

The Attitudes of Homicide Victims on their victimization

Prof. M.W. Jayasundara

Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

Abstract: In Sri Lanka, the death penalty had been in place since the times of the ancient kings and under the colonial rulers to prevent grave crimes, including murder. From 1956 to 1959 and after June 1976, the death penalty was not carried out in Sri Lanka. However, the homicide rate has declined from 7.6 in 1976 to 2.1 in 2020 even in the absence of the death penalty. It is assumed that rather than capital punishment for homicide, some other significant factors have contributed to a decline in homicides in the country. This study was conducted in 2019 to identify the characteristics of homicide victims in Sri Lanka. Moreover, the background of the offenders and their relationship to the victims were also solicited. The data were collected concerning the 59 homicide victims selected from a random sample drawn from police stations located in nine districts in Sri Lanka. For data collection, a semi-structured interview schedule was utilized.

The study has revealed that low-income earners and less educated individuals mostly tend to become victims of homicide over minor matters in their daily life. Among them a considerable number of people engaged in blue-collar jobs happen to become victims of homicide over issues that might appear relatively trivial to other people. Previous enmity, family disputes, land disputes and drunkenness have been the precipitating motives for these offenders. This study suggests that creating awareness and disseminating knowledge among the less educated and low-income categories of people can cause a positive change in their conduct towards a peaceful and law-abiding life free from homicide.

Keywords: Homicide, Disputes, Blue-collar Jobs, Victims, Less education

I. INTRODUCTION

Homicide is defined as the willful, intentional killing of one human being by another, including murder, manslaughter, and vehicular homicide or unintentional second-degree murder (Adler et al, 1995:228). The dependents of homicide victims are generally defined as the victim's family members, friends, and their loved ones. In the history of humankind, people are reported to have acted violently and responded with murder even for minor disputes. For example, in the 16th century in Rome, the crimes of violence were innumerable. There had been more victims of homicide than the number of natural deaths. In the 14th century, the murder rate was 44 per 100,000 in Rome, and during the 13th to 14th century in Germany, it fluctuated between 20 and 65 per 100,000. Many causes have contributed to the growth of murder rate in Europe. Among them, the habit of carrying arms, alcohol-induced quarrels, lack of medical treatment, absence of adequate police power and non-existence of an

effective justice system were prominent (Wales and Hemmens, 1941). With the growth of homicide rates, the number of victims has expanded considerable way.

Criminologists consider that both criminals and victims are created by the society (White; Perrone, 1997:221). In other words, victims are the consequences of crimes. The role of the researchers is to find out why crime is committed by people and the way it affects the victims and the community at large. It is believed that every homicide involves at least one victim. Sometimes becoming a victim might be a random event where he/she was simply in a wrong place at the wrong time. As there is a pattern of individuals becoming criminals, there is also a pattern of persons becoming victims of homicide. The present study aims to find out why and how people become the victims of homicide. The family members and the relatives of the homicide victims are considered the secondary victims as the event blights the lives of those family members and their immediate relatives.

Presently, the homicide rate is low in politically stable countries as well as in wealthy democratic countries. In contrast, the developing countries and countries with rapid socioeconomic and political changes show a high murder rate. However, the advancement in technology and medical science, improvements in education and thinking patterns have paved the way for a change in the motives for murder and created a downward trend in homicide. For example, in Sri Lanka, one can identify the changes in the motives in committing homicide and the methods adopted.

From a criminological perspective, the most grievous crime against an individual is homicide. According to the law, killing a person by another is considered a capital offence. Homicide is defined as follows: "Homicide is the unlawful killing of another human without any justification or valid excuse, especially the unlawful killing of another human with malicious forethought. The state of mind may, depending upon the jurisdiction, distinguish murder from other forms of unlawful homicide such as manslaughter" (Wikipedia). Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary defines murder as "unlawful intentional killing of a human being" (p.815). According to the penal code of Sri Lanka, murder is identified as "If the act by which the death is caused is done with the intention to cause death is a murder" (p.294).

