

# A Sociological Study on the Problems Faced by the Pensioners in Sri Lankan Context

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**Abstract:** This research paper examine the problems faced by the individual who is vigorously concerned in an assigned employment within a state institution that is identified as Government employee, who is upon reaching the retirement age, is precise or interpreted as a Pensioner. Accordingly, these pensioners are dwelling in various network levels the issues being looked by them are changed and it is to comprehend the imperative issues stood up to by the pensioner within the Sri Lanka.

Based on the Department of Pension, 150 pensioners been selected on random sampling basis from the retirement of Government services from January to December, in 2010. Data gathering was proceeded through mainly from questionnaires, further informal discussions, observations, interviews and case studies. Data analysis conducted via qualitative and quantitative categorization and presented through graphs and tables while, qualitative data analysis followed the explanatory processes.

The findings reveal the noticeable characteristics of the retired community as majority has Deteriorated Health conditions, Abounded breakdown of psychologies, Propensity to move towards spiritual life styles, Displeasure to move away from own supremacy and Majority of retired personnel follow the divorced living pattern.

Hence the study suggests the to launch a methodological and socially signified approach for the well-being of elderly and the retirees and it is necessary to reinforce the prevalent law and order policies in the country in order to ensure needed social security for the elderly community.

In order to react against entire complications to be faced by the elderly during the latter part of their lives, they have conformed to different and varied behavioural practices and develop community gatherings and bonds.

*(Keywords: elderly, pensioners, problems, retirement, state)*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The person who is vigorously involved in an assigned employment within a State institution which is recognised for the wellbeing of country and the nation is known to be a Government employee. Obviously, those accountable employees represent a segment of citizens entrusted to hold utmost responsibility of the development of the country. The said employee after realizing the aforementioned responsibilities and upon reaching the retirement age as per the regulatory ordinances imposed by Government is designated or interpreted as a Pensioner. Naturally, the pensioner after consecrating most of the vigorous part of life on government services tends to spend

her/his latter part of life hopefully in a comfortable manner. Yet, it is not the realism always. In any case, the pensioner compels to take resilient attempts to surmount varied impediments to be faced due to socio economic, political, environmental and cultural lapses, while also, representing the composition of older community in the country. Under the prevailing circumstances the mounting percentage of older civilians becomes a social ambiguity. Payment of pensioners' salaries for retiring employees is likely to create negative impact on the country's economy. Nevertheless, Sri Lanka is a democratic country which pursues the payment of pensions as a benefit of social well-being of the retirees whereas the pension becomes a wide range of consolation for those spending time on the latter part of their lives.

Explorations attended on pensioners at global level revealed that benefits of pension schemes are in place in Malaysia and New Zealand as well- being a social security benefit. Normally, pension schemes are built-in along with the legislations originated through constitutions of respective Governments. Absolutely, the pensions appearing as a greater benefit being enjoyed by older communities in the world followed by their retirement from the state services.

While, this research is to accomplish a sociological study to diagnose the crucial problems being faced by pensioners an in-depth exploration of the lifestyle of Sri Lankan pensioners will be endured.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The evidence from around the world says that, these systems providing financial security to the individual are under increasing strain throughout the world ( Holzmann, 2012). The prime reason for this being the rapid increase in proportion of old people in general population caused by rising life expectation and declining fertility rates (World Bank, 1994). Pension system is a form of social security system that has a wide range of importance and effect at individual as well as societal level. They influence the living standard of older people and their family members and hence welfare of the society (Bar, 2004). Even when policy making might be deemed successful, future adaptation may be required to take into account the evolution of parameters. For old-age pension systems, these parameters commonly include increasing life expectancy, declining fertility, and earlier retirement ages (Barr and Diamond, 2008). Another political economy issue is that in a context of limited financial resources and administrative capacities, a decision to spend

