

# Social Support of School Management & Stakeholders and Wellbeing of Students in Sri Lankan Schools: Special Reference to Government Schools in the Hambantota District

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**Abstract:** - This study explored the experiences of principals, teachers, students and parents on social support of school management & stakeholders and wellbeing of students with special reference to government schools in the Hambantota district in Sri Lanka. This study employed a mixed method, and case study and survey approaches were also used in studying the research problem. The main research question was: what are the experiences of the principals, teachers, parents, and students on the social support provided by school management and stakeholders for student wellbeing? Purposive and random sampling techniques were employed in order to select the participants in this study. Data gathered in administering semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, informal observations and informal discussions. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis and descriptive statistical tools. It was revealed that: Students are suffering due to their poor family background, and they are not provided required minimum emotional support from school management and teachers. The school attendance is very poor of some students since they usually engage with agricultural activities. The majority of children show poor performance. The majority of students do not have sufficient minimum resources for their academic activities. The schools are also not rich enough in providing such facilities to their students. The poor physical environment and lack of resources impact badly on students' wellbeing. The majority of parents of the students are not well educated, and So, they do not seem to have the confidence to provide necessary advises and instructions about their children's education. The students face challenges in finding good quality instructions and advises in developing their educational background, attitudes, values, self-confidence, soft skills and also hard skills. The student counselors in some schools do not have sufficient training, qualifications as counselors. The education authorities must pay immediate attention to these schools since the students are being faced with a difficult time in those schools. The schools need to be given sufficient number of quality resources and staff members. The staff members need to be motivated to provide a better service to these students.

**Keywords-** Social support, wellbeing of students, Parental support, Teacher support, Peer support

## I. INTRODUCTION

Social support is defined as the provision of both psychological and material resources with the intention of helping the recipients to cope with stress (Cohen, 2004).

Cohen and Wills (1985) proposed that social support is related to well-being because it offers positive emotions, a sense of self-worth, and predictability in life; it also functions as a stress buffer by reinforcing self-esteem, self-efficacy, and problem-solving behaviors. Researchers have noted that social support is a multidimensional construct and therefore is analyzed and measured via many different approaches, such as one's social network size, how much one believes he or she has actually received support from others, or how much one believes he or she will receive support when help is needed (Barrera, 1986; Dubow & Ullman, 1989).

Studies generally show a positive relationship between social support and well-being in children and adolescents. Thus, though evidence suggests an overall positive relationship between social support and well-being among children and adolescents, many factors may influence its magnitude (Malecki & Demaray, 2006).

### *School well-being*

School well-being is considered as a very important aspect for the development of pupils in schools in Sri Lanka. The well-being of pupils in schools is concerned with public health. It is vital that students in schools must have a suitable and conducive environment to get their education well in school. The World Health Organization (WHO) has stimulated a whole-school approach for the advancement of wellbeing in schools (WHO, 1998). For example, WHO has encouraged the health upholding school approach for the well-being of the pupils (WHO, 1998). The aspect of social support especially parents, teacher, peer group and other social and community agents play a very important role in students' wellbeing in schools. As cited by Awang, Kutty & Ahmad (2014) social support is frequently used in much socio-psychological and socio-educational research that emphasizes the importance of social relationships among community members. Students' better emotional adjustment depends on the greater the support they receive (Jindal-Snape, 2010). students would be able to deal with challenging situations if family and peers provide support to them (Currie et al., 2012).

One of the important life events in terms of social support is school education. School education is not only the first step towards making ideas come true in a new environment far from family with new friends but is also a period when relationships and interactions with others increase as well. Education leads for development of every nation. If younger generation could obtain education, they would become wealth of their nation. Preparing students to face 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges is main aim of the knowledge-based society in this era. In line with this focus, all the nation in the world tends to allocate huge amount of resources and funds from their budget for enhancing education. There are lots of measures implemented by Sri Lankan government to ensure well-being of students aiming to promote education from 1945.

### *Social support*

Social support can be defined as “information leading the subject to believe that he is cared for and loved, esteemed, and a member of a network of mutual obligations” (Cobb, 1976). Social support is a complex and multi-faceted concept. I will discuss the established definitions relating to social support, in terms of the content/type of support, the source of the support and whether support is perceived, available, or received/enacted, as these are the three areas commonly discussed in the literature.

House (1981) defined four types of support, they are: emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal support. Tardy (1985) elaborated on these categories and has provided the following definitions:

- Emotional support can be considered to be the provision of love and empathy.
- Instrumental support involves giving up time to help, or lending resources.
- Informational support includes giving advice or providing information.
- Appraisal support refers to feedback on performance, such as “well done”.

Social support is a complex concept. The source and types of support have been mentioned, it is now important to consider whether these support sources and types are applied. There are three aspects to this issue:

- Availability of social support - Measurement of the size of the support network (often from the parent’s perspective)
- Enacted/ received social support - Past evidence of social support; by considering times when social support was provided.
- Perception of social support - The way in which an individual view their support; the personal experience of an individual’s social support. This can, therefore, involve past experience, but also predictions about possible future events.

The availability of social support has commonly been researched in terms of measuring the size of the support network. Historically, children were not even considered to have an individual social network as the interaction of their parents was thought to be more relevant (Belle, 1989). Also, reports from adults do not show whether the children themselves would be able to access the support, or whether they are aware it is available to them.

Enacted social support involves the analysis of past events to see whether support was received. This has the benefit of considering those sources of support which the person is not only aware of, but that they are able to access. However, knowledge of enacted social support requires accurate recall of the event (which may be difficult for both children and adults). there is a need to research social support in relation to positive events (for example, wellbeing, having people to celebrate success with), as well as in times of stress or hardship.

