

Implications of Enforced Disappearances on Women-headed Families in the Northern Province, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Enforced disappearances persist in many countries all over the world. It creates severe social and psychological repercussions on families left behind. The Sri Lankan internal ethnic conflict lasted for three decades ended up with the deaths of more than 150,000 people and massive internal and external displacements. Additionally, a new social phenomenon has been evolved as “Women-headed Households of persons with forcibly disappeared” from all ethnic groups. The government of Sri Lanka and rebels have used forced disappearances as a weapon to suppress dissents and combat the armed conflict. This study attempted to examine the impact of enforced disappearances on Women -headed Households of North Province in a post-conflict context. Predominantly, it intended to focus on identity crisis, patriarchal domination, psychological implications, handling with painful experiences and potential challenges in implementing psycho-social programs for their well-being. The potential role of social work professionals also has been discussed. Mentioned the methodology use and highlighted the major findings.

Key Words: Sri Lanka, enforced disappearances, psychosocial challenges, women-headed households

1. Introduction

Enforced disappearance is not a new type of human rights violation. This phenomenon is taking place all over the world. Such a nature of felony became familiar for the first time when Adolf Hitler (on December 7, 1941) issued “*Nacht und Nebel Erlass*” (the Night and Fog Decree) (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2012). He wittingly served an order to exercise his official power to oppress and terrify the people in Nazi held areas and fortify the so-called national security and integrity, and make the enemies vanish without a trace (Alvarez, 2007). Involuntary disappearances are being adopted by many states and no information is received by relatives regarding their loved one’s whereabouts, fate, even when, as often occurred, it was merely a question of the place of burial or disposal of remains (Amnesty International, 2012).

In the late 1960s, forced disappearances re-emerged first in Brazil and then in Guatemala, when the Latin American military was in power. Additionally, during the 1970s and the early 1980s, in addition to Latin America the enforced disappearance was a common feature in many countries of the region. A high prevalence of enforced disappearances was acknowledged from various countries, including Iraq, and the former Yugoslavia (Alvarez, 2007).

The escalating hostility between the Pakistani state and people of Baluchistan creates a tense situation. The occurrence of involuntary disappearances and premeditated unlawful killings carried out by the security apparatus of the Pakistani state further alienates the people of Baluchistan from the national integrity (Ali & Ansari, 2012).