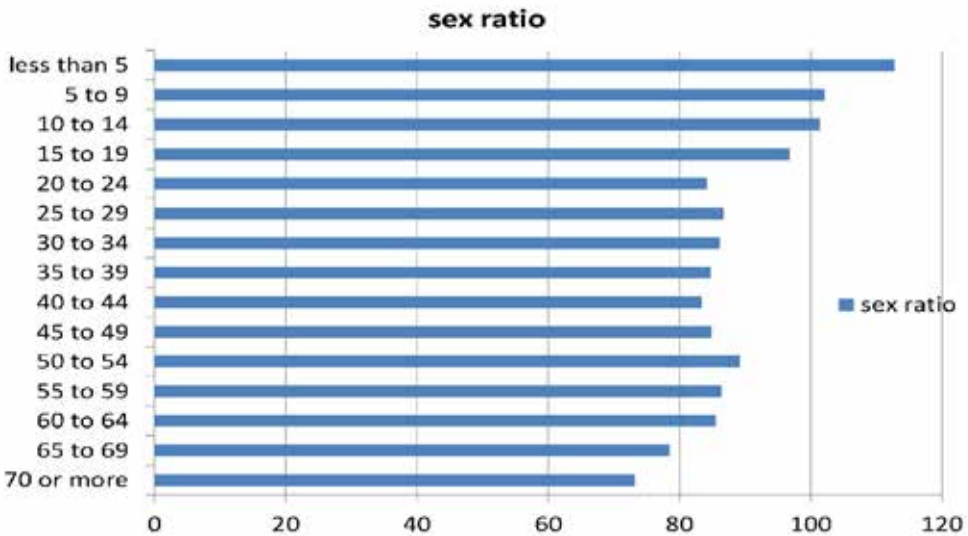
<sup>6</sup> Paduwankarai is the interior region of the Batticaloa District and was under LTTE control during much of the war.

by Ampara and Trincomalee Districts. In all three districts there was considerable variation in sex ratios according to ethnicity. Similar to the Northern Province, the Eastern Province also exhibits a male deficit in the population that is more pronounced among Sri Lankan Tamils followed by the Muslims, with the pattern changing in favor of the males among the Sinhalese. There is a significant male surplus in the Sinhalese population in Batticaloa, followed by Trincomalee. This, in turn, points to the fact that the demographic impact of the war in producing a consistent male deficit among the population is more pronounced in the Tamil population, which was primary source of LTTE recruits both in Northern and Eastern provinces (Thiranagama 2011, Somasundaram 2010a, McGilvray 2008, Tambiah 2004).

### Age-Specific Sex Ratios by District in Eastern Province

In this section we examine the age-specific sex ratios in each district in the Eastern Province also taking into consideration variation in ethnicity.

**Figure 10: Age-Specific Sex Ratios in Batticaloa District, 2012**

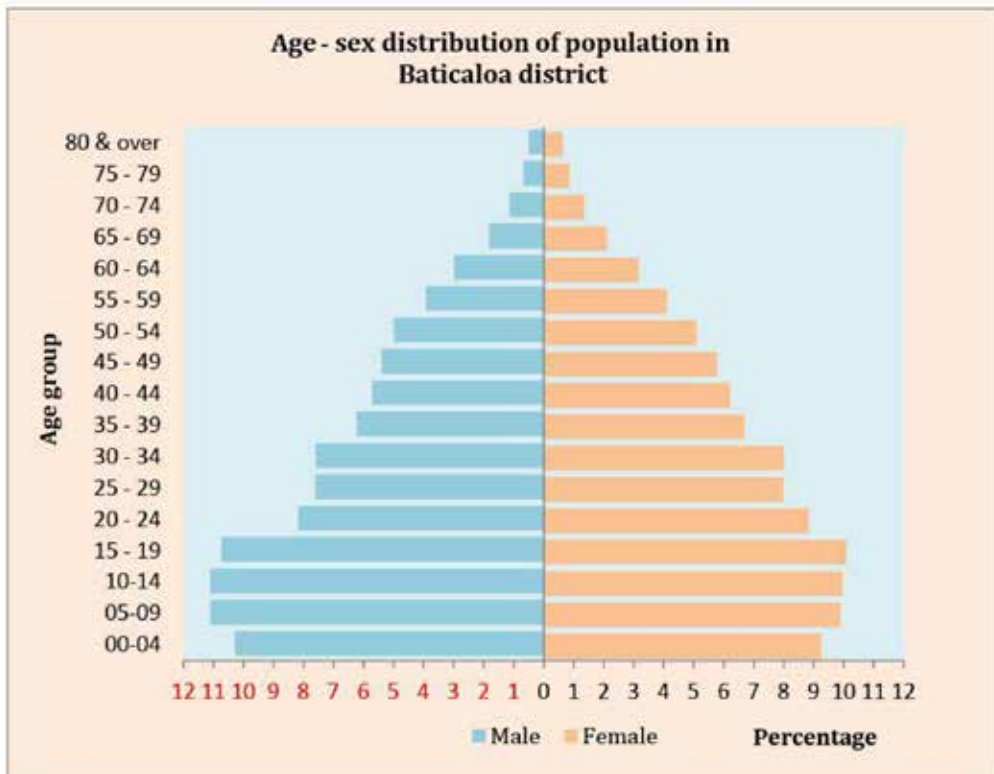


Source: 2012 Population Census

The analysis of age-specific sex ratios in Batticaloa District for 2012 indicate that the male deficit in the population begins in the 15-19-year-old age group, peaks in the 20-24 year-old age group, and continues consistently through to the oldest age group, save for the 50-54 age group. Approximately 20 percent of the male population

from age 20 onwards is missing, presumably due to the war. The significant male deficit that persists throughout the different age groups, from 20 years onwards, must be seen as a long-term impact of war, protracted over a 25-year period. As the predominantly male exodus observed during the war in Jaffna District does not appear to have been the case in Batticaloa District, and taking into account the reportedly lower incidence of tsunami-related male deaths, any male deficit in the population must be understood primarily in terms of war-related deaths. In addition, higher life expectancy among women presumably plays an important role in the sharp decline in sex ratio from 60 years onwards. We also have to bear in mind here that according to some observers, Tamil youth forcibly recruited from Eastern Province comprised the bulk of frontline combatants in the LTTE (Spencer et al. 2015, Gaasbeek 2010, McGilvray 2008).