Perceived social support can be defined as “The individual’s beliefs about the availability of varied types of support from network associates” (Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010, p. 512). Perceptions of social support can cover all four types of support described by House (1981) as well as informal and formal sources.

Taylor et al. (2004) also report that; as a resource, social support may sometimes be more beneficial in its perception than in its use.” (p.355.). Therefore, the aspect of social support which will be investigated with children is their perception of social support. It is hoped that a rich exploration of the experiences that children have of social support, will inform the development of a useful and practical tool. There are two commonly posited models for the positive effects of social support: the main effects model and the buffering model. The main effects model considers social support to have a beneficial impact, regardless of whether the person is under stress. Whereas, the buffering hypothesis theories that social support gives a protective effect on the person in times of challenge or stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985). It has been suggested theoretically that social support becomes particularly important in times of stress or threat (Ikiz & Cakar, 2010). However, difficulties with the conceptualization and measurement of social support have meant that the evidence for the direct effects or the buffering hypothesis has been mixed (Cobb, 1976; Cohen & Wills, 1985).

### *Intervention towards the wellbeing of students*

It appears that several measures have been taken by the Sri -Lankan government towards the wellbeing of students in the country. Sri Lanka has a history of over 2300 years in education. Sri Lanka is the nation where free education is introduced in 1945 from primary education up to the tertiary level. Every child in Sri Lanka is guaranteed to receive his/her education in their mother tongue as well as for free of charge. The government of Sri Lanka provides many incentives them including free textbooks, school uniforms, mid-day meals for

selected primary schools in rural areas. When it comes to the literacy rate of Sri Lanka it is relatively higher than the other developing countries.

One of the main aims of the education system in Sri Lanka is to ensure that students reach their full potential and are prepared to face 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges. There are many aims for a national system of education in Sri Lanka. The sixth goal of national education is promoting the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals. It has been explained in the New Education act as follows. "The security and stability of an individual are ensured by his/her physical and mental health. On the physical side, one must develop a healthy body with the necessary strength to resist not only disease and ill health, but also stress, strain and trauma. On the mental side, the capacity to think clearly, think analytically as well as holistically, and to arrive at viable conclusions are key factor" (New Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka, 2018, p3).

#### *Social support and student wellbeing*

Many researchers, scholars, and authors have discovered that there is a relationship between social support and student wellbeing in many societies. Social support is important in the context of learning and instruction as it is leading to motivation, cooperation, and school adjustment. Several studies showed that children who receive support from parents, teachers, peers, and other social institutions perform well than the children who do not receive such social support. Students who receive social support may object to well-intended forms of instructional support, such as questioning, feedback, and help, mainly because they view support as a signal of low competence or low regard in general (Vedder, Bokaerts and Seegers, 2005). The students who feel school as supportive, appraise the school context as "supportive" of learning. Their reflection with regard to supportive environment is very high while students who reflect their school environment is not supportive, they feel the need for support, will report low well-being in school. Generally, every student is expecting a conducive learning environment at school.

Many researchers have revealed that the measures of perceived social support are more strongly associated with well-being than other types of measures, confirming what most literature suggests (e.g., Cohen & Wills, 1985; Dubow & Ullman, 1989; Taylor et al., 2004; Wethington & Kessler, 1986).

Barrera (1986) attempted to overcome the problem by categorizing the instruments into three types of measures based on what they assess: first, social network assesses children and adolescents' social network size and density; second, enacted support assesses the frequency of support that children and adolescents' believe they have received; and third, perceived support assesses children and adolescents' perceptions of how much support is available if needed.

Social support measurements were coded into five categories: first, size (those that measure the number of people in participants' social network, such as number of friends); second, enacted (those that ask participants' perception of how much help they actually received for a certain period of time in the past, such as participants' estimation of the frequency of parents praising or listening to them in the past month); third, perceived (those that measure participants' perception of availability of help if they need it, such as how much the participants believe they can rely on their parents when they are in trouble); fourth, seeking (those that measure how much participants seek social support when they are depressed or anxious); and fifth, other (those measures that failed to differentiate different aspects of social support such as the network of relationships inventory by Furman and Buhrmester (1985), or the measures that access size and satisfaction of social support but the studies failed to report them separately).

In this study, it will code the sources of support into two categories: school management and stakeholders social support. In terms of sources of support, support from teachers and school personnel had the strongest association with children and adolescents' well-being among the four sources, followed by the support from family members. Friend support and "other" support had the weakest relationships with well-being. The findings that the mean effect sizes of both family and friend support were weaker than support from teachers and school personnel deserve further exploration. Many studies suggest the importance of parental support in children and adolescents' development (e.g., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Steinberg, 1990), but some studies found that relationships with family and friends can also be sources of conflicts (Barrera, Chassin, & Rogosch, 1993; Rook, 1984).

Peer support is significantly less strongly related to well-being than was family support children of similar characteristics, whether or not those are well-adjusted characteristics, tend to associate with each other (Erdley, Nangle, Newnan, & Carpenter, 2001), and thus are more likely to encourage each other on the qualities they share. For instance, aggressive children will be more likely to choose aggressive friends (Earls, Cairns, & Mercy, 1993). As a consequence, the aggressive behavior may be magnified, and well-being diminished because it is not a well-adjusted behavior. Future research may study whether this magnifying effect of characteristics associated with maladjustment does account for the weaker association between friend support and well-being, or whether there are other important factors. Social support is considered one of the most effective ways for individuals to cope with stress (e.g., Cohen & Wills, 1985; Dubow & Ullman, 1989; Taylor et al., 2004).