more on an old-age pension program will come at the cost of having to channel expenditure away from other equally important needs, including other social policy goals. Such choices may represent a trade-off between equity and efficiency (McCord, 2010). Elaine Fultz argues that public authorities can create the conditions required for private annuity markets to better become a feasible option as part of old-age pension systems: “to provide regular cost-of-living adjustments, governments can issue bonds indexed to inflation. (Fultz 2012, p. 8). But there’s no enough evidences to prove that the availability of the mentioned facility exist in Sri Lankan context. As Shankar and Asher (2011) argue, the old-age pension needs of Government workers, as well as the working poor more generally, extend beyond standard issues of income security alone: there is also demand for insurance and maintaining time schedule to rebuild the mentality after retirement. Alternatively, where pension systems are well-developed, it could be viewed rather as an uncertainty. In this regard, there is a role for government-issued longevity bonds. Such bonds are a form of insurance through which individuals can transfer a small portion of current income to deferred income that would be guaranteed for life, thus eliminating the risk of an individual outliving his or her savings. At the same time to enhance the social life of after retirement by strengthening the better schedules to overcome issues raise within the mentioned period.

#### Research Problem

As per the statistical data almost 0.6 million of retired persons available in Sri Lanka. It is noticeable that those retired employees who had accomplished different scales of duties under Government institutions are living under different community levels. Accordingly, the problems being faced by them are different from person to person. Consequently, the research problem is to understand the vital problems confronted by the pensioner.

#### Objectives

- To identify retired persons within the community of Sri Lanka.
- To determine the value of remuneration being received by the retired persons as a pension as well as being a social security benefit.
- To recognize the key problems being faced by the retired persons.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### Selection of the study area and the processes of sampling

In general, it is a known factor that the persons went on retirement from the Government services in Sri Lanka follow the practice of referring varied problems encountered on their pension salaries, to the Department of Pensions seeking solutions. In this context, the Department of Pension is applied to be the study area. Accordingly, this research is completed in focus of those officials who went on retirement from Government services from January to December, in

2010. The data collection was proceeded through a sample represented by 150 pensioners to be the informants selected on arbitrary sampling basis, for the study.

#### Data Collection

Data gathering was proceeded through questionnaires based on the sample of 150 selectees. In addition informal discussions, observations and through case studies more data gathering was attained. Furthermore, besides the targeted interviewees data gathering was proceeded through institutional data providers as well to collect data in pertinent to the objectives of the research and in line with the primary sources of data. Also the literature review in relation to the study is proceeded and the publications in line with the literature review was referred via the access through secondary sources of information.

#### Data Analysis

Data analysis in reference to the gathered data within the study area was proceeded based on the qualitative and quantitative categorization. In particular, the quantitative data analysis was followed through graphs and tables while, qualitative data analysis followed the explanatory processes.

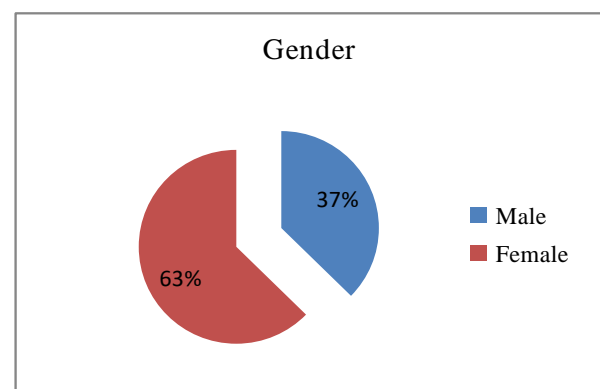
### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Noticeable characteristics of the retired community as revealed through the study;

- Deteriorated Health conditions
- Abounded breakdown of psychologies
- Propensity to move towards spiritual life styles
- Displeasure to move away from own supremacy
- Majority of retired personnel follow the divorced living pattern

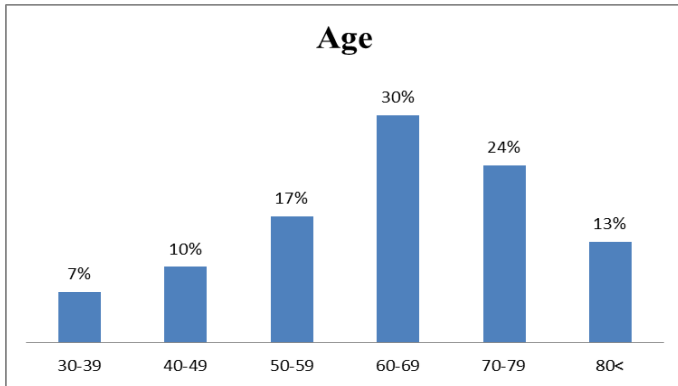
Furthermore, studies were lengthened on Sociological perspectives to analyse the status of; economic hardships of retired persons, composition of their marital status, how retired persons maintain socio-economic relationships, problems specifically faced by retired personnel as well as their response for same.