**Figure 11: Population Distribution by Age and Sex in Batticaloa District, 2012**



Source: Population Census, 2012



The net demographic outcome of this situation is evident from the population pyramid for the district for 2012. There is a clear pattern of a reduction of males in the population from age 20 onwards right up to older ages. On the other hand, female population conforms to a consistent pyramidal pattern barring a minor reduction in the 20 to 29 age group. One of the notable features of the population pyramid in Batticaloa District is the smaller size of 0-4 and 5-9 age groups relative to 10-14 age group among both males and females, with the deficit more pronounced among females. This may or may not be related to higher reported mortality among children during tsunami reported in the literature (Silva 2016).

Inter-ethnic variation in sex ratio in the Batticaloa district is given in Table 10.

**Table 10: Sex Ratio by Ethnicity, Batticaloa District, 2012**

Ethnicity	% of the Total Population	Sex Ratio
Tamil	72.7	89.8
Sinhala	1.3	196.4
Muslim	25.4	90.4
Other	0.6	93.5
Total	100.0	90.8

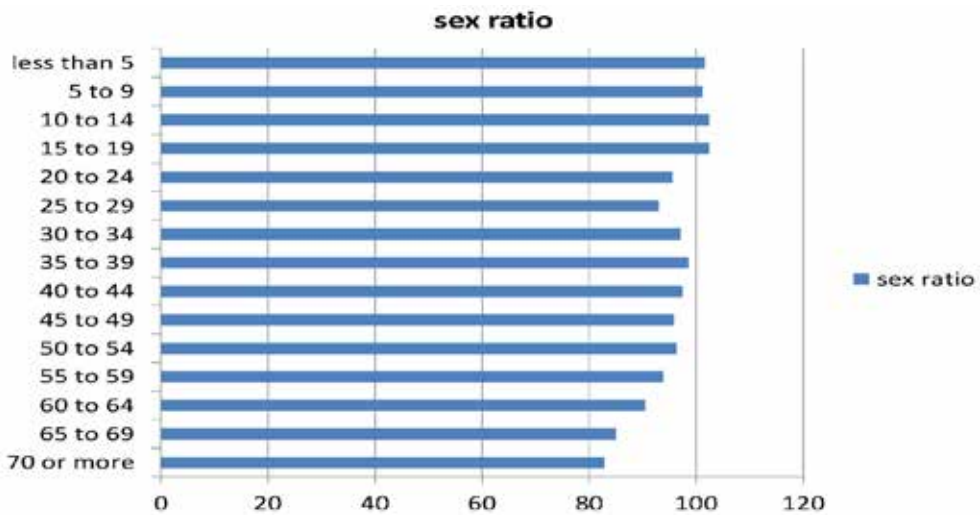
Source: Population Census, 2012

According to 2012 census data, among the Tamils, who comprise 72.7% of the district population, the sex ratio was 89.8. Among the Muslims in the same district, who constitute 25.4% of the population, the sex ratio was 90.4. In contrast, the sex ratio among the Sinhalese, who make up a mere 1.3% of the district population, the sex ratio was 196.4%; indicating a substantial male surplus, almost two males for each female. The male deficit in the Tamil and Muslim populations can be largely attributed to higher loss of male lives during the war, either as combatants or as victims of armed conflict, accompanied by higher life expectancy among women. On the other hand, the unusually high sex ratio among the numerically small Sinhalese population may be due to selective in migration of males displaced by the war from the Sinhala border villages in the district following the end of war. Women

and children, for the most part, opted to stay behind in the Sinhala-dominant areas to which they had been displaced while the men moved to reoccupy the land in the border villages that they had abandoned during the war. This shows that the demographic impact of the war was not uniform across all ethnic groups, and that in Batticaloa District, while it led to a notable reduction in sex ratio among Tamils and Muslims who suffered the brunt of war, it actually produced significant male excess in the Sinhala population due to selective in-migration of males during the settling-in process after the end of the war.

