

## STUDY ON PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES RELATED TO EXTRAMARITAL RELATIONSHIPS AMONGST JUNIOR SAILORS AND SENIOR SAILORS IN SRI LANKA NAVY

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### Abstract

*In the present society, extramarital relationships amongst heterosexual married couples have become a major concern as they relate to various family and social issues. The prevalence of extramarital relationships in Sri Lanka and particularly in a military context remain largely unexplored.*

*Previously conducted informal research, and discussions carried out by the Sri Lanka Navy Mental Health Team have found extramarital relationships to be connected to incidents of suicide. Furthermore, they are also connected to job related issues such as having to conduct numerous Board of Inquiries. Hence it is apparent how extramarital relationships, and issues pertaining to them can potentially affect the career development and job satisfaction of Naval personnel.*

*In addition, existing literature points to sex problems in marital relationships, boredom, monotony and the need to boost one's ego as reasons for engaging in extramarital relationships. As such it was considered imperative that the reasons for engaging in extramarital relationships be explored in the Sri Lankan military context through the present research. Furthermore, disparities between personal beliefs on extramarital relationships and consensus amongst friends about them were also explored through the data obtained from the research sample.*

*A semi structured questionnaire with six open-ended questions was used to collect data that participants could self-report. The data was analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis, whereas quantitative data were analysed in the form of percentages.*

*The results indicated that 68% of sailors shared a personal negative attitude towards extramarital relationships stating them as a major cause for family problems, divorce, suicides, and concerns for the future of children. However, the results showed that 51% shared positive views towards extramarital relationships when asked to report the opinions of their friends on extramarital relationships. Among the means of starting extramarital relationships, the highest reported were through the use of mobile phones in terms of mistakenly taken or answered calls.*

*The internet and social media, particularly Facebook, were also reported among the ways of initiating them. Among the reported reasons for starting extramarital relationships were staying in the camp for a long time away from the family, family conflicts, to overcome monotony and boredom, and sexual dissatisfaction in the marital relationships.*

*The results make it clear that the majority of sailors have a negative attitude towards extramarital relationships, however it is discussed in a social level amongst friends as a positive aspect. These views and results are important to enlighten them about psycho-social issues prevalent amongst Naval personnel due to extramarital relationships.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Extramarital relationships amongst heterosexual married couples have become a major concern in the current society. It relates to many other issues in the family and society. However, recent literature does not reveal any specific insights on the prevalence of extramarital affairs in Sri Lanka. It is important to explore how extramarital relationships affect Psycho-social issues in the military. Informal research conducted through suicidal incidents of Sri Lanka Navy by the Mental Health Team has found that almost all the suicide incidents had a connection to relationship related issues, more specifically, extramarital relationships. Minimising suicides has become a major challenge for the mental health professionals of Sri Lanka Navy due to the fact that these suicide incidents have no connection to mental disorders and they do not present at mental health clinics. Hence, it is difficult to identify suicidal ideations and plans in advance. Therefore, as a Clinical Psychologist and a counselling officer at the Navy, the researchers convinced that studying psycho-social issues related to extramarital relationships is imperative.

Informal discussions with Commanding Officers, Executive Officers and Divisional Officers of Sri Lanka Navy report that they face different kinds of administration issues due to issues related to extramarital relationships of Naval personnel. They report that they frequently conduct board of inquiries related to extramarital relationships. Extramarital relationships of Naval personnel cause bad

reputation for the Navy in the civil society of Sri Lanka. When Naval personnel face with an issue related to an extramarital relationship, it would indirectly affect their career development, job satisfaction as well. Hence, it would be important to study causes for prevalence of extramarital relationships, most common means that encourage Naval personnel to initiate extramarital relationships, attitudes of Naval personnel towards extramarital relationships in general as well as in the Navy. Findings of this research would broaden the knowledge of psychosocial issues related to extramarital relationships and it would be helpful to minimise issues related to extramarital relationships in Sri Lanka Navy.