#### *National aims of education in Sri Lanka*

In order to achieve national aims of education, the Sri Lankan government has implemented several measures to

ensure them. According to the Special Committee of Education Report in 1943, Hon. C. W. W. Kannanagara, the father of free education in Sri Lanka, introduced free education to all, at all levels from primary to tertiary in 1944. He involved in establishing three types of schools called Secondary, Senior, and Practical Schools. He made a big contribution in introducing vernacular medium of instruction at primary level and bilingual or English medium schools for junior secondary level, and English schools for senior secondary and higher education. Another notable contribution which he has made is: establishing central schools with boarding facilities and scholarships to expand access for higher secondary education for poor, marginalized, talented students in Sri Lanka. In addition to that he has contributed to education in Sri Lanka in introducing religious education, facilitating adult Education for illiterate adults, institutionalizing regular monthly salaries for teachers, localizing curricula and examinations, establishing an autonomous university system in Sri Lanka. There is an enormous impact on social upliftment of the Sri Lankan community via the educational reforms made in 1944, and they have been enjoying it for last seventy years in Sri Lanka (Sedere, 2016).

According to the new Education Act introduced in 2009, it has been emphasized the total development of the child in covering all the related aspects, and it says that the Education should ensure the total and integrated development of the child in a balanced and harmonious way by enhancing his/her potential across a range of different dimensions including physical, emotional, linguistic, social, intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual, etc.

However, it appears that equal education facilities, equal treatment for each student, reasonable access for education for every student cannot be seen throughout the country. There can be many disparities among schools, Education zones, Education divisions, provinces, communities, ethnic groups, societies. As a result of that the students are suffering in educating in the schools. Some are receiving immense social support from their schools, parents, teachers, peers and also community or social agents for their education. And therefore, their wellbeing is comparatively very high while other marginalized students and children are facing many difficulties in getting their education and wellbeing. It is questionable that the students who are studying in the agricultural areas are being received sufficient social support from their parents, teachers, peers and community and social agencies for enhancing the standard of their wellbeing. Hambantota is a very rural district, and many students in this sample are living in the agricultural area as and they face big challenges in getting education. So, it seems that they are experiencing many challenges in receiving social support from their parents, teachers, community, and peers since typically; they do not have a very conducive environment to spend their lives. Therefore, this study was launched to investigate the real situation regarding social

support and student wellbeing in Sri Lanka with special reference to Hambantota district school children.

Student wellbeing is an essential element for academic achievement for any person. In order to enhance student wellbeing, socio-environmental support must be uplifted. Despite several measures have taken by the Sri Lankan government authorities for the upliftment of education; high rate of dropouts; high rate of anxiety, stress, suicides, numerous violent situations, and low academic achievement are still prevailing among Sri Lankan students who are studying in the school. Thus, it is important to investigate the socio environmental support received by the students in Sri Lankan schools. In Sri Lanka, there is a tendency of an increasing number of broken families, loss of family ties, conflicts, violent situations, suicide and also a high rate of anxiety and stress for which the education system seems to be responsible at least partially if not fully (New Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka, 2018). This situation is very common and critical in the agricultural, marginalized areas in this country.

Even though free education facility is offered by the Sri Lankan government, the students who take additional tuitions by paying extra money could be able to perform in examination well, so student from lower-income family tend to be penalized because of private tuitions, due to lack of money for spending on extra paid tuition classes. Households in urban areas spend around 11,660 rupees per student, while households in rural areas spend about 7,600 rupees per student, and households in estate areas approximately 2,800 rupees per student (World Bank, 2011).

According to the New Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka (2016), it has been revealed that 17% children are out of the schools who are in the compulsory schooling age. This number is even more at the senior secondary level. High disparities in the school system compel parents to vie for better schools. Many schools lack essential resources, amenities and high order spaces. The recruitment, deployment and professional development of personnel in the system is malaise by the lack of coherent policies and procedures. Undue emphasis on summative examinations has led to an examination syndrome among the children. Majority of the disabled children do not have access to inclusive education. The percentage seeking tertiary education is meagerly small.

The new Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka, 2018, has identified several issues related to the conducive school environment. According to Act, the school plant and the total environment of the school in most places have not been maintained properly to facilitate joyful learning of the child. The school buildings and the classrooms have not been constructed with proper planning, and there can be seen haphazard expansions of school buildings without a proper plan, it has caused congestion and over crowdedness. A frequent feature is an inappropriately constructed school

building without partitioning or gates or without proper light and ventilation where a number of classes have been squeezed in. Thus, a considerable section of children has been denied a proper teaching-learning environment.

#### *The Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka*

The Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka, 2018 has proposed the following measures:

- Provincial Departments of Education should prepare two models for primary schools and secondary schools making it suitable for the climatic conditions in the area and providing a suitable physical child-friendly environment for learning.
- In fulfilling the obligation of the country in making education available and fulfilling the right to education of the child, all schools should have the essential facilities and it should be the responsibility of the Provincial Authority to strictly enforce the provision of quality education.
- The school environment should be safe and secure for all children and fulfilling this should be the responsibility of the school authorities.
- The minimum physical requirements of school should be available for each student. Partitioned classrooms, adequate space per child in classroom to facilitate learning, classroom furniture designed to suit the child and classroom requirements such as boards, and cupboards, special rooms, office rooms and staff rooms, a library rooms, playground spaces, adequate provision of drinking water, separate toilets and urinals, storerooms with a secure locking facility.
- Quality inputs and materials for instructional and teaching aids for plant maintenance should be need-based and adequate and the Head of School should be given authority to use them at his discretion.
- Community-based civil social organizations and past pupils' associations should be mobilized to collaborate with the school development societies to improve the infrastructure facilities essential for schools.
- Resources should be disbursed to school development societies and a legal framework should be established for effective use of resources provided by the education authorities and the community, enhanced performance of curricular and co-curricular activities through school-community relationships, and development of individual performance of each pupil to become a useful citizen.