Graph No. 1: Gender representation of the sample of pensioners



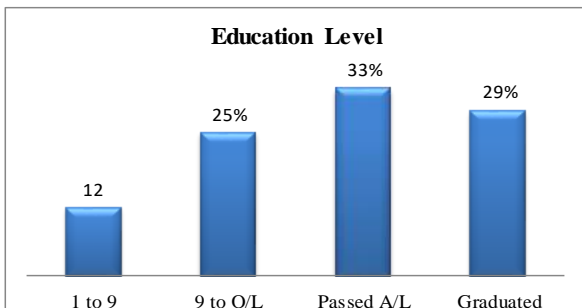
In line with the sample selectees, the pensioners visiting the Dept. of Pensions represented by 62 % female pensioners and 38 % of Male pensioners. Accordingly the majority of pensioners were females.

Graph No 2: Age depiction of the research sample.



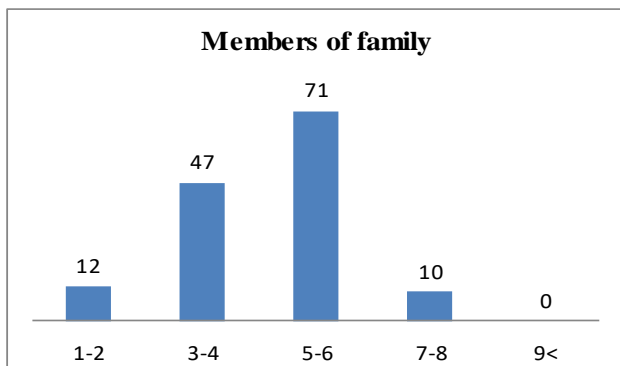
All the retirees selected through the sample could be exemplified in ages above 30 years. Those in between 60 - 69 years showed the majority which exceeds 30 % amongst the total whereas; those exceeded 80 years were 13 %. Also disclosed that the majority of those in between 30 to 39 years are found to be divorced pensioners.

Graph No 3: Standards of education of the research sample



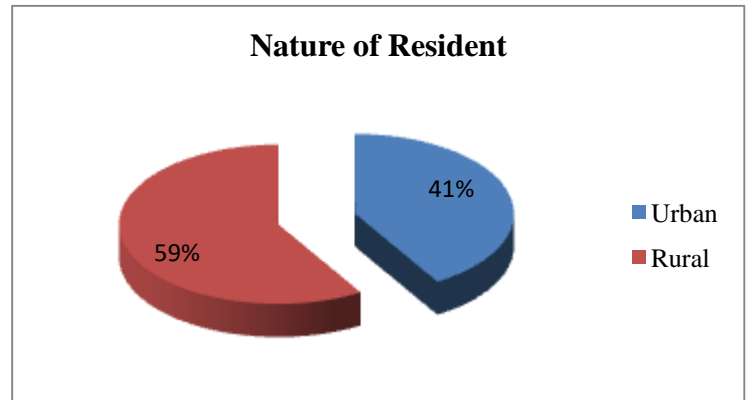
The studies pursued on the educational standards of the informants revealed that the majority had succeeded A' level which represents 33 %. Also shown that 29% had attained higher education through Universities. Therefore, it was identifiable that the majority had attained higher education.