The topic "Extramarital relationship" appears to be an area that has not been researched widely and discussed openly. However, it is important to explore literature available to find out what has been studied in this area. According Powell and Kennedy (n.d.) who invest their careers counselling military families in USA, their appointment books are filled with distressed military couples who are looking for help in resolving extramarital affairs and help with affair recovery. Likewise, informal discussions with mental health professionals in Sri Lanka Navy revealed that they also experience a similar situation that most of the counselling appointments have a connection to issues related to marriage. Karney and Crown (2007, p.56) report that "Veterans who had experienced greater exposure to combat also reported greater marital difficulties such as higher rates of infidelity". Karney and Crown, 2007 convey that implications of the findings reveal that counselling (Guidance) services should be extended to families so as to educate parents on the effects of extramarital affairs on marriage. Further, based on the findings of the Karney and Crown (2007), it was therefore recommended that counsellors should continuously organise enlightenment programmes on the mass media with regard to various factors responsible for extramarital affairs so that couples can learn and work on themselves to secure their marriage.

Extramarital affairs which are related to sex problems have been identified as one of the problems in marital relationships (Karney & Crown, 2007). This is however contrary to Lee's (1999) study of 6,000 couples in America. Lee (1999) revealed that men in America engage in extramarital affairs for three reasons such as boredom, monotony and the need to boost one's ego. One of the objectives of the current research is to explore more common causes that have a connection to initiate extramarital relationships by Naval personnel in Sri Lanka Navy. The researcher intends to explore literature thoroughly in the current research to uncover evidence for the findings of this research. Further, the following section intends to point out the objectives of the research.

## II. METHOD

### *A. Data Collection Method and Tools*

A semi structured questionnaire with six open-ended questions was used to collect data that participants could self-report.

### *B. Sample*

A sample that represents junior and senior male sailors of Eastern Naval command was used for this study. There are about 13,000 Naval personnel in the Eastern Naval area. Hence, a sample that would represent this population was used for this research. Eastern naval area was used due to the fact that it consists about one third of total naval strength of the Sri Lanka Navy. Further, when deploying away from the Western Naval area, Naval personnel mostly visit their families in about 30 to 40 days. Hence, it can be studied whether the leave system has an impact on extramarital relationships

### *C. Procedure*

The researcher used data that has been already gathered as a part of the awareness raising workshops conducted on "extramarital relationship related issues". During awareness programmes conducted by the counselling officers of the Eastern Naval area, permission was taken from the participants to use the data for a future research. Anonymity was highly protected without gathering any identifiable personal information in the data collection procedure. Participants were informed that those who were not willing to provide their data could keep their questionnaire with them.

### *D. Data analysis method*

E. The data was analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The data collection method was totally based on qualitative method. The counselling team has used six open ended questions they asked during their counselling awareness raising workshops. However, these qualitative data were transformed to analyse quantitatively as well using basic statistical methods. Qualitative data was analysed using "thematic analysis method". Scientific process of theme analysing will be used and qualitative findings will be presented in themes. Results will be presented using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

### *F. Ethical considerations*

1) *Anonymity and confidentiality*: Identifiable information like name, official number and other personal information that could indirectly help to identify the

participants were deliberately avoided. Participants were assured that all information they share would be treated with the utmost confidentiality and that their anonymity would be respected at all times unless otherwise determined by law. They were educated that their answers would not affect their job directly or indirectly and only used collectively for research purpose.

### III. ANALYSIS AND RESULT

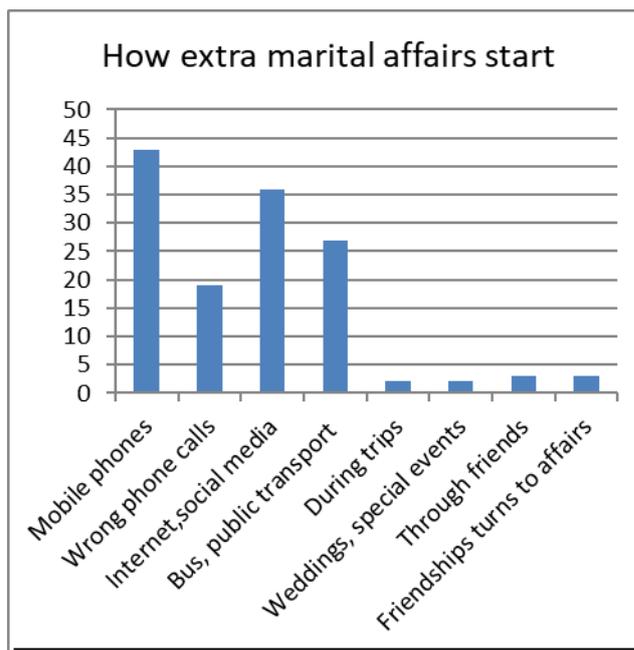
#### A. Attitude towards extramarital relationships

