

**"LANGUAGE OF ILLNESS AND SUFFERING" - STUDY ON PERCEIVED LOCAL
KNOWLEDGE AND PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTION AMONG
WOMEN LIVING IN JAFFNA**

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Violent conflict, political persecution, and catastrophic loss have wracked much of Sri Lanka. People have lost loved ones, homes, and means of livelihood; many live precariously in unsafe conditions. How do families cope when everyday life is in turmoil? What is the toll that war takes on the well-being and development of children? These questions often have been answered in terms of psychiatric categories and diagnostic labels. The question I would like to generate is Does the language of illness and symptoms capture people's own accounts of their suffering and their chosen means to cope with suffering. International donor community directed much emphasis on dealing with civil wars, aftermath, psychological impacts of war on people and well-being since 1990s'. Signing of a peace/ceasefire agreement, between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam in February 2002, hadn't stopped the steady growth of "psychosocial interventions" in Sri Lanka. "Psychosocial interventions" mostly focused on providing psychological assistance to "mentally affected" and "traumatized" people.

I carried out a study where participants spoke about their experiences, how do they perceive, interpret, live and cope with violent conflict and do they need psychological assistance from external resources to deal with such experiences. My paper holds account for the following question, (i) what is the problematic nature of diagnostic criteria? (ii) can diagnostic criteria be related and interpreted differently in different cultures? (iii) how does adverse situations impact development of children? (iv) do the people recognise the "language" of psychological assistance being provided? (v) do the people recognise the need for psychological assistance? (vi) what are the local coping mechanisms?

I propose, language of illness should concur with people's own account of their suffering and their chosen means to cope with suffering instead of introducing something absolutely strange to the local knowledge.

Keywords: Illness, Suffering, Violent Conflict, Well-being, Psychosocial Intervention, Child Developmental, Coping Mechanisms.

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