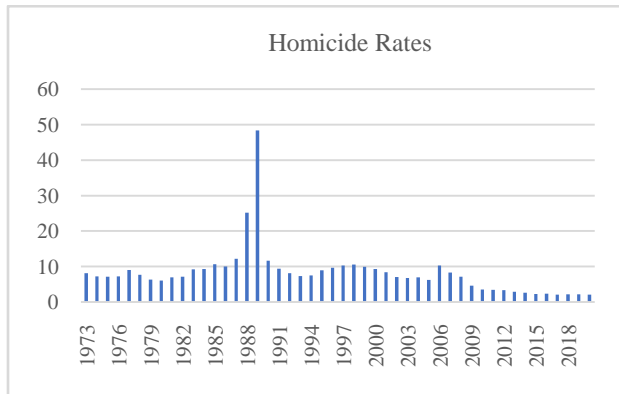
Further, to complete an act of murder in Sri Lanka, the following factors should be present.

- i. The intention of causing death.

- ii. The intention of causing bodily injury which is likely to cause death or
- iii. The knowledge of an act that is likely to cause death (293 of Penal code).

As the punishment for homicide, the death penalty had been carried out since the times of ancient Kings up to 1976. From 1956 through 1959, this penalty had been temporarily abolished.

Figure 1. Homicide Rates in Sri Lanka 1973 -2020



Source: Administration Reports of the Inspector General of Police 1973-2020

After June 1976, the death penalty was not carried out on any homicide offenders who were convicted of murder (Hood, 1989:22). Though it is generally said that the murder rate is lower when the death penalty is in operation, the data present in Figure 1. indicates that the murder rate was lower in the absence of the death penalty in the years 1978-1981 and 2002-2005 and 2009 onwards. When the death penalty is not implemented it is generally commuted to life imprisonment. For example, when the death penalty was in operation in 1973 murder rate was 8.1, but after the death penalty was commuted to life imprisonment after 1976, the murder rate had declined up to 2.1 by 2020.

Research Problem

In Sri Lanka, unlawful killing of people remained high until recent decades. The death penalty for grievous crimes was practiced during the reigns of the kings in the country. But after the British colonization of the country, the punishments were formalized, and the country’s first penal code was introduced in 1883. Gradually, the indigenous criminal justice system was replaced by British oriented judicial system. The imposition of the death penalty was limited to homicide, treason and few other crimes. The sole purpose of the punishment was to deter people from committing crimes and keep them under the control of law and order introduced by the British. The death penalty had been carried out against murder for several centuries except for its temporary abolition from 1956 to 1959. But the death penalty has not been carried out since the 23 of June 1976 after the hanging of the last person at Welikada Prison in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Although many criminologists and penologists discuss more about perpetrators of homicide, they o discuss less about victims of

homicide. However, people still keep killing others due to various reasons. This study has focused on its research problem as to why people become victims of homicide and the attitudes of victims on their victimization.

Objectives

- To identify the causes of victimization of homicide in Sri Lanka.
- To identify the characteristics of the homicide victims in Sri Lanka.
- To determine the nature of the criminal behaviour of the homicide offenders.

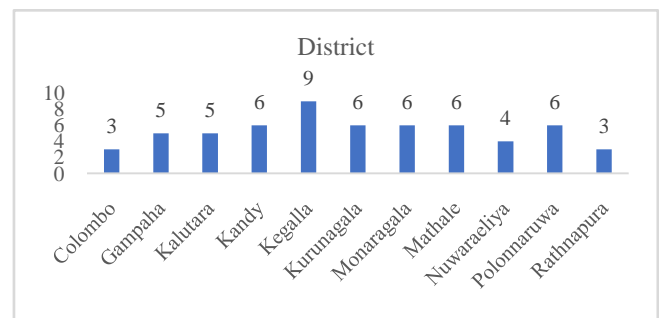
Significance of the study

Though some research has been conducted to examine the characteristics of homicides and the behaviour of those involved in homicides, no research has been undertaken previously to obtain first-hand information through face-to-face interviews with the secondary victims of homicide. Therefore, this research will undoubtedly be significant for academics and policymakers to work towards an extensive progression of crime prevention and policy planning. The study will also generate new knowledge as regards the behavior of the homicide victims and the causes and the motives that paved the way for becoming such victims. Further, the information on the victims' background and the reasons for why they had become victims of homicide would be significant for those who study homicide victims of the country.

III. METHODS

The study was carried out concerning the homicide victims selected from nine districts in Sri Lanka. Figure 2 shows the number of cases selected from each district consisting of 3 to 9 victims. A convenient sample of 59 victims was selected from the data available in selected police stations. The survivors of the victim’s family in the sample were met at their residences, and the data were collected from them through interviews. Interviews were designed primarily to gather data on the impacts of homicide upon them, the nature of the incidents, and the characteristics of the perpetrators. This semi-structured and open-ended procedure took approximately 30-40 minutes per survivor from the victim’s family.