While Sri Lankan education is free, it could be seen major issues in terms of the wellbeing of children in terms of social environmental support. Even though children start their schooling, school cannot take the whole responsibility of educating them but home and other institutions also should function together for the wellbeing of their children. Even

though the theoretical base describes the role of the socio environmental supporting for improving wellbeing of students, there are a smaller number of empirical researches have been carried out in the Sri Lankan context. Especially, it is imperative and vital for researching socio environmental support for secondary school students' well-being in Sri Lanka as there is a dearth of studies undertaken in this area. The purpose of this study was to investigate the association between social support school management and stakeholders, and wellbeing of students who are studying in the schools located in the four schools in the Hambantota district.

#### *Parental support and wellbeing*

There are lots of research studies point to the statement that the child starts his/her education in the family and the involvement of parents in a child's education improves his/her wellbeing, performance, and achievements. The parental support is most effective when it is well planned, comprehensive and long-lasting. Sri Lankan education system incorporated several policies to enhance parental support ensuring wellbeing and achievement of their children.

The concept of "Deguru" in Sri Lankan Buddhist society tradition explains the role of parents to be the teachers of their children at home. In Buddhist teachings and discourses a strong sense of responsible parenting is reflected. It was highlighted Singalovada and Maha Mangala Sutras as the education of children as one of the parents' key duties. As cited in the new Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka, 2018, The parents' charter promulgated in 1979 embodies the rights and duties of parents in the education of their children. Twenty articles in the charter explain the rights and duties of parents related to their role at home, and also their involvement in school activities and school governance. In the charter it has been mentioned the parents, duties as follows. Understand the philosophy and policy pertaining to the education of their children, cooperate with teachers with a view to promoting intellectual and moral development of their children, make regular inquiry about the child's educational attainments and progress by examining the child's work, seek membership of the School Development Society and participate actively in its work, participate in fulfilling the needs of the school not only by monetary contributions but also through labor and cooperation, send the child to school regularly and respond promptly to any communication from the school, fulfill the needs of the child throughout his/her educational career including therapeutic remedies wherever necessary or when intimation is made of special disabilities, make available to the school one's own share of experience and expertise, formulate programmes with the principal to ensure the safety of the resources of the school; and appreciate the fact that the father and the mother are paramount to the child and lead the child on the path to the full enjoyment of the benefits of a free and equal society (Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka, 2018).

According to Sivertsen (2015), some researchers suggest that parental involvement provides attention to children's education and praise which, in turn, helps them recognize their education is worthy of adult interest. As children tend to model adult behaviors, when parents are actively involved with their schooling, children will learn the importance of education and make effort to emulate those behaviors from their parents. It also will help children to understand their schooling isn't just about them, and it's a collaborative approach between pupils, teachers and their parents. This team approach can further motivate them to work hard and produce positive results. The children who receive support from their parents are likely to feel competent and make sense school attendance becomes more important to them.

#### *Teacher support and wellbeing*

Support from teachers can be articulated in many ways containing caring, having rules that are perceived as clear and fair, and allowing for age-appropriate autonomy in decision-making (Klem et al., 2004).

#### *Student wellbeing*

In this study, Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework was used to explore the environmental factors that contribute to student wellbeing. The ecological perspective also called the social-ecological model is a conceptual framework used in the social sciences to examine the interactive relationship between individuals and their social environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory specifically examines the influence of immediate and distal environments on the learning and development of individuals. This theory represents the social contexts as layered systems and stresses impact of the interaction between these contexts and the person in the key developmental outcomes including social and emotional adjustment (Taylor & Gebre, 2016). Bronfenbrenner initially proposed ecological systems theory in 1979 relating to an environmental taxonomy consisting of a hierarchy of systems at four levels - the Microsystem, Meso system, Exo system and Macrosystem (Neal & Neal, 2013). The Microsystem is the immediate environment of the individual including the home, school, peer group, and workplace which has direct interaction with the environment. The Meso system refers to the connections between two or more Microsystems (e.g., the relationship between home and school). Meanwhile, Exo system comprises the larger social context such as the surrounding community that impacts children directly through parents. Finally, the Macrosystem, which consists of Micro, Meso, and Exo systems, includes the cultural values, economic conditions, and ideologies that flow back to the inner levels to influence the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017; Lopez, 2011, Neal & Neal, 2013). The Ecological systems theory represents the various levels as a series of systems nested around a focal individual simulate a set of concentric circles.

Bronfenbrenner then revised this model by introducing another system namely chronosystem and proposed the bioecological theory which hypothesized human development as the joint product of four factors, namely personal, contextual, process, and time factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). The chronosystem includes developmental changes induced by life events and experiences that originated from both the external environment (e.g., school, workplace and home) and internal characteristics of the individuals (e.g., puberty and illness). Bronfenbrenner argues that these events influence the relationship between the individual and the environment and eventually the development of the person.

As the current study investigated the relationship between student wellbeing and socio environmental factors, the ecological system theory which emphasizes the pressure exerts by the members of the various systems in the environment towards the focal person and the theory of wellbeing development appears to be more relevant to this study. This study investigated the relationships of support from two Microsystems (school management and stakeholders) towards well-being of the student. The learning environment of a child needs to take into consideration the cultural contexts of the whole society as well as the subcultures of the family and the school.