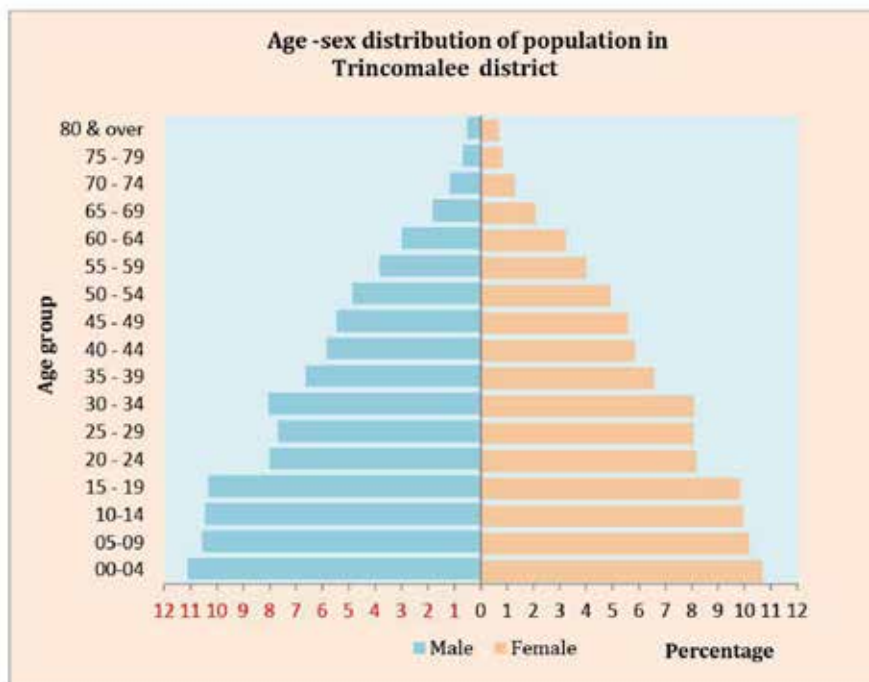
As for the age-specific sex ratios in Trincomalee District, the pattern is broadly similar to that in Batticaloa (see Figure 12). The dent in the sex ratio in the 20 to 29 age group, however is less pronounced, and, unlike in the case of the Batticaloa District, there is no consistent reduction in sex ratios in all subsequent age groups.

**Figure 12: Age-Specific Sex Ratio in the Trincomalee District, 2012**



Source: Population Census, 2012

**Figure 13: Age and Sex Distribution of the Population in Trincomalee District, 2012**



Source: Department of Census and Statistics 2012

In the Trincomalee District, too, the pyramidal shape of the population is disturbed in the 20 to 29 age group among males and, to a lesser extent, among females as well. The population size is skewed in favor of the females, particularly after 20 years of age. This, in turn, implies a higher presence of females in the labor force. Given gendered employment patterns in Sri Lanka, this likely affects the labor market.

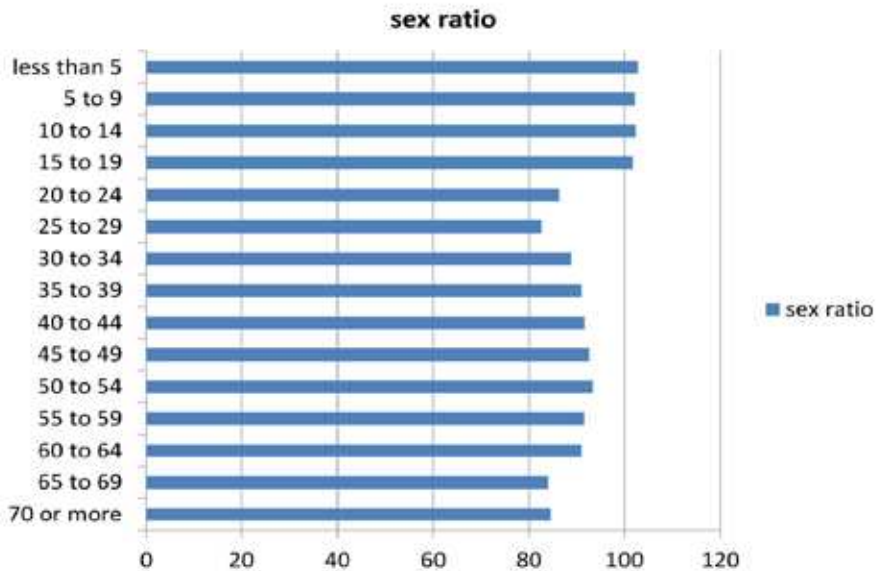
**Table 11: Sex Ratio by Ethnicity, Trincomalee District, 2012**

Ethnicity	% of the Total Population	Sex Ratio
Tamil	31.5	90.0
Sinhala	26.7	102.3
Muslim	41.8	100.6
Other	0.3	94.5
Total	100.0	97.6

Source: Population Census, 2012

With respect to the inter-ethnic variation in sex ratio in the Trincomalee District, the sex ratio was 90.0 among Tamils (31.5% of the total district population), 100.6 among the Muslims (41.8% of the total population), and 102.3 among the Sinhalese (26.7% of the total population). Once again, the Sri Lankan Tamil population reported the lowest sex ratio, followed by smaller ethnic groups, the Muslims and the Sinhalese. While the Tamils were possibly the worst affected in terms of death toll during the war, as reflected in the distorted sex ratio in the surviving population, there is no such demographic distortion in the other two main ethnic groups in the district.

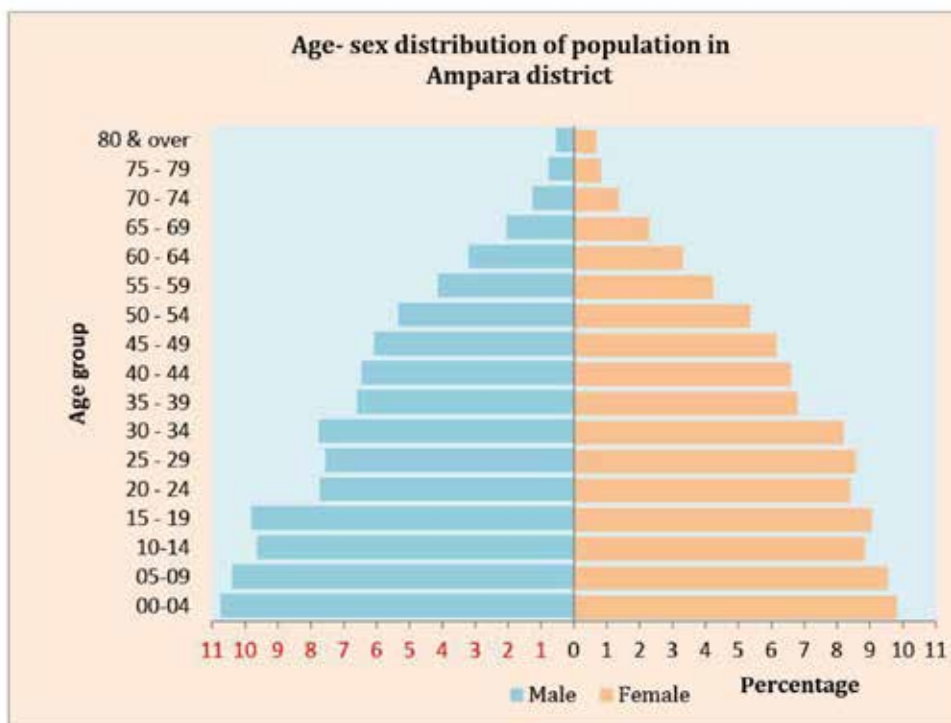
**Figure 14: Age-Specific Sex Ratio in the Ampara District, 2012**