Figure 2: The sample of the study



However, the length of the interviews was subject to a considerable individual variation. An assurance of confidentiality and voluntary nature of participation was established with those who participated in the discussions.

Data Collection Methods

The interviews were designed primarily to provide the secondary victim with the opportunity to reveal the causes that make them victims of homicide and the circumstances associated with the homicides against them. Questions relating to the background profiles of the primary victims as well as the characteristics of the offenders were solicited. In addition to the interviews, case study methods were used for obtaining in-depth information concerning each respondent.

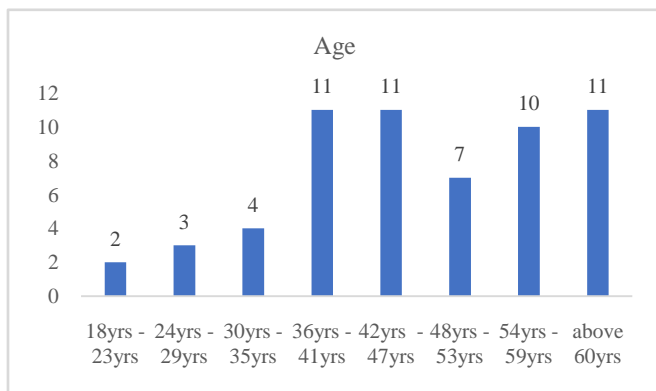
In the study, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected regarding the criminal behaviour of the primary victims and the homicide offenders. In analyzing data, standard data analysis methods were utilized to achieve the objectives of the study.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Age Distribution of the Victims of Homicide

The age range of homicide victims is mentioned in Figure 3. According to the statistics, it is apparent that homicide is a crime perpetrated against persons from all walks of life the young and the elderly. The present study was conducted on 59 individuals who had become homicide victims.

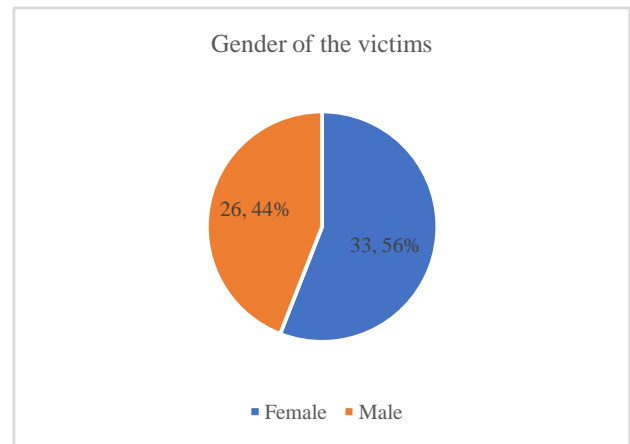
Figure 3: Age Distribution of the Victims of Homicide



Source: Field Research 2019

According to the age distribution of the homicide victims, the highest number is found from each of the three age categories between 36 to 41, 42 to 47, and over 60 years. The second-highest number (n=10) represents the age group between 54-59 while the third-highest number (n=7) belongs to the 34-41 age categories. The lowest number of victims comprises the age group between 18 to 23 years. The older people over 60 remain dependent on their kith and kin for their protection and survival according to their socio-economic conditions. The elderly being a target for homicide is indeed a pathetic situation for this age group deserves the due attention of the country at large.

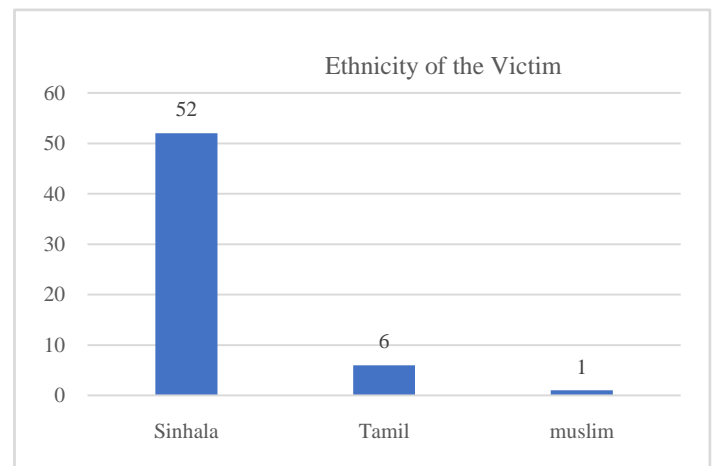
Figure 4: Gender of the Homicide Victims



Source – Field Research, 2019

When the gender pattern of the victims is concerned, a considerable variation can be observed. As Figure 4 shows, the majority of the victims (56%) are females and the males amount to only 44% of the sample.

