

# Ragging; Its Evolution and Effects: A Literature Review with a Special Reference to Sri Lanka

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**Abstract:** - Ragging in basic sense consists of use of humiliation to socialise new comers who enter in to educational institutions. It is an international phenomena dates back to hundreds of years. The article attempts to bring together literature relevant to ragging, paying more attention to the Sri Lankan context. Although it is an act of humiliation, in extreme conditions it can cause physical, behavioural, emotional and social problems among victims. In Sri Lanka state universities are known as a common place of ragging and currently more attention is paid due to the incidents reported regarding extreme conditions that are highly traumatic. Literature highlights that ragging is associated with student politics in Sri Lankan universities. There are many negative outcomes of ragging and stress is of the significant negative outcomes. However, according to existing literature ragging has positive effects such as socialising students coming from deprived backgrounds.

**Key Words:** Ragging, Universities, Sri Lanka, Negative Effects, Legal Sanctions

## I. INTRODUCTION

‘Ragging’ is a term that makes new comers of institutions frightened and its severity can vary from a simply cracking a joke to a traumatised incident. At present a huge emphasis is paid in combat ragging in the public sector universities in Sri Lanka. This is because of some of the critical incidents occurred with in ragging in universities that either made the victims commit suicide or became critical mental patients. Accordingly, To begin with the article presents a discussion on the definitions of ragging followed by its history and its presence in the international arena. Next it presents the literature relevant to ragging in the Sri Lankan (SL) context, ragging as a University sub culture and reasons for prevalence of ragging. This will be followed by a discussion on literature pertaining to different forms of ragging and negative and positive effect of ragging. Finally, the paper presents the Sri Lankan legal and policy related matters pertaining to gender, youth and violence and universities.

## II. RAGGING: ITS NATURE AND DEFINITIONS

Ragging is a traditional and systematic human right abuse in the field of education and it is mostly found in universities or institutions. Apart from ragging, hazing, fagging, bullying, pledging and horse-playing are different terms used in different parts of the world but each signifying the same old practice of welcoming the fresher in a barbaric manner (Wajahat, 2014: 129). Ragging is practiced all over the world, with different nomenclature; *baptême* in French;

*doop* in Dutch and *mopokaste* in Finnish (Garg, 2009: 264). Accordingly, the term ‘ragging’ can be applied to any unruly behavior that involves mocking or treating any student offensively so as to cause nuisance, frustration or feelings of fear so as to adversely affect his or her state of mind (Garg, 2009: 263). The freshers are traumatized both physically and mentally deriving sadistic a pleasure by the seniors amounting to gross violation of basic human rights. Number of students every year are being forced to go through this experience. Ragging is associated with physical, behavioural, emotional and social problems among victims (Nallapu, 2013: 33). Various incidents of suicides, violence, physical injuries, sexual abuses and psychological disorders, resulting because of ragging are always reported (Shinde, 2017: 664).

So many definitions are given by different authorities regarding ragging; Supreme Court of India has given a comprehensive definition of ragging; it is any disorderly conduct, whether by words spoken or written, or by an act which has the effect of teasing, treating or handling with rudeness any student, including in rowdy or undisciplined activities which causes or are likely to cause annoyance, hardship, or psychological harm or to raise fear to junior student and which has the effect of causing or generating a sense of shame or embarrassment so as to adversely affect the psyche of a fresher of a junior student; ragging is a form of abuse of newcomers to educational institutions, wherein some senior of in terms of verbal, physical and sexual aggression (Garg, 2009: 264).

Ragging is any act, conduct or practice by which dominant power of senior students, former students or outsiders, is brought to bear on students freshly enrolled or students who are in any way considered junior by other students and includes individual or collective acts or practices. (A) involve physical or psychological assault or threat or use of force or wrongful confinement or restraint; (B) violate the status, dignity and honour of such students; or (C) expose students to ridicule and contempt and affect their self-esteem; or (D) entail verbal abuse and aggression, indecent gesture and obscene behaviour (Chitkara University, 2009: 55).