This study will be carried out to investigate the experiences of the principals, teachers, parents, and students on the social support provided by school management and stakeholders for student wellbeing. It seems that most of the children in the Hambantota district are facing big challenges in getting education, and also concerning their wellbeing. Especially, they face difficulties in receiving better social support from their parents, teachers, community, and peers since most of them are living in the marginalized agricultural areas, and also schooling in less facilitated schools. Thus, this study was carried out in order for addressing the following research questions, and also to achieve the following objectives. The main research question of this study was: what are the experiences of the principals, teachers, parents, and students on the social support provided by school management and stakeholders for student wellbeing? The main research objective of this study is: to investigate the experiences of the principals, teachers, parents, and students on the social support provided by school management and stakeholders for student wellbeing. Specific research objectives are to: identify the nature of social support receiving the students of Sri Lankan government schools from school management and stakeholders, recognize the way the school management and stakeholders provide their social support to the students of Sri Lankan government schools, and identify challenges associated with the social support and wellbeing of students in the Sri Lankan schools.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a mixed-method and convergent parallel model for studying the research problem. Both survey approach and a case study approach were used in this study. Purposive and random sampling techniques in order to select the participants in this study. The case study sample includes four government schools, four principals, eight teachers, eight students, and eight parents and the survey sample comprise twelve schools, twelve principals, thirty-two teachers, twelve parents, thirty-two students in the Hambantota district. Data gathered in administering semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, informal observations and informal discussions. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis and descriptive statistical tools.

### *Data collection process*

The researcher planned to use various data collection tools for gathering information in order to enhance the trustworthiness of the data. In terms of the triangulation of the data in this study many data collection instruments were used as interviews, questionnaires, informal observations, and informal discussions.

In order to collect information regarding participants' knowledge, experiences, and perception on the social support and student wellbeing of the students who are studying in the schools located in the Hambantota district. Especially, it made attention to gather information of the participants who are engaged in the government schools in the agricultural areas in the Hambantota district in Sri Lanka.

In the process of data gathering, the researcher obtained two research assistants' support to administer the questionnaire. All the research assistants were trained. The researcher took necessary steps to maintain the trustworthiness in the process of data gathering. Before approaching the stakeholders and school management it was taken required permission from the principals and relevant parties to access the participants.

An information sheet regarding this research was provided to all the participants in attaching the invitation letter. Then, all the participants were briefed about this research and also informed them of the nature of their role in this study. It was distributed questionnaire among all the participants after obtaining the verbal consent of the participants. The questionnaire was coded before administering it. All the data gathered through the questionnaire was translated into English by the researcher since it was given the participants in Sinhala language, and a sample of the translated data (10%) was get checked by a lecturer in English language.

In order to interview the participants of this study, a semi-structured interview protocol was used for gathering information from the participants: selected principals, teachers, parents, and students. Interview data were collected only from 28 participants via interviews. All the instruments

were pilot tested. All the interviews were recorded with participants' permission and then transcribed into text form. For conducting interview one research assistant participated in helping to get notes and for handing digital voice recorders.

The informal discussions were very helpful for gathering information for the purpose of gathering rich data in this study. In addition to the formal interviews, some of the school meetings, staff meetings, and some other important meetings were indirectly, informally observed to gather the data in this study. In addition to that, some informal gatherings, discussions, physical, organizational environments were also observed informally. Accordingly, it was able to gather most of the data freely through the observation of the meetings. Informal discussions may be very effective to gather real information.

During the data collection process, it was gathered participants' experiences, views, perceptions, and practices. Quotations were directly taken from the qualitative data transcriptions as required to validate the interpretations.

Since this study uses quantitative and qualitative data, both techniques have been used to analyze data in this study. In order to analyze the quantitative data gathered through questionnaire survey from the participants, descriptive statistical tools and techniques were employed. The participants presented their experiences as their real-life stories when they interview, and those stories were the research data in this study. Thematic analysis is one of the most common approaches of qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2001; Mutch, 2005) and it was the most appropriate method for analyzing qualitative data in this study.

In order to protect the participant's anonymity, several strategies were taken during the research process in this study. Several codes were used to identify schools, cases, and participants, in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of the data in this study. For instance, the coding which was used to recognize the schools and participants in this study are stated as follows: school A (SA), school B (SB) and school C (SC), and principal of school A (PA), principal of school B (PB) and principal of school C (PC) are used to identify principals in these schools. school A teacher 1 (SAT1), school A teacher 2 (SAT2), school A parent 1 (SAP1), school A parent 2 (SAP2) school B parent 1 (SBP1), school C parent 1 (SCP1), school A student 1 (SAS1) school B student 1 (SBS1), school C student 1 (SCS1) etc. Sometimes, according to the situation in order to maintain the confidentiality of the information and protect the anonymity of the participants some pseudonyms were used to identify participants in this study.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Emotional support*

As defined in Tardy's (1985) model, emotional school support involves perceptions that people care, which could mean that a child feels safe coming to his or her school.

Malecki and Demaray (2003) reported that emotional support was a significant individual predictor of social skills and academic competence.

In this study, it was found that the importance of parents' and peers' emotional and psychological support for the wellbeing of the students. However, they expect emotional and psychological support of teachers and school management also. According to the information received from the participants, the students are rather closer to their peers if they are at the senior secondary level. It was revealed that the students expect more emotional and psychological support from their parents and teachers when they are studying at the primary level. The students who are studying at the junior level classes expect more emotional and psychological support from parents than other parties. According to the majority of students (60%), students expect emotional and psychological support from their parents than the other parties. However, they expect more such support from their teachers for their academic development. One student (SAS2) indicated; "I believe my parents are the very important persons in my life, so always expect their love, care, emotional support. I cannot expect such things from others". It was noticed that some students are suffering due to their poor family background, and sometimes, they are not provided required minimum emotional support from school management and teachers although they expect more emotional support from both parties. The school attendance is very poor of some students since they usually engage with agricultural activities, with their parents in the busy agricultural seasons. It seems that such situation has become a usual habit in these agricultural areas.