Figure 5: Racial Distribution of Murderers



Source – Field Research, 2019

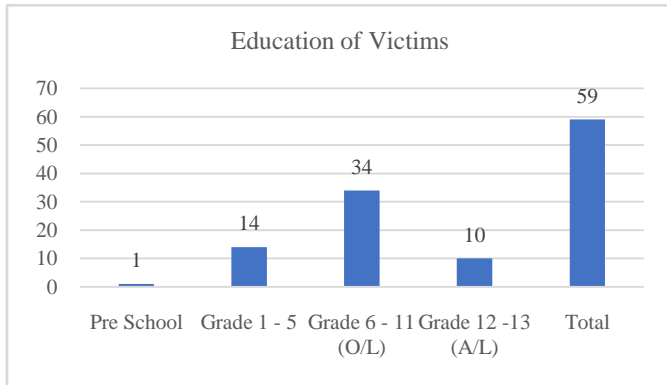
Among the individualistic factors that affect homicide victims, the race is a significant factor for it uncovers the cultural characteristics of the victims. Figure 5 indicates that the highest number of victims (n=52; 88%) represents the Sinhalese while the lowest number depicts the Muslims (n=1; 2%), and the number of victims belonging to the Tamil community is 10%. However, the ethnic composition of the total number of victims shows a slight variation when compared to their national representation.

Educational Level of the Victims

Figure 6 indicates the standard of education of the victims of homicide which shows a considerable difference in their education. The poor standard of education of the victims reveals that there exists a correlation between low education and victimization. Accordingly, most victims (n= 48; 76.1%) did not have the Ordinary Level educational qualification.

Among them, 1.7% (n=1) had attended only the pre-school while 23.7% had studied up to grade 5 level.

Figure 6: Educational Level of the Victims of Homicide

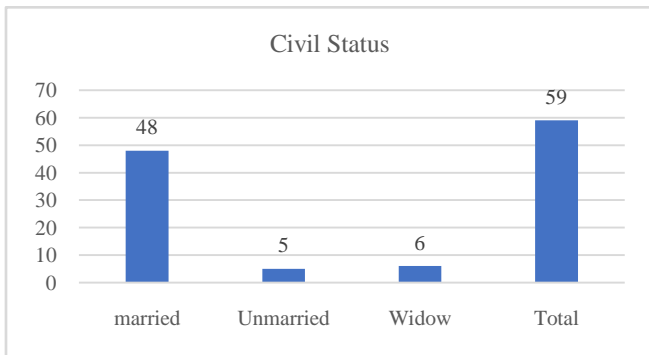


Source – Field Research, 2019

Only 16.7% (n=10) of the sample had studied up to G.C.E. Advanced Level of education. When the impact of education on crime is considered, a lower level of education often contributes to higher crime rates of any society as the lack of education creates a society with poverty, unemployment, and inadequate health facilities. These factors have a direct bearing on deviant behaviour patterns. Further, a society that consists of educated people is an asset to the individual himself and the entire community, for they bring about wealth, health, knowledge, skills and peace to the living environment. Lack of access to education paves the way for poverty. Therefore, it can be inferred that the less educated in the community often disrupt the peaceful environment and they tend to settle their conflicts through violence which make them become both victims and offenders of homicide.

Civil Status of the Victims

Figure 7: Civil Status of the Victims of Homicide



Source – Field Research, 2019

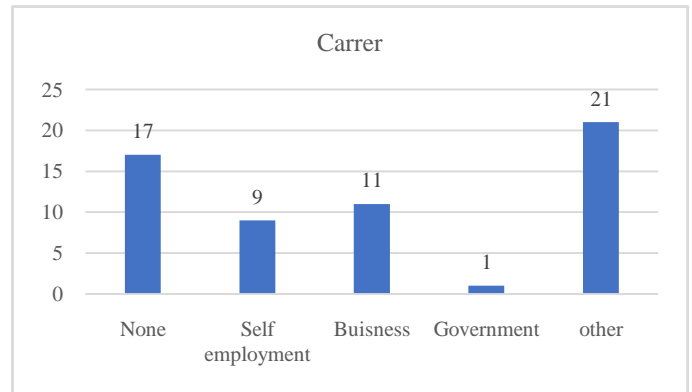
Figure 7 shows the status of the victims’ families from the perspective of their civil status. In the present study, 48 (80%) of the victims of murder were married while 5 (8%) were unmarried. Besides 6 (10%) victims remained as widows. There was a considerable variation in the pattern of civil status of victims. In the study, 82% of the married were found victimized, whereas 8% of unmarried were victimized.