Ragging is an age old practice in most professional institutions, where in-coming junior students are subjected to a certain amount of ‘good natured’ teasing by seniors. This is intended to break the ice and also allows juniors to get to know seniors (Nallapu, 2013: 33). This act is not limited to schools, colleges, universities and hostels, but it has

penetrated in every field in the society. A noticeable increase has been observed in ragging all over the world and especially in Southern part of Asia which includes Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. Ragging has become a fashion or one can say a routine in institutions especially after the establishment of residential campuses known as hostels, where seniors involved finds a sense of pride and satisfaction in it. However, in recent years, ragging has changed from normal human methods to cruel, brutal and inhuman methods which is mainly due to lack of supervision and absence of adequate guidance (Wajahat, 2014: 132). This act of annoying, teasing and torturing a person mentally and physically at times goes out of control and results into severe psychological harm. There are cases where such treatment has led to serious physical injuries and sometimes even leads to a student's death in the form of suicide (Wajahat, 2014: 132). This will not only cause humiliation or harassment but will also have far reaching negative effects in an individual's self-esteem, self-confidence and personality. Accordingly, ragging is the biggest fear of any student entering college, especially those moving away from home to live in hostels. Scholars suggest that ragging is a criminal problem which has psychological roots and is a social ignorance (Nallapu, 2013: 35).

### III. HISTORY OF RAGGING

Ragging has been existence from since the Anno Domini era (A.D.). At that time, it was not brutal, rather it existed in its mild form as a sort of tradition during the 8th century A.D. Olympics in Greece, later the armed forces of several countries started practicing this ritual. From the army training institutions, the practice of ragging came into the fold of engineering, medical and other residential institutions. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century several students' organizations were formed in the Europe and the United State. Accordingly, it was a part of the army and English public school tradition. They started practicing ragging on the new entrants in their community in a mild form. However, ragging became a major problem in the west after World War I. During the World War ragging underwent massive transformations as new techniques were introduced. These were introduced by students who returned from war and re-joined college. These techniques were actually severe forms of ragging which was practiced in army camps (Shinde, 2017: 664-665).

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, master's degree students needed to obtain a document that affirmed they had gone through the equivalent of middle ages hell night. Veteran students' extorted money from fresher ill-treated them physically and forced them to dress in old garbs. One such French custom that immigrated to American universities was the cap or beanie that American fresher and many Greek pledges routinely wore for a term of a year. The custom still exists on a voluntary basis at a few American colleges such as Phillips University in Edin, Oklahoma. The system of penalize, disappeared from the continent, but not before many young men was humiliated, injured and killed. Early Egyptians, Romans and Greeks knew ragging. Racking was also in

practice parallel to ragging with a special instrument of torture known as 'rack'. But later, it got mixed up into ragging. In the Netherlands in 1962 there was uproar because freshers were given treatment, a reference to the dreaded World War II concentration camps. Accordingly at one time a fresher suffered a brain injury when a senior student tried to knock a ball off his head with a hockey stick. In another custom, more than 200 young men were packed naked or half naked into a small room. The seniors then performed various kinds of barbarities on them. France has also had its problems controlling young men. The French term 'brim a de' includes hazing, ragging, silly and dangerous jokes and forced drinking. During 1920s in France, a national campaign raged against brim a des. The minister of public instruction forbade them in all French schools, and the minister of war ordered an end to such practices. According to a 1928 notice in the New York Times, brim a des had too often gone beyond the limits of fun and especially win anxious boys, who often voiced persecution and cruelty. In the military schools, practical jokes had been pushed much further. The ministers of instruction and war emphasized that new boys must be welcomed cordially, fairly and kindly. Brim a des have also been a problem in Canada, perhaps because that country has imported such customs from the British, French and American Greeks. Hazing activities flourished on the Canadian border. Many incidents reported in Canada during orientation week, the conventional method for introducing new students to college life (Wajahat, 2014: 130).