As found by Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder (2004) emotional support in the form of caring about the students' success may indirectly increase academic achievement by influencing student motivation.

Wentzel (1998) revealed that student-teacher relationships are undoubtedly important in the context of providing students with the motivation, structure, and support necessary to protect them against undesirable outcomes. As discovered by Ladd & Burgess (2001) the positive student-teacher relationships, marked by low levels of conflict, are related to increased student engagement, school liking, and academic achievement.

Further, Wentzel (1998) found that middle school students who perceived greater levels of teacher support. Therefore, establishing and maintaining quality student-teacher relationships is essential for guiding students through this transition period. Social support from teachers, parents, and peers has been identified as a critical factor in obtaining positive outcomes and protecting against adverse outcomes in students (McNeely & Falci, 2004; Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 2000).

Social support is important in the context of learning and instruction as it is leading to motivation, cooperation, and

school adjustment. Several studies showed that the children who receive support from parents, peers perform well than the children who do not receive such social support. A student (SBS1) explained his views about the social, emotional support given by his parents and friends and teachers as; "My parents are very kind and good. But they are not educated enough to provide me good support. So, my friends are available to me when I face problems. Some of the teachers help me when I face educational related problems. However, I do not happy about school management". One principal (PB) expressed his views about the social, emotional support given by them the students in his schools as; "we always think about students, their performance, discipline, etc. There are very arrogant students and also innocent students in my schools. They are treated differently". It appeared that the students in school B are not treated equally. However, it was noticed that it depends on the principal's attitude. Another principal (PC) indicated that; "I like to treat each and every student in the same manner since I consider all are children and they all are my students. Everyone can study, they all are children with same qualities, desires, aims, etc. I believe my students in my school are very happy about our support is given for their education". One teacher confirmed the statement made by PC as; "we know our principal always make reasonable decisions regarding our students, and he always tries to do him better, and we are also advised to provide our maximum support to our students although they are in any situation." Moreover, one student (SCS2) of school C also indicated the support given by their school management and teachers them as; "Our students are happy about our school, its management, the services and support given by them for our development". One student (SDS1) indicated the requirement of emotional support of the adults, teachers, school management as: "Most of the parents of our students are farming they do not have good education for providing better advise us, and also money for spending on our education. So, we must be provided at least minimum support of school and teachers for carrying out our studies well. It does not happen very well in my school. The teachers and principals do not like to work in our school for a long time since it is situated in a very rural area with very insufficient facilities. So, every day we are suffering. We do not expect physical resources but at least emotional support is enough". It was noticed that the staff members of schools do not tend to continue their service in their present schools willingly since their schools are located in the rural and agricultural areas with poor facilities. Therefore, it appeared that the majority of school staff and teachers (60%) do not seem to provide adequate emotional support to the students of their schools. The majority of parents (65%) also indicated that the poor emotional support provided by their school management and teachers for the educational development of their children. As found by Brewster & Bowen (2004) the supportive student-teacher relationships are mainly described by characteristics such as warmth and acceptance. These characteristics align well with the emotional support component of student-teacher relationships



but fail to account for the additional types of support that teachers provide.

The majority of teachers (70%) indicated that the parents of the students do not tend to encourage and provide required support to their children for improvement of their academic performance, and the majority of children seem to show poor performance in curricular and co-curricular activities. However, students of school C is better than the students of other schools in terms of emotional support given by the school management and teachers as well as their parents. As Jindal-Snape (2010) discovered the social relationship among community members. Currie et al. (2012) revealed that the students' better emotional adjustment depends on the greater the support they receive students would be able to deal with challenging situations if family and peers provide support to them.

#### *Instrumental support and resource availability*

According to Hamre and Pianta (2005), instrumental support includes literacy instruction, evaluative feedback, instructional conversation, and encouragement of child responsibility. A child could feel that his or her teachers, parents, peers, friends, school management do notice when he or she does something well. If a child feels that his or her teachers, parents, peers, friends, school management are willing to spend extra time helping him or her, this may result in the perception of high instrumental support Malecki and Demaray (2003).

Hamre & Pianta (2005) found that in particular, students noted that they felt support from teachers to whom they were emotionally connected, who used best practices in teaching, noted and promoted student scholastic success, encouraged the asking of questions, and treated students fairly.

As found by Awang (2014) student well-being has diverse dimensions including academic attainment, happiness, and enjoyment, ability to adapt to school life, and social life positive peer relationships. As one parent of school C (SCPR1) said, her child was grateful to have friends who helped her to understand thoroughly and familiarized her with the difficult subjects. One student of school C (SCS2) described the support that they received from peers was perceived as the best opportunity for them, especially when some subjects were confusing for them.

It was noticed that there is no strong supportive community in helping the juniors to adjust to the school activities. As most of the students indicated, they will be useful if they build a good relationship with the senior good competent students because they are experienced, and those students can help them and advise them about school life and education. Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco (2005); Lohfink & Paulsen (2005) have discovered that peers can be ideal sources of knowledge and social capital through social networks and value orientations. Further they have found that

the students are highly likely to be successful at school because they benefit the support if they receive from their parents.

It was found in this study that the students obtained support from their siblings. Some students reported that their siblings are studying as senior students at the school. Almost all students (80%) in the sample perceived the meeting right people and building good relationships with them to be important factors.

This study also observed that in the social relationship at school and in village, students were more comfortable being with friends who shared similar experiences. One student (SAS2) indicated as: "Most of the time we were together, sharing our experience, we help each other, I feel more confidence...I think it is hard if we don't have any close friends".

