

Environmental transformation, cultural diversity and crime trends and patterns in post-independence era of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Sri Lanka has undergone many faces of change, conflicts, ethnic riots and civil wars, which have created many environmental and social problems in post independent era. In post war environment, criminality has become a crucial issue. Consequently, strategies have been developed to restrain crimes rates. The long-term crime trends and high rates of crime fluctuate, and the fluctuations are influenced by political upheavals in the country. Crimes related to political activities began to appear after 1970s, and until then the picture of crimes in Sri Lanka was very much like any other traditional society. The late 70s showed the beginning of organized crimes and gang crimes, and the crimes related to drugs increased in numbers and reported in various communities after 1980s. The development of the tourist industry, opening of the economy in late 1970s and the civil war that started in early 1980s have contributed to a change in crimes patterns. The factors that have contributed to the new developments in crime rates and patterns include, the civil war, changes in political culture, media, and the introduction of new technology and environmental transformations. They can be viewed as background factors that contributed to the increase in crime rates and the creation of new patterns of crimes in Sri Lanka. The study examines criminal tendency within the transformed socio-economic, political and cultural environment during the post-independence period of Sri Lanka, and the legal procedures established to curb crimes and maintain the law and order. The main objective of the study was to explore the social and cultural context of crimes in the post-independence era. The methodology used in this research is drawn from criminological approaches to research, and theoretically it is driven by the Strain theory. The study is based on official crimes statistics and literature, and primary data were collected through interviews, case studies and case histories obtained from the prisoners. The results show how the social context of crimes influenced the crime rates during the past two decades. Educated people show a high crime rate than the uneducated people in some years. It also shows a wide gap between the male and female prisoners. (97:3), The high crime rates are found to have committed by people who are legally separated. Minority groups (Muslims, Malay and Burger) show high crime rates associated with drug abuse compared to the majority (Sinhalese and Tamils). Crime rates are higher among the Hindu and Islamic people than among the Buddhists. The study also shows that grave crimes have decreased while sexual crimes have been sharply increased. Homicide rates have declined from 9.04 (per 100,000 population) in 1991, to 3.47 in 2011; rape has increased from 2.18 in 1991 to 9.18 in 2011. Overall, the study shows women and children are vulnerable to crimes than other age and sex groups in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *Crimes, Crime rate, Cultural diversity, Environmental transformation, Social context*

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