### IV. RAGGING: AN INTERNATIONAL PHENOMENON

Ragging or bullying is not limited to a particular country or continent; rather it has been an international phenomenon. Ragging has been highlighted in western literature also (e.g.: in Britain, Tom Brown's Schooldays and Boy by Roald Dahl and C. S. Lewis's The Silver Chair) (Garg, 2009: 264). In a comparative, cross-sectional, multilevel study in 35 countries in Europe and North America for the period 2001-2002, it was observed that adolescents from families of low affluence reported higher prevalence of being victims of bullying (Srabstein, Piazza, 2008: 114). Adolescents that attend schools and live in countries where socio-economic differences are larger are at higher risk of being bullied. Bullying is a substantial problem affecting Canadian children also (Srabstein, Piazza, 2008: 115). In a survey on final year medical students in 6 medical colleges of Pakistan, 52% of respondents reported that they had faced bullying or harassment during their medical education (Garg, 2009: 264). The overwhelming form of bullying had been verbal abuse (57%), while consultants were the most frequent (46%) perpetrators. A report in 2007 by the Indian anti-ragging group Coalition to Uproot Ragging from Education (CURE) analysed 64 ragging complaints and found that over 60% of these were related to physical ragging and 20% were sexual in nature. These facts and figures are nothing but the reflection of a large picture wherein the downtrodden people are always oppressed by the mighty ones and academic

institutions are not an exception to this rule (Garg, 2009: 264). Results of a prospective study of Korean adolescents showed that bullying independently increased suicide risks (Kim, Leventhal, Koh, Boyce, 2009: 253). Based on an analysis of a national representative sample comprising of middle school and high school students in United States (US), it was found that 39% of the students were involved in bullying others and/or were victims of bullies at least three times in the preceding 12 months. Bullies, victims and both are at a significantly higher risk of suffering from self-inflicted, accidental and perpetrated injuries; abusing over-the-counter medications; indulging in hurting animals and people on purpose, using a weapon that could seriously hurt someone and of being frequently absent from school, as compared with their peers that are not involved in bullying or have rarely participated in it (Garg, 2009: 264).

The ill effects of bullying are not only restricted to the victim alone. The catastrophe of a victim of ragging seems to be limited to that individual and his family; but if we look deep into the skin, then we come across the vast ill effects on the conscience of masses. What about other students that were the batch mates of Aman Kachroo in India? After the Aman Kachroo episode, the parents who had sent their wards to a professional college for achieving their desired goals are breathing under constant threat regarding the safety of their kids. And this fear is certainly going to hamper the future prospects of the coming generation, the future of the country (Garg, 2009: 264).

#### V. RAGGING IN THE SRI LANKAN CONTEXT

Bullying (commonly known as ragging) of first year students, hereafter called freshers, by senior students is a form of severe ragging at the beginning of each academic year, which has been a regular phenomenon in Sri Lankan Universities since the time of the University of Ceylon, later Peradeniya, in the late 60s to early 70s (Gamage, 2017: 35). Perhaps a form of ragging existed since the inception of the residential university located in a picturesque landscape providing a romantic atmosphere for the students embarking on a learning experience distinct from what they received in schools, many of which are located in rural settings. However, ragging in the early phases would have been a milder version practiced for socializing purposes, as it has not seen any accounts of severe ragging, not certainly torture, during the early period of Ceylon University history (Gamage, 2017: 35).

Generally, in Sri Lankan universities, ragging takes place within university premises, including in locations like outside lecture halls, tutorial rooms, canteens, the library, roads and parks. Students are asked to read a book upside down, smoke a cigarette putting the lighted side in the mouth, remove shoes, kneel down, give a political speech or even go in front of a female fresher and say something silly. In extreme cases, boys are asked to smoke cigarettes if they disclose they are non-smokers and they are asked to drink a cocktail of

alcoholic drinks if they disclose they are not alcohol consumers. Freshers are forced by seniors who engage in ragging to engage in pseudo sexual acts and acts that are against normal etiquette in society; most importantly including removing clothes and displaying personal sides of the body. In the case of males, they would even be forced to masturbate in front of the seniors if the event takes place in a residence hall room or similar space. In these instances, freshers are powerless bodies compared to the seniors who perform these acts (Gamage, 2017: 35).

However, verbal and emotional abuse is much more frequent than sexual or physical abuse in Sri Lankan universities. Physical abuse of the new students is not widespread, and when it occurs, it is not of a severe type (Premadasa, Wanigasooriya, Thalib, Ellepola, 2011: 556). Specially, female students are severely traumatized by the ragging experience, as many are unable to cope with the vulgarity, humiliation, sadism, obscene language, mental torture and cruelty perpetrated on them (Premadasa, Wanigasooriya, Thalib, Ellepola, 2011: 558). For instance, Miss Ratnaseeli of Sangamitta hall could not bear the rigorous of the rag which made her to jump up from the second floor of the Hall which caused her serious physical damage, a cripple throughout her life thus blasting her future, as a result of a severe and ugly ragging which was experienced by freshers at University of Peradeniya in 1973 (Panditharatne, 2008: 355).