Source: Population Census, 2012

As in other districts in the Eastern Province, there is a marked deficit in the male population in the Ampara District from age 20 onwards, with peak deficits in ages 20-29 and 65 onwards. The female surplus in the older age groups is understandable given higher life expectancy among females, but the female surplus from age 20 to 34 or so, following higher sex ratio in younger age groups, must be understood in terms of loss of adolescent and youth lives due to the war.

**Fig 15: Population Pyramid in the Ampara District, 2012**



Source: Population Census, 2012

The population distribution in the Ampara District shows a notable reduction in the males aged 20 to 29. The population composition changes from a female deficit in ages 0 to 19 to a male deficit from age 20 onwards. Once again, this is likely to affect the sex composition of the labor force as well as the volume of old-age dependency among females in particular.

**Table 12: Sex Ratio by Ethnicity, Ampara District, 2012**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>% of the Total Population</b>	<b>Sex Ratio</b>
Tamil	17.4	88.9
Sinhala	38.9	98.5
Muslim	43.4	91.8
Other	0.3	94.9
Total	100.0	93.8

Source: Population Census, 2012

In contrast to other districts in the province, the pattern of female excess in the Ampara district is uniform across ethnic groups. Among the Tamils, who comprise 17.4 % of the district population, the sex ratio was 88.9, followed by a sex ratio of 91.8 among Muslims (roughly 43.4 % of the population), 94.9 among smaller ethnic clusters (0.3% of the population) and 98.5 among the Sinhalese (38.9 % of the population). This district was one of the worst affected by the 2004 tsunami, and, in view of reported excess female mortality attributed to the tsunami, it may have partly offset the war-induced female surplus in the population (Silva 2016).

On the whole, the demographic impact of the war in the Eastern Province is broadly consistent with the patterns observed in the Northern Province with regard to age-specific sex ratios and inter-ethnic sex ratios.

### **Overview of Demographic Changes**

While assessing the demographic impact of the war and war-related population movements in the Northern and Eastern provinces, close attention must be paid to inter-district variation, as well as differences related to ethnicity and gender. In summary, the key demographic impacts of the war and war-related population movements are as follows:

1. In general, the war and related casualties and population movements—combined with a markedly higher life expectancy among women—have produced to an unbalanced sex ratio among all ethnic groups. This unbalanced sex ratio is manifested in a significant male deficit among Sri Lankan Tamils, and a variable pattern in Sinhala and Muslim communities (with a less pronounced male surplus in most instances).
2. Changes in the sex ratio are uniform and more significant among Tamils, who constitute the largest single ethnic group in the Northern and Eastern provinces together. The resident Tamil population in the Northern Province, and the Jaffna District in particular, is characterized by a significant male deficit, particularly among the economically active labor force. This, in turn, has a number of implications upon livelihoods and earning capacity, family

structure, gender relations, and the vulnerability profile of the affected communities. In the next section of this report, these social and vulnerability aspects are explored using qualitative data generated through this social assessment.

3. Among the Muslim and Sinhala in-migrants in parts of the Northern and Eastern province, and in Mannar, Vavuniya and Batticaloa districts in particular, there seems to be a surplus of males. Displaced male migrants have typically returned to their original lands following the end of the war, leaving behind their female partners and children in their adopted homes in host communities outside the former war zone. This effectively has created two homes for families: one within the host communities inhibited during the war (e.g. Puttalam in the case of Muslims displaced from Mannar, and Rambawa in the case of Sinhalese displaced from Vavuniya), and one within families' original area, which has consequently distorted sex ratios. FGDs with re-settlers in Mannar and Vavuniya Districts reported a number of reasons for staying in their host communities. These factors include the availability of better facilities in the places of displacement (e.g. Puttalam), the development of social networks, following their initial movement to these host communities, state support for resettlement in the original villages, and a strategic decision on the part of the relevant households to remain connected to both original villages and host communities. This was through relocation of part of the family (usually elderly males or elderly parents) in the original village, considering access to land and services (including educational facilities better established in host communities as well as housing and rehabilitation assistance to resettling families moving back to original villages), and the perceived vulnerability profiles in each location (see also Weerakoon 2012, Brun 2008).
  
4. As evident from age-specific sex ratios and population pyramids presented in this report, there is a much higher female presence in the elderly population aged 60 and above, irrespective of ethnic identity. Without

access to pensions and other retirement benefits, and in the absence of social welfare programs, specialized geriatric care, and elderly care from within the family and community structures, these elderly women may encounter special challenges during their old age. This appears to be a common social welfare issue cutting across all ethnic communities connected with higher life expectancy among women, perhaps further pronounced in the war-affected regions due to excess war-related male mortality.

The social and economic impacts of these changing demographic profiles and the related vulnerabilities are explored further in the following sections.