Overall, students agreed that great friendship developed when students found similar characters, and one student of school D (SDS2) described several aspects such as common interests, being easy-going, open-minded, and helpful. One student of school B (SBS1) explained her views on the support given by her friends as "I don't feel lonely, they treat us like family members. When I feel stressed, I will share my problem with my friends...so I feel released.

Preparing students to face 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges is the main aim of the knowledge-based society in this era. In line with this focus, all the nations in the world tend to allocate huge amounts of resources and funds from their budget for enhancing education. There are lots of measures implemented by Sri Lankan government to ensure well-being of students aiming to promote education for several years.

It appeared that the majority of students in these agricultural areas do not have sufficient minimum resources for their academic activities at school. The schools are also not rich enough in providing such facilities to their students. As mentioned by the majority of students (65%) most of the students display poor performance at the examinations due to lack of resources. Further it was identified that some school does not have been deployed sufficient numbers of teachers for every subject. One student (SBS1) mentioned that; "we do not have a music teacher for a long time, and we did not have a science teacher for five months in the last year. So, the students show poor performance at the exams and in these areas, there is no tuition culture, and there are tuition classes in the cities, however we do not have money to attend those classes in the town and cities". One parent (SAP1) indicated that; "we are trying our best to send our children to the school regularly if we do not have any emergency work at home. We hope that the school and the teachers will look after the academic activities of our children. However, sometimes we came to know that some teachers do not do their job well, and school management and principal also do not care about that. We are helpless since we are poor to admit our children to big school in the city. At least our children can engage in

agricultural activities since we have agricultural lands. Past studies suggest that there is a strong association between perceived social support and student well-being. Awang, Kutty & Ahmad (2014) revealed that social support refers to subjective judgment of the assistance quality provided by family members and close friends. Ethnicity, living arrangements, working status, educational level, and household incomes were found to be significant factors for promoting student wellbeing. (Burholt et al., 2003)

One teacher (SDT1) specified that most of the students in her class are from very poor agricultural families, and so they do face many difficulties in doing their academic and co-curricular activities in school. The education background of their parents is also very unsatisfactory. However, teachers and the school management attempt to provided them the minimum facilities since this school also does not have sufficient physical resources and on some occasions, minimum number of teachers are not provided by the higher education authorities in time. Finally, it is badly affected the students who are studying in school. The majority of principals (70%) indicated that the schools are not provided sufficient amount of resources by the government, and school is supposed to collect funds for that. Unfortunately, the background of the community members and the parents of the students are very poor in this school. Therefore, we are facing problems in finding resources, at least for providing minimum facilities to the students". Suldo and colleagues (2009) found that appraisal and informational, support was significantly related to middle school students' well-being. Asante (2011) found that social support reduces stress levels and depressions among youth with challenging behavior. It appeared that most of the schools in these agricultural areas are facing challenges in finding resources. It seems that the students of the schools in these areas are badly affected the poor support provided by the school management, teachers and community members. Finally, their wellbeing has affected that situation worse. The majority of students, teachers, parents, and principals indicated the poor physical environment and lack of resources of their schools, and further they mentioned about its impact on the students' wellbeing. One of the students (SAS2) indicated the challenges which they are being faced in the school due to lack of support of the school management, parents for providing required educational resources as Our parents are poor and our school also does not have minimum facilities. So, the majority of poor students are suffering in getting their education due to lack of resources. However, a few students are somewhat rich. They bring required educational materials for the lessons. Most of them are very good and share their materials with the students who do not have".

However, the aims of the education system in Sri Lanka are to ensure that students reach their full potential and are prepared to face 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges. There are aims for a national system of education in Sri Lanka. The sixth goal is for promoting the physical, mental and emotional well-

being of individuals. It was explained in the new Education act.

#### *Informational support*

Informational, relates to having access to information or having someone to help when understanding is lacking. For example, a child might feel that his or her teacher is almost always available to help explain something when he or she has trouble understanding or needs advice (Malecki and Demaray, 2003)

The majority of parents of the students are not well educated in this school sample. A very few numbers of parents have some educational background. So, they do not seem to have confidence to provide necessary advises and instructions to their children with regard to their education. Therefore, the students of the majority of these school samples face challenges in finding good quality instructions and advises in developing their educational background, attitudes, values, self-confidence, soft skills and also hard skills. The teachers also little bit embarrassed to provide advises to the students since some of the students' behavior is little bit different than the normal students in some schools. One principal (SAP) stated: "some students in my school are little bit arrogant, so we tried our best to put them in to correct path in providing advises, however, still some of them have not changed their behavior. So, on those occasions, we automatically compelled to punish them. We have to help other students with their educational development. All the teachers in my school are committed to that voluntarily". As one teacher (SCT2) indicated the students of school C are better than the students of other schools in terms of discipline, and the nature of commitment for the education. One student (SDS1) stated: "Usually, our friends help us to sort out our problems on many occasions, some problems cannot be informed our parents, teachers and school leaders. On those occasions our friends are helping students by providing better advises, and I have seen that sometimes they provide physical resources also to the students. Still we maintain a good culture in our villages, and all of them are maybe relations or/ and friends of each other". It appeared that the villages are helping each other to solve their problems, sometimes by providing advises, resources and so on. It was noticed that, especially, the senior students used to believe, and depend on their friends than their parents, teachers, and others when they face problems. The majority of parents indicated that "our children do not discuss many things with us, and they always chat with their friends, and we know they help each other in different ways". As the majority of teachers explained, the senior students always with their friends while the junior students are asking teachers' help to solve their problems. However, it appeared that most of the parents of the students in these areas are not well educated for providing advises in order to solve their contemporary issues and problems. One teacher (SBT2) indicated that: "I have an experience that one student had a big family problem. She had tried to solve by herself with the support of her friends, eventually it had been worst. Lastly,