It can be assumed that there is an element of class jealousy on the part of seniors who engage in ragging in Sri Lankan universities. It reflects the social deviancy (Gamage, 2017: 35). The ragging has to do with the general stratification of society along various hierarchies and the power imbalances between the various social classes. Being young and coming from socially deprived backgrounds, most senior students are not in a position of power derived from social, political, and economic hierarchies. It is possible to hypothesize that senior students who come to the university from well to do or urban backgrounds are not inclined to engage in ragging (Gamage, 2017: 36). And also, if they see some freshers come to the universities with the trappings of urban middle class backgrounds, they are taken to task. For example, wearing jeans, expensive shoes or shirts, mod haircuts, and expensive watches can be an attraction to good-looking female freshers. Seniors who engage in ragging force freshers to either remove such items or confiscate these items temporarily to prevent social imbalance in the university premises. Students from lower socio-economic, rural and low urban backgrounds or minority caste backgrounds to universities are a trend that has characterized the student population since the mid to late 60s. This made the percentage of students entering universities from high socio-economic and urban backgrounds a minority. This imbalance in class composition made those from the latter background the subject of class jealousy in the eyes of those from the former background (Gamage, 2017: 36). Those from lower socio-economic and rural backgrounds saw those from well to do families and urban schools or with western

outlooks in behaviour (dress, hair style, English language ability, social contacts, etc.) as class enemies who needed to be tamed and put in their place (Gamage, 2017: 37).

There is another hypothesis with regards the ragging in Sri Lankan universities; ragging is associated with student politics on university. There are formally established branches of national political parties in universities. In order to take control of the Students' Association, an entity sanctioned by university regulations to address the welfare needs of students, politically motivated groups compete among each other. In most campuses, office bearers of the Students' Association usually have been elected in the past from the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a leading leftist party in Sri Lanka. However, since it was not in the ruling coalition back then, it could not offer employment or other benefits to graduates. Nonetheless, given the elitist nature of national politics and mainstream political parties, the JVP had become attractive to sections of the electorate that did not have access to these parties, including many students in universities. Thus student bodies or associations with JVP officials tended to adopt a radical platform in relation to education and employment matters. Today the situation has changed somewhat. The Frontline Party (FP) or Peratugamee Pakshaya, an offshoot of the JVP, has become dominant in student politics and associations on universities. It is possible that student activists of the FP or those affiliated with the JVP who come from rural and urban but marginalized socio-economic and caste backgrounds, engage in forms of ragging to maintain their superiority over those who come to the university from more privileged socio-economic and caste backgrounds. With the added muscle of the JVP (which has of late entered into winning coalitions and thus been part of the government), they are better organized to create an encompassing consciousness among students who feel marginalized from the mainstream socio-political-economic landscape and the opportunities it offers (Gamage, 2017: 37).

However, irrespective of the fact that the victims had felt irritable and had outbursts of anger, it is reassuring that these situations did not lead to any violent confrontations between the two parties and the long-term consequences seem to be minimal as the students perceived such treatment by senior students to be more of a joke or as kidding and not a discriminatory practice (Premadasa, Wanigasooriya, Thalib, Ellepola, 2011: 556).

Additionally, all universities are government institutions and the total number of seats available for the prospective students is limited. In 2017, out of 253,330 students who sat the General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) Examination, 163,104 (64%) had qualified for university entrance, but only 24,000 (14%) of them were able to get enrolled in university education (Department of Census and Statistics, 2017). The vast minority that gets selected for higher education, may, therefore, view any harassment that they would suffer at the hands of the senior students as something that they have to live with if their long term goals

are to be achieved. Also, many students still find it considerably difficult to finance their secondary and tertiary education. An attitude that may have implications in this context is how violence, especially against women in domestic settings, is perceived by the victims themselves in countries such as Sri Lanka, who tend to tolerate and conceal it even when extreme and physical (Wanasundera, 2000: 253).