68% of sailors have shared a negative attitude towards extramarital relationships stating it as a major cause for family problems, divorce, suicides, and concerns for the future of children. These negative attitudes were shared when they were asked to share their own ideas on extramarital relationships. However, when they were asked to share their Naval friend’s opinions on extramarital relationships, 51% of them have shared opinions favourable to extramarital relationships with positive view towards having extramarital relationships such as “having an extramarital relationship is not a problem as long as they look after economic issues and other needs of the family, Having an extramarital relationship is good to reduce boredom, good to gain economic benefits, good for sexual dissatisfaction”. They have stated that most of their friends like to have an extramarital relationship and they see them as an essential thing. Some reported that extramarital relationships are fun. Hence, it appears that there could be a surface level collective opinion that they shared amongst friends as a positive attitude towards an extramarital relationship while they personally hold a negative opinion. Further, the other research findings constructively contributed to understand and make important recommendations too.

#### B. Means of starting extramarital relationships

Participants shared their views on how extramarital relationships start amongst them or their friends. These views were analysed and summarised as percentages in Graph 1. The highest percentage (43%) of the participants reported that most of their friends’ known extramarital relationships were started through “usage of mobile phones”. When it comes to using mobile phones, 19% have specifically reported that mistakenly taken calls or mistakenly received calls have triggered the start of an extramarital affair. Moreover, 36% of participants reported that extramarital relationships are started through the internet and social media. 20 participants specifically mentioned “Facebook” as one of them. 27% of participants reported that their own or their friend’s extra marital affairs started while in the bus when travelling during the leave period. Other means reported were during trips, weddings, special events, through

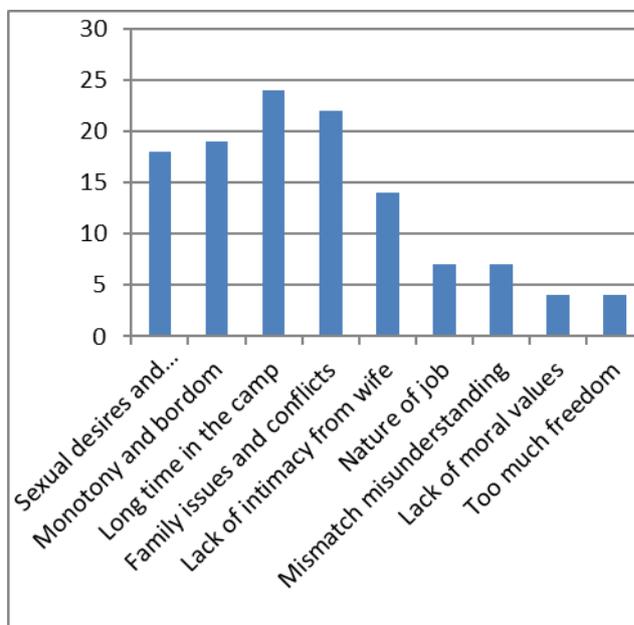
friends, friendships turning into affairs and during training courses.



Graph 1: Means of starting extramarital relationships reported by Naval personnel

#### C. Reasons to start extra marital relationships

Participants’opinions on reasons to start extramarital relationships were explored. The graph 2 summarises these findings.



Graph 2: Reasons to start extramarital relationships by Naval personnel

The highest percentage, 24% of the participants have shared the view that extramarital relationships are started due to “staying in the camp for a long time, away from the family” as a reason. 22% of participants reported that

family issues and conflicts are a reason to start affairs. 19% reported that monotony and boredom were reasons to start extramarital relationships. 18% percent say that unfulfilled sexual desires and dissatisfaction are reasons for extramarital relationships. 14% stated that a lack of intimacy and love from their wives were reasons for extramarital relationships. A lack of moral values, mismatch, and misunderstanding between married partners, too much freedom, nature of the job and civil people's attraction to security forces people and influence from friends to start extramarital relationships were other causes reported by participants.

Problems which arose due to extramarital relationships were also explored. Participants shared their experiences on Naval personnel committing suicide due to issues related to extramarital relationships. The majority (68%) of them have reported that family conflicts, divorce, mental health issues are raised due to extramarital relationships. 30% of participants have reported that economic issues are caused due to extramarital relationships. 19% reported that it affects the education of children.

According to the findings, it appears that majority of sailors have a negative attitude towards extramarital relationships, however it is discussed in a social level amongst friends as a positive thing. These views and results are important to enlighten them about psycho-social issues prevalent amongst Naval personnel due to extramarital relationships.

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