Further, of victims (10%) had been widowed as compared to the unmarried victims of homicide.

Occupation of the Victims

The occupations of the victims before their event of victimization were also a concern of the study. The occupation-related information of the homicide victims requires close attention for understanding the relationship between the victimization and the employment status of the victims. According to the findings, the victims in the sample showed that they had been different from vocational backgrounds. Many victims (n=11; 18.6%) were employed in businesses, while another nine (15%) were self-employed in different fields such as masonry, driving, and manual labour.

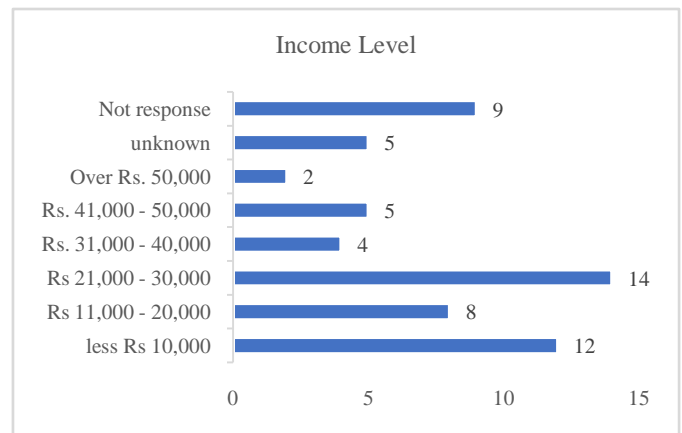
Figure 8: Occupation of Homicide Victims



Source – Field Research, 2019

The victims employed in the government sector was limited to only one person (1.7%) as indicated in Figure 8. However, 35.6% (n=21) of the victims were employed in different occupations. The unemployed victims who had been victimized by homicides amounted to 28.8%, (n=17) and it appeared that a considerable number of unemployed people had become victims of homicide in Sri Lanka. The reason was that they were predisposed to settle their minor disputes through violent means.

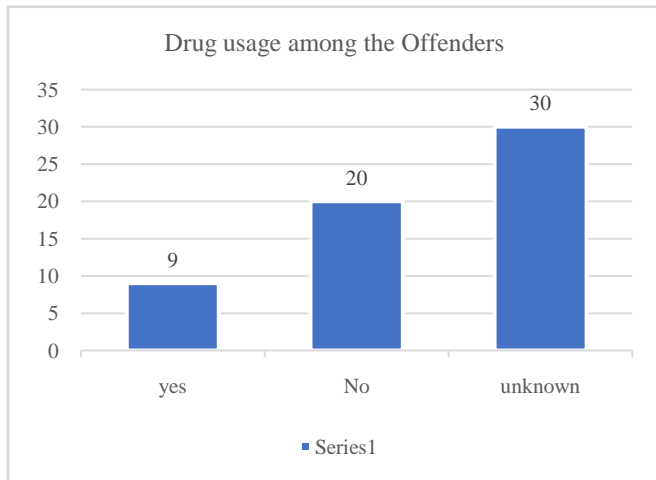
Figure 9: Income of the Victims



Source – Field Research, 2019

Even though most victims received less than 30,000 rupees per month, there were 12 (20.3%) victims who received less than 10,000 rupees as their monthly income. This amount is not at all sufficient to run a family or meet an individual's ends meet in the present context of Sri Lanka. The findings of the study indicate that there were only two victims who had received a monthly income of over 50,000 rupees. Consequently, it is apparent that the members of the lower-income groups often become the victims of homicides due to their fatalities and miseries of life.