The government and higher education authorities have been grappling with the issue of ragging for several decades primarily by way of adopting a legal approach. Many a times they have tried to address this issue, but the complexity involved does not allow them to reach the root cause or prime suspect with ease. This is because in ragging both the genders male and female are equally involved and they both take advantage of being senior so blame cannot be thrown on one. Majority of the students do not support ragging in the universities as it has made them to go through a serious mental stress, some has suffered psychological disorders and others physical disabilities. Ragging has left an impact on those who have experienced ragging even for a day. Students entering colleges and universities are surrounded by studies burden and careers related issues, if ragging results is ruining their personality and career than it should be strictly banned from all colleges and universities (Premadasa, Wanigasooriya, Thalib, Ellepola, 2011: 561).

## VI. RAGGING AS UNIVERSITY SUB-CULTURE

Some argue that ragging is part of the university sub-culture. Maintaining seniority among the student population (as also a way of defying social hierarchies existing beyond the boundaries of the university), or indeed finding suitable partners for romantic relationships can be the precursor to the emergence of ragging in universities (Gamage, 2017: 38).

The extent to which ragging has evolved from a simple exercise by senior students to establish their power and authority over freshers for individual motives, to a complex phenomenon where the subject of ragging becomes harmful physically and psychologically has to be understood in relation to the broader changes that have occurred in universities over the decades, student mentality, and the prevailing sub culture (Wajahat, 2014: 133).

Regrettably, ragging has evolved into a socially, culturally, and perhaps legally unacceptable practice in various universities. Such practices amounting to torture cannot be condoned purely on the basis of other justifications including the argument of a sub culture and even social justice (Gamage, 2017: 38).

One argument for its tolerance by authorities is the assumption that it is a temporary phenomenon limited to the first few weeks of the new academic year. Thus many academic staff also tends to tolerate and overlook acts of ragging. However, this this is only relevant if ragging is conducted publicly. The more sinister aspects of ragging take place away from the public eye (Gamage, 2017: 39).

## VII. REASONS FOR PREVALENCE OF RAGGING

- According to the Scholars, it is observed that the main causes for prevalence of ragging are:
  - Importance the seniors get in the initial stages of admission by helping and guiding the new comers for various things in the absence of or ineffectiveness of institutional mechanism (ragging is justified by these students on the ground that ragging is the only way by which the new students can be taught about the traditions of the institution)
  - Eagerness of seniors to show off their power, authority and superiority and influence over there junior students
  - Being a means of retaliation (seniors were ragged, so they also do the same thing to their juniors)
  - Introduction of juniors
  - Use of alcohol in hostels
  - Satisfaction of sadistic pleasures
  - Making a 'fashion statement' (many senior students live under the misconception that ragging makes a style statement and will put them in the 'influential crowd' of their university)
  - Lack of supervision and lack of implementation of serious anti-ragging measures by college authorities
  - Vacant or no posts of wardens in the hostels. Many wardens are not actually staying in the hostel
  - Ragging is not considered a social evil (Chopra, 2009: 55-58)

## VIII. FORMS OF RAGGING

There are some of the existing forms of the ragging observed in the universities and other institutions and they are as follows: **The verbal torture:** Verbal torture involves including in loose talks. The fresher men may be asked to sing the lyrics of any vulgar song or use abusive language while talking to the seniors. **Dress code ragging:** The fresher men asked to dress in a specific dress code for a particular period to time. The dress code ragging may make the fresher men feel awkward and uncomfortable as it often brings them unnecessary attention from everybody. **Formal Introduction:** This involves asking the fresh men to introduce themselves in different styles. **Sexual Abuse:** This is severest form of ragging that takes place in universities. The seniors are mainly interested in juicy details such as the anatomical description of one's body parts, his or her sexual interests, etc. In many cases, the fresh men have been asked to strip before the seniors. **Playing the fool:** The fresher men may be asked

to enact scenes from a particular movie or mimic a particular film state. In many cases, the seniors may also ask the fresher men to do silly things. **Hostel Ragging:** Outstation students who stay in the hostel are most vulnerable to ragging. They may be asked to do all odd acts from cleaning the room of seniors to washing their clothes, from fetching them water or milk to completing their assignments. **Drug Abuse:** This can be the worst form of ragging wherein the fresher men are forced to try drugs thereby driving them into addiction etc. (Shinde, 2017: 665)

## IX. NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF RAGGING

The persons who have been ragged have developed psychological, physical, emotional and behavioural problems. It is stress which is believed to be caused mostly by external events. Ragging mainly induces stress. Even the very thought of ragging provokes enough stress among the students taking admission to 1<sup>st</sup> year of university education in various courses. It has physical, emotional and behavioural effects on students and can create negative feelings. Stress is a mind and body response or reaction to a real or imagined threat, event or change. It is somewhat nonspecific biological, emotional & behavioural process that occurs when physical or psychological well-being is disturbed or threatened. It produces severe anxiety. Any environmental condition or event, that disrupts or is perceived as a threat to physical or psychological well-being, may evoke stress.