### **Livelihood Impact**

The impact of gender imbalance in the population on livelihoods in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka can be understood along a number of dimensions.

First, the male deficit tends to influence the overall structure of the labor force, in light of the disproportionate loss of working age men due to war-related mortality and outmigration patterns. Roughly 50 percent of the work force was lost in the Jaffna District during the war, due to the loss of unskilled combatants as well as highly skilled professionals who moved out of the district. Apart from businessmen who ran the commercial economy in cities, and professionals who managed the public and private sectors, agricultural livelihoods were also affected by the shortage of male labor. The detrimental impacts of male labor shortage on agriculture are no better illustrated than by the demise of the Vellalar farmer aristocracy in the Jaffna district, which was credited with a long-established pattern of blending white collar public sector employment and commercial farming of tobacco, vegetables, onions and chili crops (Rasanan 2015, Pfaffenberger 1982). Sarvanandan (2007) notes that in Vanni and in Eastern Sri Lanka, the war-related destruction of infrastructure, the LTTE-imposed taxes and appropriations, and the government-imposed ban on agricultural supplies (such as fertilizer and chemicals) further added to the war-induced destruction of livelihoods. With the two main rural livelihoods in the Northern and Eastern provinces, fishing and farming, women rarely engage. This prevents women-headed households from taking on these activities as their



primary source of livelihood. On the other hand, women are often more active in certain types of livestock keeping (e.g. poultry and goat keeping), home gardening and catering, and other activities that do not necessarily clash with their household duties, gendered roles, and cultural expectations.

Second, due to the breakdown of agriculture, fisheries and other industries, daily wage earning became the most important livelihood, particularly for poorer people (Sarvanathan, Jeyaprabha and Alagarajah 2017, Jayatilaka, Amirthalingam and Gunasekara 2015, Razaak 2014, Silva, Sivakanthan and Wickramasinghe 2012). Based on previous studies and information gathered as part of the current assessment, we estimate that wage labor is the primary or a subsidiary source of livelihood for over 75% of households in the war-affected Northern and Eastern regions. Particularly for unskilled female workers, including women-headed households where women were compelled to work in the absence of male breadwinners, wage labor is viable option. Partly due to the oversupply of unskilled female workers in the labor force, resulting from the demographic processes described in the preceding section, the daily wage of an unskilled female worker is usually lower than 50% of the daily wage given to an unskilled male worker. This was revealed in a prior literature (Silva, Wickramasinghe and Sivakanthan 2012) and was also confirmed in FGDs we conducted. In effect, a lack of employment opportunities for female workers, and poor wage levels among unskilled female workers where they do find work, are likely contributing to higher levels of poverty reported in selected regions of the Northern and Eastern provinces (Silva et al. 2017).

Third, as elaborated in another report developed as part of this series (Silva et al. 2018), the ability of unskilled female workers to find work is constrained by a number of factors, including: child care responsibilities, health care and elderly care responsibilities, poor road and transport facilities, cultural inhibitions on widows and unmarried women past what is considered a marriageable age, potential sexual abuse and sexual advances in workplaces, and the seasonality and lack of continuity in casual work opportunities (Silva et al., 2017). The displacement of female labor, in particular by agricultural machinery such as combined harvesters and tractors (a process that has advanced in the post-war era), is another force to be reckoned with when considering the overall trends in the demand for unskilled labor in

agriculture. With all these constraints on female labor, the surplus female labor in the work force is bound to push down household income levels and increase their vulnerability (within a context of limited social protection<sup>7</sup> and eroding community support mechanisms). These demographic dynamics, such as the female excess particularly in the older age groups, may help explain the puzzle of exceedingly low female participation in the labor force reported by a variety of studies (Gunatilaka 2013, World Bank 2017).

Finally, the female deficit noted among Sinhala and Muslim resettlers in the Northern and Eastern provinces may also impact livelihoods in so far as diminishing female contributions in farming, household subsistence and saving practices, and taking care of the sick, elderly and the disabled. FGDs and Key Informant Interviews conducted in Sinhala and Muslim settlements in Vavuniya and Mannar districts revealed that the absence of a younger generation was a serious concern in these communities. In one Sinhala resettlement, FDG participants reported that the village, originally having 140 households, had since reduced to 20 households comprised of about 40 people (28 men and 12 women). In the displaced families, mostly elderly males returned, as the others were well settled in their designated relocation environments. An additional 15 families commuted to the village from time to time for farming and collection of any handouts given on an irregular basis. The people living there engaged in rice and highland cultivation, using agro-wells, with some taking up commercial agricultural production for external markets. The older residents in the village had a pioneering spirit, but they reiterated the view that their future is uncertain due to lack of people and unwillingness of the younger generations to join them.

A similar pattern prevailed in a Muslim settlement in Mannar created for IDPs returning from Puttalam. FGDs conducted with new settlers in this community pointed to the fact that their families were split between Puttalam and Mannar, trying to access better services in the former and more plentiful land resources and resettlement assistance in the latter. This, in turn, raises the question as to the actual social impact of prevailing resettlement policies and programs and their net effect on

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<sup>7</sup> As discovered in the FGDs conducted in this assessment, the Samurdhi Program is either not present or has low coverage in many administrative units in the Northern and Eastern provinces.

post-war recovery and development. This is an issue that requires closer attention and analysis beyond the preliminary observations in the current study.

## **Social Impact**

The unbalanced sex ratio in the population directly or indirectly contributed to a number of social pathologies identified in the Northern and Eastern provinces.