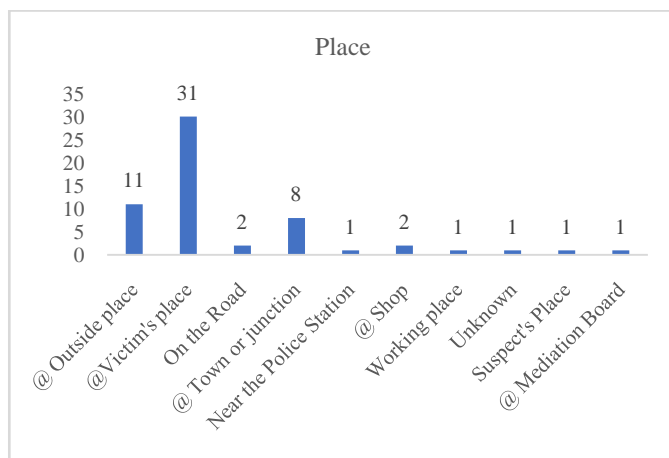
Figure 10: Drug Use among the Homicide Offenders



Source – Field Research, 2019

Figure 10 indicates that nine homicide offenders (15.2%) have taken to drugs and alcohol while 20 offenders (33.9%) did not consume any drugs. However, the victims' family members did not know whether the rest 30 (50.8%) offenders had fallen to alcohol or drugs. In general, consumption of drugs is deemed to stimulate or facilitate the offenders' criminal behaviour and influence them to lower their inhibitions, impair judgements, and increase their recklessness and risk-taking behaviour. Therefore, it is likely that many offenders have taken drugs or alcohol before they committed homicides.

Figure 11: Location of the Homicide

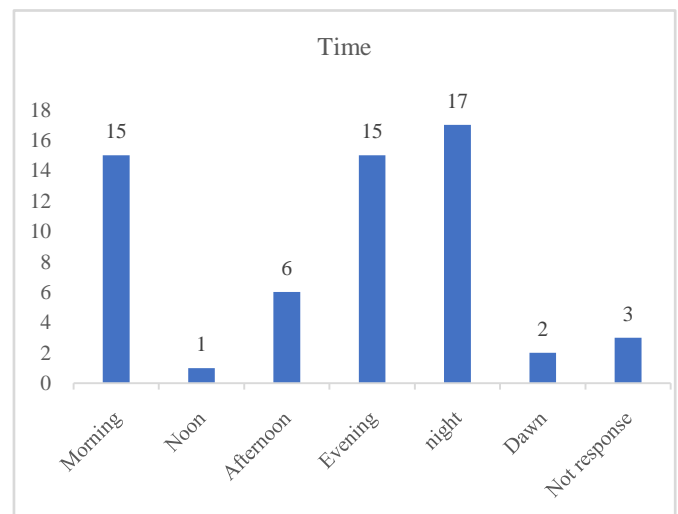


Source – Field Research, 2019

The causation of crime against humans takes place due to various reasons. As a social animal, a human being interacts with the other members of the society and especially with the people in his community. When he encounters unbearable situations or disagreeable occasions, he is inclined to react with violence under provocation. This scenario leads him to resort to criminal acts such as murder and grievous hurt against the people with whom he interacts. In other words, people do not kill their close relatives or other members merely for sadistic pleasure or without any provocative reasons. The researchers and criminal justice officials have identified different reasons that persuade people to commit murder. Among them, the different kinds of disputes including land disputes, family disputes and other issues such as alcoholism, drug addiction, illiteracy, irreligiosity, unemployment, poverty, political reasons bulk large. One or several reasons for murder can be identified to a certain extent at times. But the reasons for murder may vary from one culture to another or country to country.

Similarly, the offenders have committed premeditated homicides as well as unpremeditated homicides at different locations. Figure 11 shows that most homicides (n=31; 52.5%) had occurred at the victim's residence or a place much closer to it. Many of those homicides seemed to have been committed with premeditation. The rest of the homicides had taken place outside the victim's residence, such as on roads, in towns and junctions, in commercial establishments and at other public places. However, eleven cases (18.6%) had occurred off the victim's premises but not in a public place.