Graph No 4: Composition of the members of sampled families



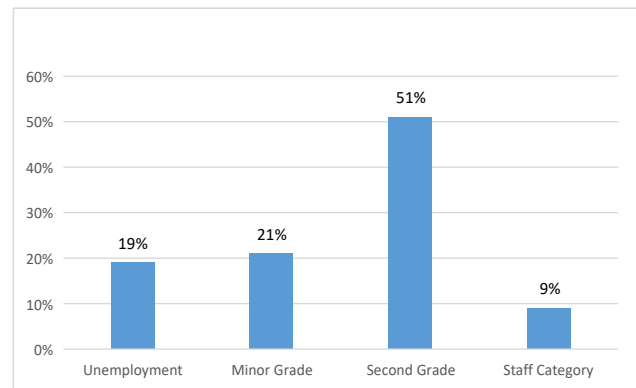
The configuration of family units of the sample disclosed that the average size of the membership per family is from 5 - 6 representing 47 % of the sample. Another 6 % of families headed by retired personnel represented by 7 - 8 members per family. Whereas, 8 % of family units found to be with few members and headed by divorced family heads added with families with children, was a notable factor. In such families the informants introduced themselves as widowed family heads yet added their children and the grand children to the size of families. It was probable that such expression is made to forget and to disregard their isolated living pattern.

Graph No 5: Status of residencies of the informants of research sample



It was noteworthy to analyse that majority of interviewees were residents in rural settings exceeding 50%. The aforesaid finding confirms that more people in rural areas had entered into government jobs mainly targeting the pension as a benefit while majority of urban persons had joined in private sector jobs targeting higher salaries.

Graph No 6: Structure of employment of informants of the research sample.



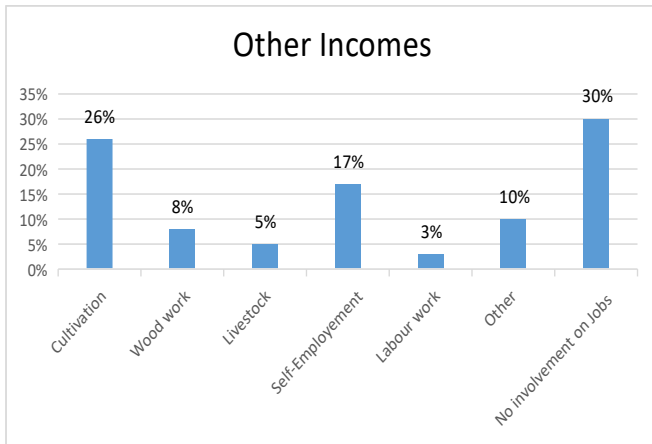
In reference to the employment structure of informants of the Research, it was found that majority of them has employed under 2<sup>nd</sup>. Grade of jobs Eg: Teaching, clerical positions, postal services, nursing, military services, police etc.

Herein, those unemployed retired persons represented 19 % out of the total sample whereas; the leading category is entailed by widowed persons and destitute. Also revealed

that 22 % of the samples were those engaged in minor scale of jobs such as; labour, office assistance and so on. This category represents 51% while, those who represented 1<sup>st</sup>. Grade (Staff) positions namely; Heads of institutions, Directors, Accountants, Doctors, Judge(s) and the colonels of army etc., showed 9 %.

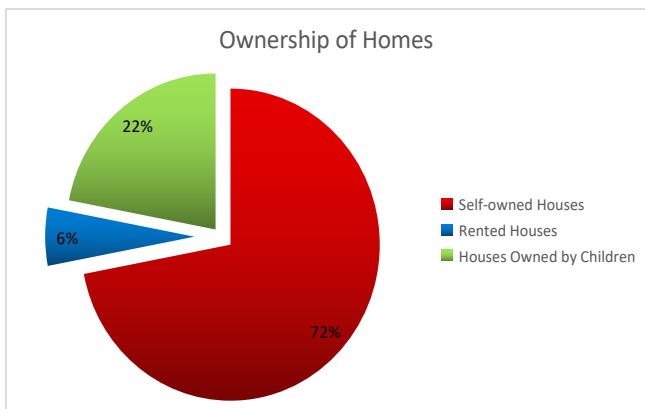
In this respect, the category of unemployed elders were signified as 19 % of the total and the majority of this segment were widows and destitute. Also identified that those worked as office assistants and labourers were 22 %.

Graph No 7: Added income sources of informants.