Stress is one of the most important variables of ragging which leads a person towards psychological, physiological, cognitive and behavioural problems. These problems are specified below:

- Physiological Problems
  - Nausea, headaches, hypertension
  - Sleeping disorders
  - Elevated blood pressure, increased heart rate
  - Skin disorders
  - Asthma, rheumatoid arthritis
- Psychological Problems
  - Anxiety disorder is the most common reaction to stress. Anxiety affects the performance level.
  - Negative self-image, reduced self-esteem and loss of faith
  - Anger, irritability and nightmares
  - Depression, lack of interest, and withdrawal behaviour
  - Panic disorder, social phobia, and obsessive compulsive disorder
- Changes in cognitive pattern
  - Lack of concentration and attention
  - Reduced productivity
  - Forgetfulness, errors in judgment etc.
  - Constant fear

- Inferiority complex and guilt because of decline in academic performance and feeling of insecurity arising out of financial exploitation
- Behavioural Problems
  - Change in attitude towards their career and at times even leaving universities and careers
  - Alcohol and drug addiction, and increased smoking
  - Compulsive behaviour, itinerant lifestyle
  - Aggressive behaviour and criminal activities may also be the reaction to stressful experiences.
- Other reactions to stressful events:
  - Prolonged stress gradually minimizes the abilities of effective functioning.
  - Stress may produce much stronger psychological reaction than simple anxiety.
  - Stress may generate Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that is the most long-drawn-out and serious of all reactions to severe stress.
  - Interpersonal relationships may get disturbed (Wajahat, 2014: 130-131)

Other than the psychological, cognitive and behavioural disorders, the physical injury also become through beating, hitting by objects or by forcing to perform dangerous tasks to sexual abuse by forced stripping, forced masturbation, forced unnatural sex, etc. (Garg, 2009: 266).

#### X. POSITIVE ASPECTS OF RAGGING

Although nothing positive can expect through ragging, according to existing literature ragging has a positive dimension also. Some students who come to the university from deprived backgrounds display signs of submerged personality such as extreme backwardness resulting in a failure to communicate with peers and lecturers. They may display excessive forms of subordination due to the cultural, social, familial and economic backgrounds they come from and the resultant dependencies they experienced in early life. If their parents were labourer's, landless farmers or those earning a living by selling physical labour, in Sri Lankan society they are seen as subservient to those in high economic or social positions, particularly in the countryside. When students from such backgrounds enter the university, they bring with them and reflect the dispositions of such background, which have been passed down to them as an inevitable consequence of the process of socialization in their respective life conditions. Through acts of minor ragging such as asking them to sing a song, go and say something to a female student, act as a lover in front of an imaginary girl or speak as a person in another role such as a bus conductor or fish seller, seniors believe that they can eliminate or at least curb subservient character traits that these freshers inherited from their family and school contexts (Gamage, 2017: 39). In contrast there are more severe forms of ragging such as asking a male student to smoke a cigarette from the lighted side,

drink alcohol mixtures and getting them drunk, or remove clothes and engage in masturbation, or sexual engagement between two male students which cannot be accepted under any conditions (Premadasa, Wanigasooriya, Thalib, Ellepola, 2011: 565).

#### XI. LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS PERTAINING TO RAGGING, GENDER, YOUTH AND VIOLENCE

Although this paper focussed only on the literature pertaining to ragging, currently Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) is also a concern within ragging. Thus the certain laws and other legal aspects might be overlapping. However, following is a discussion on the legal and policy framework which addresses ragging in a broader sense.

The measures introduced in the past by the government (Prohibition of Ragging and other Form of Violence in Educational Institutions Act, No.22 of 1998, the University Grants Commission, which oversees all higher education institutions in Sri Lanka, has recently promulgated additional regulations aimed at preventing harassment of the new students by their seniors. The university authorities are now required to report such incidents to the police, and those found guilty of the offences are liable to rigorous imprisonment of up to 10 years, expulsion from the institution of higher education and payment for damages suffered by the victim (University Grant Commission, 2010). An additional stipulation is that all students pledge in writing that they will not engage in harassment of the new entrants.