## **Concerns about the Marriageability of Young Women**

One of the recurring themes in female FGDs, including FGDs with women-headed households (WHHs) and unemployed young females conducted in a prior study in Northern Province, is the non-marriageability of young women due to their inability to raise a dowry. This is an oppressive patriarchal custom that has clearly survived the war. This situation is further accentuated by the deficit of marriageable male partners of appropriate age, as well as a corresponding weakening of the bargaining position of girls vis-à-vis young men in the local marriage market. Women often alluded to a perceived risk of abuse by known or unknown persons within the environments in which they lived (see also Herath 2017, Samuel & Kodikara 2010, Tambiah 2004). According to KIIs with women activists working for civil society organizations and Women Development Officers employed by the government, consensual and non-consensual sexual alliances involving women who have limited agency or ability to negotiate added to their vulnerability. On the whole, the situation reinforces feelings of vulnerability and insecurity among women in particular. In an environment where unmarried women are seen as a burden to the family, and marriage and child bearing are the ultimate proof of womanhood, unmarried women past the marriageable age experience a complex mix of stigma, vicious rumors, and potential abuse. On the other hand, any suspected sexual alliances prior to or outside marriage and outside ethnicity are seen as a broader cultural and existential challenges in that the emerging developments contradict the conventional patriarchal and puritanical expectation of women as bearers of pure and uncontaminated Tamil culture (Sarvananthan, Jeyaprabha and Alagarajah 2017).

## **Marital Instability**

The unbalanced sex ratio not only affects the potential for marriage among unmarried women, but also the very institution of marriage and family itself. Partly due to repeated displacements, a confused social environment, and the state of flux in IDP camps and new settlements, extramarital relations have exploded among the new settlers, with certain married men often having multiple partners, taking advantage of the female surplus in the population, including war widows. In order to avoid conscription, a practice reportedly employed by the LTTE during the war, marriages were hurriedly arranged by parents. As the war ended, the fragility of these often under-aged marriages emerged and husbands desertions their wives became a regular occurrence (Herath 2017, Tambiah 2004). The alcoholism of husbands, which is also part of the social pathology in many communities in the Northern and Eastern provinces, and the associated patterns of domestic and gender-based violence, further contribute to the phenomenon of marital instability. The estimates of the percentage of households with serious marital problems, including separations and divorces, range from 10 to 25 in selected communities in the Northern and Eastern provinces (Herath 2017, Tambiah 2004). .

In one FGD, an older, married woman asserted that peaceful resolution of internal problems within the family is no longer possible in many households. In KIIs with Grama Niladharis, they often mentioned that their interventions in disputes within the family have become increasingly necessary in light of domestic violence on the part of alcoholic husbands, specifically. In a female FGD, one woman noted: “Women are as disposable as damaged plastic buckets; so easily replaced nowadays [*pilastic vaali, pilastic poradhal udainthantham maathuvathu pola*]. Even for a simple mistake of the wife, the husband opts to go to another woman.” This statement conveys the view that, in part due to unbalanced sex ratios, the value of women has fallen not only in the marriage market, but also within the institution of marriage and family itself. One Grama Niladhari stressed the need for family counselling at the village level. While an unbalanced sex ratio cannot be treated as the only or even primary cause of marriage instability as elaborated by Herath (2018), it is certainly one of the relevant factors contributing to marriage instability in resettling populations.

## **Impact on Community Leadership**

A leadership deficit was evident in many of the communities and institutions visited under this assessment. According to prior studies and our KIIs, community leadership declined during the war (Herath 2017, Gaasbeek 2010). Often the male leaders in the communities moved out because of the war or, if present, were reluctant to come forward and assert themselves in their new environment. Interestingly, many of the community leaders visible in FGDs were either middle-aged women or disabled males, who filled in the vacuum in community leadership. How far this situation has actually empowered the relevant persons is not clear from the available evidence. The capacity of this leadership, however, was rather limited in terms of tapping resources from the state, NGOs, and civil and political society outside the area. In order to promote an active civil society supportive of community-driven development initiatives this leadership gap must be recognized and carefully addressed.

## **Overall Impact on Gender Relations**

The impact of the skewed sex ratio on gender relations in society can be approached in two ways. On the one hand, with the prevailing male deficit in the Tamil population in particular, one can expect the women to take on some male activities such as leadership roles, technical occupations, and negotiations with government and non-government establishments. If successful, this has the potential to break inhibiting gender stereotypes and undermine patriarchy, thereby bringing about structural change in society. The pattern is reversed in the in-migrant Sinhala and Muslim communities, where there is a surplus of males, but their female family members left behind in the relocated sites may have the potential to assert a more proactive role within their families. On the other hand, a surplus of women in the population can intensify competition for limited employment opportunities available for women as well as diminish the bargaining power of women in the marriage market and within the institution of marriage itself. This is more likely to reinforce the existing gender inequalities in society and oppress women more. In this assessment, we found more evidence for the latter, rather than signs of any strategic change in gender relations. We do not, however, exclude the possibility of such structural change in time to come.

## **The Psychological Impact**

As expressed in FGDs, the women in the Northern and Eastern provinces experience feelings of insecurity due to a number of reasons. The absence of adult males who are expected to safeguard women and children is the most obvious of these reasons. The fragile condition of some of their homes, with no stable doors, windows, or walls in some instances, add to their feelings of insecurity, particularly at night. In a total of three FGDs with Tamil women, they noted that the presence of security establishments with large numbers of Sinhala male soldiers in close proximity to civilian settlements adds to their feeling of insecurity. We came to know through FGDs that one common coping strategy adopted by Tamil women is sleeping in their relatives' or neighbors' homes that have sufficient space and secure walls, doors, and windows. Women suggested that this communal sleeping arrangement ensures their security not only against total outsiders, but also potential threats from within their communities. These arrangements infer that in spite of the end of war and their resettlement (often in their original villages), Tamil women in particular continue to live with a sense of insecurity.