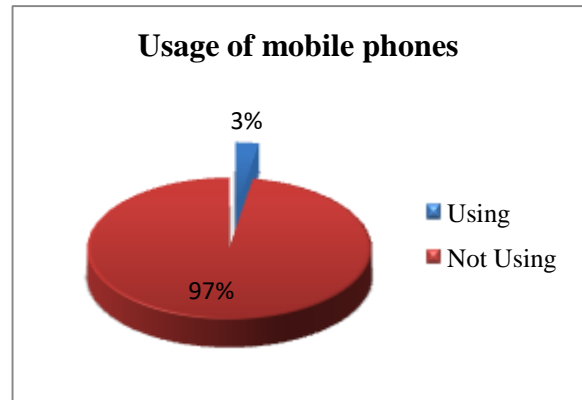
The analysis of mixed income avenues disclosed varied scales of involvement on 6 clearly identified sources. Incomes derived through cultivation, wood work, Livestock, were represented by 39 %; whilst, persons involved in self-employed actions were signified as 17%. The said self-employees were involved in garment products, making envelopes, and selling food items, whereas, 10 % of another sector worked in Day-care centres, hotels, shopping centres and in the field of security services. However, the sector doesn't involve in any added income avenues represents higher scale, equal to 30 %.

Graph No 8: Status of the ownership of residential facilities of the research sample



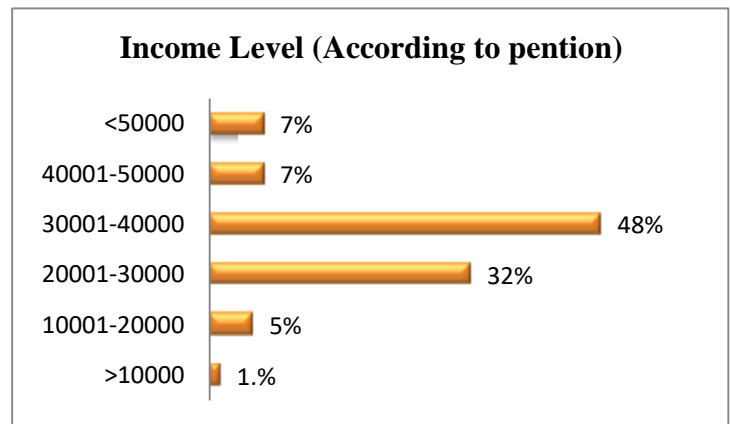
As disclosed, 72 % of the informants of the sample hold the ownership of houses they live. Next category of informants (6 %) asserted that they are living in rented houses. The balance segment of retired persons (22 %) are said to be living with family members in hoses owned by the children. Accordingly, this analysis proclaimed that highest majority of persons retired from Government services had accomplished their dream of possessing a house owned by them. It is extremely noteworthy that retired personnel could embrace the ownership of a property.

Graph No 9: Communication - Usage of Mobile phones of the research sample.



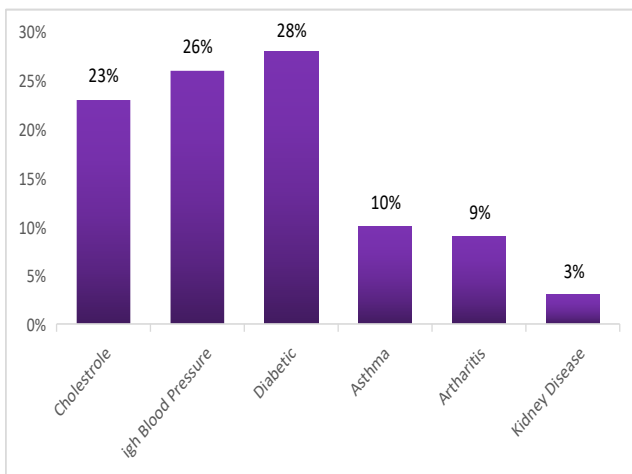
As per the usage of phones by the data providers, divulged that 97 % of the respondents were using hand phones of which the majority were using normal phones whilst, a section of them were using smart phones.

Graph No 10: Accessing for internet by the informants of the research.