The following are the legal and policy frameworks that deal with instances of SGBV in universities.

##### *International Standards*

Sri Lanka has ratified the foremost United Nations international standard on women, the *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* in 1981 and its *Optional Protocol*. In 1993, Sri Lanka signed the *Vienna Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* - which specifically recognizes violence against women as a social phenomenon. Promoting gender equality and empowering women are part of the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs). Sri Lanka has also ratified the following ILO conventions: *Equal Remuneration Convention* (No. 100), *Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention* (No.111) and *Revision of Maternity Benefits Convention* (No. 103) (University Grants Commission, Federation of University Teachers' Association, CARE, 2015).

##### *Legislation*

Legally, SGBV is addressed under the *Penal Code* 345 of 1995 (sexual harassment), 363 (rape), 364A (incest) and the *Prevention of Domestic Violence Act* of 2005. The *Prevention of Domestic Violence Act* recognizes the phenomenon of violence within the family or domestic sphere.

The *Prohibition of Ragging and Other Forms of Violence in Educational Institutions Act No. 20 of 1998*, Section 2 (2) is of specific import to universities as it has been drafted to prevent and punish sexual harassment that can occur during the course of ragging (University Grants Commission, Federation of University Teachers' Association, CARE, 2015).

#### National Policies

The *Sri Lanka Women's Charter* was passed by Cabinet 1993 and is the main policy statement by the government regarding the rights of women. It expresses the State's commitment to remove all forms of discrimination against women and address areas of gender-specific relevance to women. The most significant outcome of the Charter has been the establishment of a National Committee on Women in 1994. The Committee is tasked with monitoring the rights established under the charter (Perera, Gunawardane, Jayasooriya, 2011.3.).

Sri Lanka also adopted a *National Action Plan for Women* in 1996. The updated *National Action Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights - 2011-2016* carries a section on women's rights and labour rights that refers to devising policies to address SGBV in the workplace.

The *National Human Resources and Employment Policy* (2012) recognizes sexual harassment and talks of the need to promote attitudinal change to prevent sexism and discrimination in workplaces as well as the equitable sharing of care and household chores.

The *National Youth Policy - Sri Lanka* was unveiled in 2014 with the goal of developing the full potential of young people and to enable their active participation in national development for a just and equitable society. It acknowledges SGBV as posing a serious problem for young women given the high incidents of gender-based violence and sexual harassment as well as teenage pregnancies and sexual abuse amongst girls (University Grants Commission, Federation of University Teachers' Association, CARE, 2015).

#### University Policies

Commission circular No. 919 by the University Grants Commission dated 15th of January 2010 titled *Guidelines to be introduced to Curb the Menace of Ragging in the Universities or Higher Education Institutions* provides clear instructions on how to prevent ragging and procedures to be followed in the event of ragging (University Grants Commission, Federation of University Teachers' Association, CARE, 2015).

## XII. CONCLUSION

Ragging is considered as an act of humiliation to socialise new comers in to educational institutions. However, in extreme conditions it can cause physical, behavioural, emotional and social problems among victims. Its history goes back to many centuries and ragging is not limited to a

particular country or continent but it has been an international phenomenon. Within Sri Lanka it is commonly prevalent in state universities and today the issue has more attention due to the incidents reported regarding extreme conditions that are highly traumatic. Another common happening in Sri Lankan universities is that ragging is associated with student politics in universities. According to literature ragging is also understood as part of the university sub-culture which aims at socialising the new comers to adjust to the new environment. Among many forms of ragging verbal torture, dress code and physical and sexual abuse are the most common. Stress is a negative outcome of ragging and it can cause psychological, cognitive and behavioural disorders. Further hitting by objects or by forcing to perform dangerous tasks to sexual abuse by forced stripping, forced masturbation are also negative effects of ragging. Although nothing positive can expect through ragging, according to existing literature ragging has a positive effects such as socialising students coming from deprived backgrounds. In Sri Lanka there a number of legal and policy frameworks including the Prohibition of Ragging and Other Forms of Violence in Educational Institutions Act that aims at punishing perpetrators.

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