The generalized feeling of insecurity among the civilians is clearly one of the ingredients of what Somasundaram (2010a) aptly described as the 'collective trauma' in the aftermath of the war. As we found during FGDs and KIIs in Vanni, most sections of the security forces tended to handle their day-to-day relations with civilians with considerable caution and humanitarian outlook. The sheer presence of security forces in large numbers and in close proximity to civilian communities created a feeling of insecurity among civilians, and for women in particular. According to respondents in female FGDs, the absence of adult males in many houses and the fragile nature of housing have further accentuated their sense of insecurity.

This collective fear psychosis was evident from the panic about 'grease devils' (*greezebhotham*) which went viral Nationwide, but particularly among civilians in the Northern and Eastern provinces around 2012 (Somasundaram 2010b, Venugopal 2015). The moral panic surrounding unknown male 'Peeping Toms' looking for female victims in some of the war-affected areas epitomized the acute feeling of insecurity among female civilians in the aftermath of the war. This moral

panic was caused by the female excess in the civilian population combined with the heavy presence of the military in close proximity to civilian communities (Venugopal 2015).

Yet, the panic about grease devils disappeared after some time in the Northern and Eastern provinces, as well as in the rest of the country. Its specific manifestation in the Northern and Eastern provinces, however, signified a fear psychosis that had not completely disappeared, as revealed in female FGDs conducted in 2017. The building of new houses under various projects, along with parallel developments such as the decline of paramilitary groups, may have served to reduce the feeling of insecurity among the civilians. Nonetheless, the heavy military presence remains unchanged, even in the most interior parts of the two provinces (Gaasbeek 2010, Spencer et al. 2015). Some of the Tamil civilians, including women, are hired by the Civil Defense Force as farm workers, particularly in some Vanni regions. This seems to have created some economic opportunities for the poorer Tamil civilians, but the FGDs with women in Vanni indicated this has not necessarily created a more favorable civilian attitude towards the security establishment.

Women survivors, particularly in parts of Mulaitivu, Vavuniya, Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts, grieve for their lost relatives, including their husbands and children. Many find it difficult to have a closure to these traumatic experiences, not having seen the dead bodies of their loved ones, not having performed the required funeral ceremonies, and unable to accept that their loved ones are no longer living. While this did not come out strongly in the FGDs, partly because we did not explore it explicitly (even in the FGDs with women), this was mentioned as an important mental health issue in the KIIs with psychiatrists, counselors, and women's activists.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

The first part of this report analyzed the changes in the sex ratio in the civilian population in the Northern and Eastern provinces, based on the findings of the population censuses conducted by DCS in 1981 and 2012. In particular, a significant male deficit in the economically, socially and politically active age groups was identified—not only as a demographic imbalance, but also a potential determinant

to the economic, social and psychological vulnerabilities among the predominantly-Tamil populations in the affected regions.

The second part of the report explored the resulting vulnerabilities in detail using qualitative research, thus examining the impact on livelihood patterns, instability of marriage and family, a leadership deficit, unequal gender relations, and the overall sense of security among the resettling population. These factors are certainly important to recognize and deal with in designing development activities and social policies for post-war recovery in Sri Lanka.

It is likely that the prevailing imbalances in the sex ratio among the war survivors will take a number of generations to naturally re-stabilize. Policy makers, development workers, civil society organizations, and even the private sector must take this as a “frame condition,” within which economic initiatives, development interventions, psychosocial programs, and security regimes must be introduced. At the same time, under the current circumstances, there may be an unprecedented opportunity to alter unequal gender relations that have evolved through cultural processes over a long period of time. As evident from this detailed analysis of gender composition in 8 districts in North and East, women now constitute a majority of the population and voters in Tamil communities. They have the demographic capacity to influence governance and (by implication) state policies in their favor. Despite the potential strategic leverage this situation holds for women’s empowerment (as identified in some of emerging feminist literature), this outcome has not yet materialized (Samuel and Kodikara 2010, Ruwanpura and Humphries 2004, Tambiah 2004, Kottegoda 1996). It is no coincidence that in the Northern Province and parts of the Eastern province, women have risen to important positions in civil administration,<sup>8</sup> as well as in local government and campaigns for civil rights. Yet, the development of this apparently healthy trend has been inhibited by male-dominant political processes across the entire spectrum of governance, as well as rising trends in indebtedness, domestic violence, alcoholism, family breakdown, desertions of wives by their wayward husbands, and a marked leadership deficit in community activities. While this is by no means the only strategic social issue that requires policy and

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, in 2011, three of the five District Secretaries in the Northern Province were Tamil women with considerable administrative power, in spite of a number of impeding factors.



program attention, it is certainly an important one that has a bearing on overall underdevelopment of the region.

The unacceptably large wage gap for male and female workers in casual employment, particularly in the agricultural sector, calls for suitable interventions in vocational training and self-employment promotion, particularly for women-friendly development initiatives, such as micro-enterprises, home gardening, and livestock development. There must also be support and funding for the expansion of the garment and other processing industries as a source of stable employment for women in particular. Support must be given for the establishment of appropriate day care facilities for small children, so that more women can enter the labor market. The development of rural roads and transport facilities and the establishment of market linkages for the output of small producers—specifically including women—should also be a priority. Further, there are some prospects for reviving the cooperative sector in the Northern and Eastern provinces, specifically with regard to facilitating various producer groups, including milk producers, poultry farmers, home gardeners, cottage industries, and food processing. The development of Ammachchi food outlets<sup>9</sup> under the initiative of the Department of Agriculture and local women’s groups can be seen as a progressive step from this angle. In order to respond to the breakdown of families, early marriage, problems in the marriage market, trauma and related issues, as well as alcoholism and various forms of psychosocial stress in the communities, counseling services must be strengthened, along with the timely interventions by mediators such as religious leaders, village-level government officials (e.g. Grama Niladhari, school teachers and health workers). There must be an open discussion about the ways and means of addressing these issues among the social sector personnel (e.g. counselors, probation officers, Child Right Promotion Officers, Women Development Officers and Social Service Officers), civil society leaders, religious leaders, school authorities, and elected representatives in each area. We also found that many of the social sector positions in government institutions in the Northern and Eastern provinces have remained vacant, and this has contributed in some ways toward advancing the social problems identified in this assessment. The relevant agencies, such as the Ministries of Women’s Affairs, Social

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9 These outlets are used by local women’s groups to prepare popular local food items in demand and (identified as healthy food) and sell them at affordable prices for the local consumers.