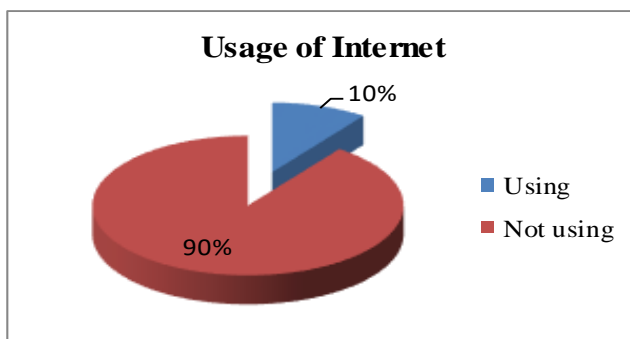
SA marginal number of interviewees (10 %) of the sample were found to be sourcing through the internet. It was revealed during the study that 90 % were not using the internet except those parents whose children are in countries overseas which is an exceptional observation.

Graph No 11: Status of Health and related problems of the sample of Pensioners



In search of the risk of non-transmittable diseases which are noticeable as common health problems currently, it could be perceptible that a considerable number of sample interviewees found to be caught by such diseases. It was found that the majority is distressed over Diabetes representing 54 %. Similarly, the sufferers from Cholesterol represented by 4 %, while. 50% were found to be the casualties of high blood pressure whereas, 20 % reported to be affected by Asthma and 18% of the sample agonized due to the Arthritis. When the undergone treatments are concerned, merely 50 % are following Western treatments. Furthermore, there were frequent sicknesses too causing in minor scale such as; headache, joint pains, phlegm, cough and muscular pains Etc. When the treatments are concerned, it was revealed through discussions that those who are suffering from mediocre pains and sicknesses are used to obtain varieties of therapeutic oil from Ayurveda centres for healings,

Graph No 12: Prevalled levels of Monthly earning thru' the Pension salaries.



Study in progress was further stretched to review the income bases of retired pensioners in focus of pension salaries they receive. Basically, 3 categories of income earners could be identified. One category of pensioners earn Rs. 30,000/= to Rs. 40,000/= per month. It could be determined that majority of this category represented by the positions of Teachers, and Principals. Likewise, two children (less than 18 years) were

getting Rs. 10,000/= being a retired salary. It was revealed that the parents of these children were employees of Government services and had passed away and the authorities had taken steps to enable the two children to access the said amount. Also, a segment of 20 % are earning monthly pensions from Rs. 40,000/= to 50,000/= and beyond Rs. 50,000/= as well. As disclosed, this category represents Grade 1 staff such as Directors, Secretaries and Doctors.

In line with the said income levels a majority of retired persons are living amidst of economic hardships, as divulged during discussions. When the expenditure pattern of the majority of families is concerned, either husband or wife or both used to spend money to undergo medical treatments. In addition, the findings of study outcomes revealed that beyond 50 % of the pensioners manage their daily expenses viz: food, clothing and medicine etc., merely in use of pension salaries.

As per the information gathered from the data contributors the benefit of pension scheme is purely a social security measure which was an unmeasurable outcome.

It is a pleasure to state that this Sociological research that had been focused on the diverse complications being faced by retired persons, could achieve its targeted objectives since, the pursued community could share a comprehensive volume of data and needed information to enable the study team to conclude analytical overviews of the status of retired employees. Accordingly, it was possible to determine who is the retiree or the pensioner and also to perform an overall assessment on the benefits be attainable thru' pensions by the pensioners and the magnitude of same. In addition, attention was paid on the key problems being faced by pensioners within the revealed scales of pension salaries. The other information disclosed was the on-time notification of Government when the senior employees reached 55 – 60 of advanced-in-age, with official declaration that such staffs are listed as retirees of Government services. Furthermore, Government offers Pension salaries as a measure of social welfare action and also being a methodology of social security.

In parallel to the above explorations the research team paid attention on a detailed assessment on varied difficulties being experienced by the retirees. Consequently, the following crucial problems could be recognized;

- Problems encountered owing to unstable economic conditions
- Frequency of sufferings due to illnesses
- Solitariness
- Changed composition and role within families
- To seek assistance of others when self-manageable actions cannot be attended by the self.

The key problem being faced by the respondents of the research sample as emerged through the data collection process can be listed as priorities as shown below. Also



revealed that one person can be affected in different ways due to several causes and effects.