Figure 12: Time of the Occurrence of Homicide

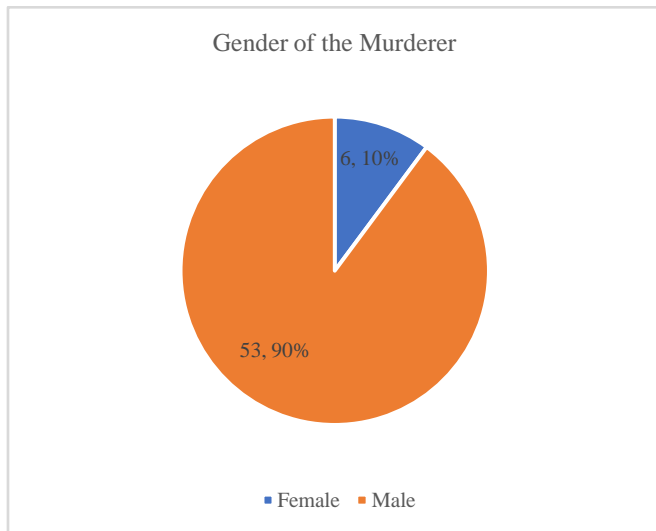


Source – Field Research, 2019

The time of the occurrence of homicide was a concern of the present study. Figure 12 shows that most of the incidents (n=17; 28.8%) have occurred at night. The least number of homicides (n=1; 1.7%) have taken place at noon. Apart from that, in the morning and the evening, the occurrence of homicides has amounted to an equal number of 15 (25.4%) each. According to Figure 12, six cases of homicides have

taken place in the afternoon whereas two cases have occurred at dawn.

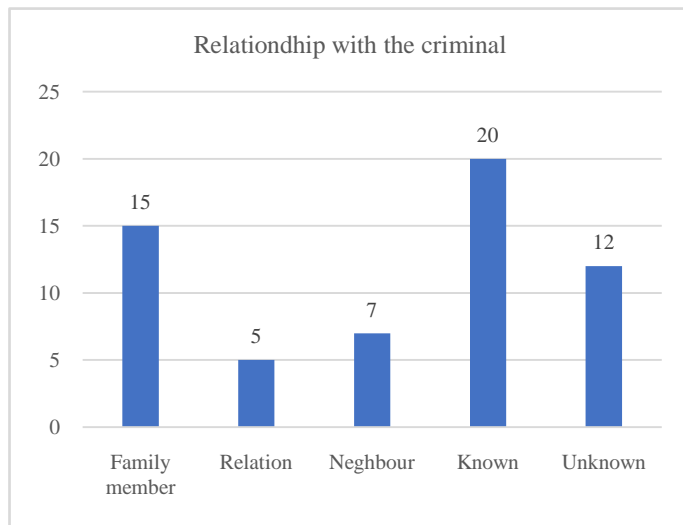
Figure 13: The Gender of the Offender



Source – Field Research, 2019

The present study was also concerned about the gender of the murderers. Accordingly, the majority of offenders, 53 (90%), consisted of males, while 6 (10%) of them were females.

Figure 13: Relationship to the Criminal



Source – Field Research, 2019

Homicide is a crime predominantly resulting from interpersonal conflicts among people known to each other and the statistics too reflect this factor. Accordingly, 79.7% of victims were known to the offenders and only 20.3% remained as unknown persons in the relationship between the offender and the victim. This rate of unknown offenders needs to be further studied in order to understand the fundamental nature of the incidence of homicide in the country. In organized homicides, including contract-killing, the victim may not be known to the offender. As as the victim is no more

to reveal the offender's identity in some cases, the information regarding the offender is gathered from the relatives of the victims. The offenders who were not known to the relatives would possibly be known to the victims. Homicide in the country appears as a crime that occurs in the family environment at a considerable proportion, deserving due attention for the peaceful coexistence of family members. As it was well evident from the study, 25.4% of homicide offenders were family members who had committed homicide against their very family members. The findings of the study were quite consistent with the results of the research conducted by Jayawardene (1961) on homicide in the southern province of Sri Lanka. Accordingly, 64.8% of the suspects of homicides were members of the same family. Except for one suspect (2.7%), the rest of the suspects consisted of friends, co-workers or members of the same gang and either the master or the servant of the victim (89). It is commonly believed that in some minor arguments and disputes the victim is the instigator of the homicide. Domestic violence and various family disputes that remain unsolved for years happen to culminate in homicide within the family. Apart from that, relatives (8.5%) and neighbours (11.9%) have also committed homicides against their own relatives and neighbours due to various conflicts among them.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study was aimed at finding homicide victims and their characteristics. Apart from that, the nature and criminal behaviour of offenders of homicide was also a major concern of the study. Accordingly, data were gathered and analyzed in line with the objectives of the study. The following conclusions were drawn from the study.