Services and Social Empowerment and Probation and Child Care, must be advised and adequately funded to fill the remaining vacancies—particularly in the Northern and Eastern Provinces—bearing in mind the emerging needs in these newly-settled or recently-resettled communities.

Skill development and leadership training, with a focus on women, would make a useful contribution toward enhancing their participation at higher levels of decision making in Sri Lankan society. Legal interventions—such as a quota system for women in local government, the Pradeshiya Saba and Provincial Councils—may be particularly appropriate for the Northern and Eastern provinces, given the current sex ratios. Finally, in order to deal with the problem of alcoholism among men, efforts must be made to curtail the manufacture and supply of illicit liquor, raise public awareness about the addictive nature of alcohol, and promote alternative forms of entertainment—such as sports, theatre, and popular movies with social themes specifically relevant to the Northern and Eastern provinces.

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**Annex 1: Daily Wages Given to Male and Female Hired Workers in the Informal Sector in Selected Locations in the Northern and Eastern Provinces**

**Table 13: Wage Differential between Male and Female workers, Concerning the Daily Wage for Casual Labor in the Informal Sector, 2012.**

<b>Field Location</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Santhvelli, Batticaloa	Rs. 800	Rs. 250-300
Kiran West, Batticalo	Rs. 200 (Fish net cleaning)	Rs.100 (Fish net cleaning)
Achchelu in Valikamam East	Rs. 700	Rs. 200-350
Annivilanthna, Kilinochchi	Rs. 700	Rs. 300-400
Mulliavalai, Mulaitivu	Rs. 700	Rs. 200-300
Nainamadu, Vavuniya	Rs. 1000	Rs. 500
Akkaraipattu	Rs. 500-800	Rs. 400-500
Polonnauwa	Rs. 800	Rs. 600-700
Ampara	Rs. 800	Rs. 500-700

Source: Information gathered during FGDs.

As revealed through FGDs conducted in CARE sponsored study in 2012 (Silva, Wickramasinghe and Sivakantan 2012), the reported wage differential between male and female casual wage laborers in agriculture was quite significant, particularly in Vanni and parts of the Eastern Province. For instance, for casual farm work, the daily wage for female workers was often nearly 50% of wages paid to comparable male workers. In the Vanni, a female daily wage earner was typically paid Rs. 300-400, as compared to the Rs. 700 to 800 paid to male workers. In Vanni and in the Eastern Province, the pattern was basically the same, even though the gap tended



to be more narrow in Eastern Province relative to Vanni. Interestingly, in parts of Polonnaruwa and Ampara districts, the wage differential between male and female workers was much less, signifying that this problem was more acute in the former conflict zone; there, more women have recently entered the labor market due to the death, disappearance or desertion of male family members. In many FGDs even women accepted these wage difference as part of a natural state of affairs and did not question it in any way. When asked why they accepted this situation, some women argued that men received the wages they deserved as they undertake harder physical labor, while others said that if they were to raise this with their employers they would lose even the wages they were getting at present. The wage differential partly reflects patriarchal social values that undervalue female labor as compared to male labor. Yet, we must also recognize that the oversupply of female labor in the casual labor market, which results from the unbalanced sex ratio noted above, has the effect of further deflating female wage levels by the sheer operation of supply and demand. To some extent, this explains the higher wage gap between male and female workers in areas directly affected by the war, such as the Vanni, even when compared to nearby border areas such as Polonnaruwa, where the demographic impact of the war was quite different.

These differences in wages remained unchanged in 2017 when we conducted FGDs under SSA. Further, we noted their considerable impact on the quality of life and standard of living in households that are dependent on wage labor, partly because the higher earnings of men were invariably used for alcohol consumption and other wasteful expenses, while the smaller income of female casual laborers were more or less totally devoted to the welfare of the household (including essential expenses for household consumption and the education and health of children). On the other hand, the male deficit in the civilian population in the aftermath of the war not only resulted in a significant loss of economically active male household members, but also led to a situation where female household members took up casual wage labor in agriculture, further dampening the wage levels applicable to women workers.





# Sex Ratio and Vulnerability in Northern and Eastern Provinces in Sri Lanka

By  
**Kalinga Tudor Silva**

Comparing the results of 1981 and 2012 population censuses in Sri Lanka, the current study examined the impact of the war on the population dynamics in the Northern and Eastern provinces with a focus on changes in the sex ratio. The sex ratio in the population varied by district and also by ethnic group within each district. On the whole Tamils have a tendency for a female surplus in the population while there is a tendency for male surplus in Sinhala communities and, to a varied extent in Muslim communities in districts with a notable presence of these two ethnic groups such as Vavuniya, Mannar and Ampara. This variation in sex ratio profiles in different ethnic communities can be attributed to different levels of mortality and different rates of out-migration among men and women in the Tamil community during the war and selective in-migration of Sinhala and Muslim men when their respective communities are reestablished in the aftermath of the war particularly in the border areas. The study also examined the impact of the unbalanced sex ratio on development challenges, postwar recovery and perceptions of vulnerability in different communities.

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