Hence, when the problems being faced by retirees are interpreted it was noticeable that majority of the sample are being affected due to economic hardships. Accordingly 50% of them had faced economic problems. Outcomes of the study revealed that 60 % of pensioners who are eligible for newly revised pension scheme can manage all essentials of the self and the relatives provided that both husband and wife is eligible for pensions. Nevertheless, there were certain cases that such couples too, face inadequacies in managing family needs through both pensions.

Inadequacy of pension salary was surfaced specifically when the retired person has to set off the medical and clinical expenses of the married partner or the family members. Due to this reason a majority of persons in the sample used to attend clinics in Government hospitals. Also could see that retirees are forced to attend private hospitals for urgent tests / scanning etc.,

Furthermore, rapid increase of the prices of commodity items due to the devaluation of Sri Lankan money in turn, decreasing the Rupee value had influenced the majority of pensioners negatively also pressurising some of them to involve in added income actions.

Beyond economic hardships, nearly 50 % of the sample of pensioners live isolate which is one other crucial problem as disclosed through the study. This is seemingly an unresolvable dilemma that husband and wife lives alone or wives without husbands or else husbands without wives living in segregation as revealed through the study. When the profile of living pattern is concerned almost 50% of families found to be living away from children whereas the balances 50% were living with children. Also noticeable that those families living away from descendants were practicing alternate solutions to ignore the mental depression while, nurturing pet animals at home or to involve in religious practices etc., Also identified a larger segment of retirees involved in horticulture or home gardening as potential solutions to overcome the above said worries. Whereas, watching television without specifically selected programmes, as part of the usage of media is a common feature revealed through the study.

By virtue of the depression emerged due to isolate living pattern, a segment of pensioners used to read books and newspapers while others spend time on the caring of grandchildren. It was revealed through the study that grandparents possess higher scale of satisfaction by taking care of grand children while their grown children are busy on the jobs. These practices can be analysed psychologically too, as actions to forget the sufferings they undergo due to varied sicknesses. Other than roaming via internet and phone contacts the active participation of senior citizens on civil organizations namely; Adults' Societies or other welfare institutions was one other specific event noticed.

As revealed through the study one of the root causes triggering psychological disadvantages and frustrations among the retired persons is the change of their composition and the role that was evolved within families conventionally. Even though, children in their childhood had obeyed the discretion of adults when they grow up and become parents they act on own judgement may be due to the prevailed circumstances. It was apparent that such situations had kept the retired parents at a distance. Owing to such situations a group of seniors with depressive mentalities too, could be identified during the study. As observed 10 % of seniors were affected due to the said statuses.

The study team could notice that pensioners representing the sample visited the study area named ; the *Department of Pensions* seeking solutions for certain unresolved issues in pertinent to their pension salaries. Study team could also observe that the majority of the pensioners entered the department with the support of a second person. The observations confirmed that 10% of the retirees needed support from helper due to the deficiencies in communication such as hearing and talking, and also due to nervous problems etc.,

Accordingly, the elucidated complications shown above are the key problems being faced by the pensioners of the study sample. Also, the majority of the sample could actively participate in the analytical studies attended by the team.

The elderly in this society constitute the group that is most vulnerable; however, the least concern is evidenced by their own families which are a crucial issue. However, when the elderly is determined as a social problem in the contemporary society it is worthwhile to emphasise explicitly the pensioners as well.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Insufficiency of the pension salary, being offered as a social security benefit to secure the lives of the retirees.

- In order to react against entire complications to be faced by the elderly during the latter part of their lives, they have conformed to different and varied behavioural practices and channels such as;
  - Propensity to follow religions
  - Conforming into hobbies
  - Built-in relations with children and grand children
  - Participation in civil organizations
- To out-manuever the adulthood, the pensioners are to pay precise attention on the problems they are affected and to win their rights.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

- To launch a methodological and socially signified approach for the well-being of elderly and the retirees.

- There were news published by Media in the recent past on the incidences on committed suicides by elderly persons in the face of adult-hood related problems. Accordingly, it is necessary to reinforce the prevalent law and order policies in the country in order to ensure needed social security for the elderly community.

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