she came to me and asked my advice to sort out her problem. I helped her with the support of the principal. We had to even advise her parents also to solve her problem". Like all the participants, principals, teachers, students and parents, no professionally qualified counselors in this school sample for helping students when they face emotional unbalances, critical mental problems, social and different kinds of problems and issues disturb their education. It can be seen student counselors in some schools do not have sufficient training, qualifications as counselors. They are subject teachers, and occasionally they provide advises the students when they face problems. Sometimes, the way of handling problems of students by them may create additional issues and problems. Finally, it may affect the students' learning environment in school. This can be seen as a problem which these schools and students are faced at present. However, it was noticed that, still, a solution has not been found out anyone to streamline such situation. Overall, it appeared that these schools have been marginalized by the relevant authorities since there are no complains forwarded by the parents or stakeholders in this regard.

According to the new Education Act introduced in 2009, it has been emphasized the total development of the child in covering all the related aspects, and it says that the Education should ensure the total and integrated development of the child in a balanced and harmonious way by enhancing his/her potential across a range of different dimensions including physical, emotional, linguistic, social, intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual, etc.

#### *Appraisal support*

Appraisal involves the perception that individuals in one's social network provide constructive criticism and positive reinforcement. It appeared that the majority of students of schools in this study sample are not appreciated appropriately, however, most of them do not perform well at the examinations and at co-curricular activities. As the majority of teachers (70%) indicated the parents of the majority of students do not seem to have a real understanding of the requirement and importance of appreciation of the successes of their children. The principals also confirmed the above view of the teachers. However, the majority of students indicated that the parents of them always encourage them to study well to pass the examinations, and further, they stated that; their friends and peers always provide feedbacks for the activities which they perform, and their friends encourage them to perform well. One teacher (SDT2) stated: "most of our teachers encourage our students to perform their studies well, however, some of them do not ready to accept our instructions and perform accordingly". The majority of students (70%) are willing to have teachers' positive feedbacks and constructive criticisms. According to them, some teachers do not ready to provide their feedback to the relevant students in suitable way, in time. And they do expect cheerleaders from school management to encourage them. The majority of parents also expect positive encouragement

and feedback from school management and teachers regarding academic activities of their children. The view the majority of participants (65%) in this study in this regard is; "since these schools are located in the rural and agricultural area, such cultural aspects cannot be expected from the school leaders and the staff members".

Generally, every student is expecting a conducive learning environment at school. The students who feel school as supportive, appraise the school context as "supportive" of learning. Their reflection with regard to the supportive environment is very high while students who reflect their school environment is not supportive, they feel the need for support, will report low well-being in school (Vedder, Bokaerts and Seegers, 2005). However, most students in this sample do not have such positive environment in the schools as well as at home.

Inadequate teacher distribution in rural areas is also a big challenge faced by schools (Gnanawasa 2017). Even though free education system has been implemented in the country there are students who do not attend school, and there is a 20% of children drop out from schools (Perera, 2012), and as a result of many reasons, it could be seen a remarkable number of poor school attendance rate of students in rural, agricultural and marginalized schools (Perera, 2009). As found by Currie et al. (2012). students who enjoy high levels of well-being are generally less involved in risky behaviors and perform better at school. According to Sedere (2016), examinations-oriented education has affected severely the total development of students and the overall development of children ignored by parents as they paid their attention to school activities. Because of over-emphasis on examination students are not well as they under pressure, students tend to drop out from their schooling and more absenteeism is to the school.

Murdock and Bolch (2005) found a positive link between teacher support and school adjustment. Marin and others (2008) found that if there is a positive connection with the teachers, it may encourage a student to learn, participate more in-class sessions, or engage in the other academic achievement as it may lead to students' wellbeing.

Cauce and Srebnik (1990) identified the importance of school, family and friend support for children and adolescents' well-being. Studies found that positive associations between school support, parental support, peer support and well-being outcomes, including improved emotional adjustment, better academic-related achievement and behaviors, and fewer psychosomatic symptoms.

#### IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

School well-being is considered very important in the development of the pupils in Sri Lanka. It is vital that students in schools have a suitable environment to function well in school. It was noticed that some students are suffering due to their poor family background, and they are not

provided required minimum emotional support from school management and teachers although they expect them from those parties. The school attendance is very poor of some students since they usually engage with agricultural activities, with their parents especially in the busy agricultural seasons. It seems that such situation has become a usual habit in these agricultural areas. There is no sufficient encouragement and social support from parents and from school side. The majority of children show poor performance at the exams and also and also regarding co-curricular activities. It appeared that the majority of students in these agricultural areas do not have sufficient minimum resources for their academic activities at school. The schools are also not rich enough for providing such facilities to their students.

The poor physical environment and lack of resources impact badly on students' wellbeing. The majority of parents of the students are not well educated, and So, they do not seem to have the confidence to provide necessary advises and instructions about their children's education. These students face challenges in finding good quality instructions and advises in developing their educational background, attitudes, values, self-confidence, soft skills and also hard skills. The student counselors in some schools do not have sufficient training, qualifications as counselors.

some teachers do not ready to provide their feedback to students in suitable way, in time. And students do expect cheerleaders from school management to encourage them. The majority of parents also expect positive encouragement and feedback from school management and teachers regarding academic activities of their children.

The education authorities must pay immediate attention to these schools since the students are being faced with a difficult time in those schools. The schools need to be given sufficient number of quality resources and staff members. The staff members need to be motivated to provide a better service to these students. There is a need for having best qualified student counselors for those schools. There is a need to have a

parental awareness programme in order to convince the importance of education of their children and educate the way to help them.

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