The victimization of homicide has been a result of systematic, environmental, demographic and personal circumstances. Some particular characteristics of homicide victims can be identified in comparison with other type of victims. As the age groups of the representative sample of the study are concerned, the highest number of victims 11 (18.6%) fall into the age groups of 36-41, 42-47 and over 65 years. The second-highest number of 10 victims (17%) belong to the 54-60 age group. However, only one victim was identified between the age group of 18-23 years. It was found that many older people had become the victims of homicide. The percentage of victims over 60 and between 56-60 age stood at 18.6 and 17 respectively. These older people naturally depended on the rest of the population for their protection and survival concerning their social and economic situations. The elderly becoming homicide victims is a pathetic situation that shows the moral degradation of the community. Another specificity of the finding of the study was that more females (56%) than the males (44%) had become homicide victimis. According to the ethnic composition of the country, the Tamil and the Muslim community represent a relatively lower number, and among the victims of homicide too their representation stands proportionately lower while the majority Sinhalese represent the highest number of homicide victims.

As the educational levels are concerned, there appears a direct relationship between less education and the victims of homicide. Accordingly, one victim had attended only the pre-school while 23.7% had attended school only up to grade 5 standard. On the whole 83% had received education below Grade 11. In contrast, 17% had passed grade 11 or received higher education up to Advanced Level. In general, education brings up desirable change in the behaviour of mankind together with knowledge, skills and understanding in one's life. In addition, it develops human personality, thoughts and amicable relationships. As might be expected, the uneducated and the less educated do not often find success in their lives when compared to the educated.

The civil status of the victims indicated that 48 (82%) of them were married and 5 (8%) were unmarried, whereas 6 (10%) victims were widowed. This indicates that homicide victimization increasingly takes place among the lower income earners as compared to the other social groups of the society and the married experienced more unresolvable conflicts than the unmarried since the married encounter greater familial problems.

The previous occupation of the victims was another concern in the study. The highest number of victims (n=21; 35.6%) had worked as masons, farmers and labourers etc. in their locality. There were 11 businessmen (18.6%) within the representative sample of the victims except one government employee. Further, 9 (15%) were self-employed while 17 (28.8%) victims had no employment. Accordingly, it was revealed that these people had led hand to mouth existence and they mostly lived in rural areas where many people became homicide victims in contrast to the urban areas. Only 2 (3.4%) victims had earned over fifty thousand rupees monthly income while the rest had made a meager income by doing odd jobs. The findings of the study revealed that many homicides had occurred in the areas where the poor and the unemployed lived, and they belonged to the lower income families.

Drugs and alcohol abuse have been reported against 15.2% of homicide offenders. The victims were uncertain whether 50.8% of other homicide offenders consumed drugs. However, these higher drug and alcohol consumption rates merit serious attention in any preventive measures against violent crime and victimization. The majority of homicides had occurred at the victim's residence or in their neighbourhood. The rest of the homicides had taken place off the victim's residence such as on roads in towns, junctions, commercial establishments and in other public places. According to the study, a high incidence of homicide prevailed among family members and their neighbours, and it seems that all these incidents of homicides have occurred either at victims' residences or in their neighbourhood.

Most of the homicides have taken place at night. Only one case has taken place at noon. Apart from that, a significant number of homicides have occurred in the morning as well as in the evening. The crime of homicide is mainly carried out by

males accounting for 90% of the cases, while females make up 10% of the cases. This gender difference that appears in the findings of the study cannot be considered separately as it is a homicide incidence involving both male and female offenders leading to the culmination of conflicts in manslaughter. Even though the females are engaged in deadly clashes, males tend to admit the crime and thus face legal actions. On the other hand, females have been mostly victimized by known individuals, while males are often victimized by strangers or contract killers. With the change of the role of the women in the present industrial society, their responsibility as an income earner and the person who runs the family may cause the same problems as with their partners. Within this scenario, females are inclined to involve in homicides.

As homicide is a crime predominantly resulting from interpersonal conflicts among people known to each other, the finding of the study confirms the same factor. Accordingly, nearly 80% of victims were known to the offenders. The rest of the offenders remained as strangers in the relationship between offender and victim. This rate of unknown offenders needs to be further studied to understand the country's fundamental nature of homicide incidence. The unknown offenders might have been contract killers or belonged to organized criminal gangs, and surprisingly they may even have known the deceased.

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