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**PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN SRI LANKA****D.A.R.E.S. Gunawardana***Former Demonstrator, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka***Dr. S.A.D.H.N. Suraweera***Senior Lecturer, Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka*

**Abstract:** Social cohesion is the extent of social togetherness in a territorially defined geo-political entity such as a university. Social cohesion is a characteristic of the collective residing in this entity, rather than of individual members. The university as a cohesive society can be characterized according to three domains. They are (1) reliable social relations, (2) a positive emotional connectedness of its members to the entity and (3) a pronounced focus on the common good. University is one of the best places that can be used to promote social cohesion because university represent diverse of student community from every corner of the country. However, previous studies reported that ragging at hostels in universities takes place at significant level when senior students mix with the new students. So, this shows the need for depth research on what are the issues faced by hostel students on any act focus on psychological abuse act especially when they are staying at university hostels. Therefore, the objective of the paper is to identify such act (special reference to psychological acts) and thereby provide recommendations to prevent from those identified situations as well as to inform how to promote social cohesion among university students in Sri Lanka.

Mixed research methodology was used to gather and analyze data to achieve the objective of this study. Based on one selected state university this research was carried out. Stratified sampling technique were used to select appropriate sample from university undergraduates (n=1765). This study used structured close-ended questionnaires as well as structured interviews to collect quantitative and qualitative data. However, this paper will not present qualitative data. Data were analyzed using the SPSS software packages. ANOVA, Crosstabulation and Frequency analysis was used to achieve the objectives of the research. This study found that students experienced psychological acts such as other persons controlling what students do, made to feel alone/social isolation, harassment through social media, having rumors spread about students during their university life. Such unpleasant experiences have a bad effect on students and their university life which negatively impact on social cohesion among university students.

**Key words:** Community cohesion, University students, Psychological Acts, Ragging, Sri Lanka

## INTRODUCTION

The heart of the university is their students. Universities do everything for them. For example, University will provide an innovative curriculum to meet the needs of their diverse student population, University will work in partnership with their students to deliver a high-quality experience and ensure they flourish during their time, and university will support their students to make a positive contribution to society and to their chosen fields.

The higher education sector in Sri Lanka consists of both public and private higher education institutes. The public higher education sector comprises of universities, research and postgraduate institutes, and advanced technical institutes. Both undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs are conducted by universities. The postgraduate degrees range from diplomas to master's degrees and PhDs. All undergraduate degree programs take three or four years, but medical degrees take five years. For any undergraduate degree program in any university in Sri Lanka, there is a huge requirement of offering accommodation facilities because each intake represent students from every corner in the country. Every year, this is a significant challenge for higher education sector to accommodate and maintain the hostel facilities in the universities due to the large increase in the student intake every year (Mansoor and Hussain, 2015). Therefore, the importance of accommodation facilities for university undergraduates has substantially increased. It is believed that the facilities provided in the hostels for the students have some impact on their academic performance (Mansoor and Hussain, 2015) as well as it is believed that the friendly and secure environment provided in the hostels for the students have some impact on promoting social cohesion in the university.

Social cohesion can be defined as the extent of social togetherness in a territorially defined geo-political entity such as a university. Social cohesion is a characteristic of the collectiveresiding in this entity, rather than of individual members. As identified in the International comparison of Social Cohesion Method Report – 2013 (depicted in Figure 1), a cohesive society has been characterized according to three domains. They are (1) reliable social relations, (2) a positive emotional connectedness of its members to the entity and (3) a pronounced focus on the common good. Each of these three domains unfolds in three dimensions, which can be measured separately (Dragolov, Georgi and Ignácz, Zsófia and Lorenz, Jan and Delhey, Jan and Boehnke, Klaus, 2013).

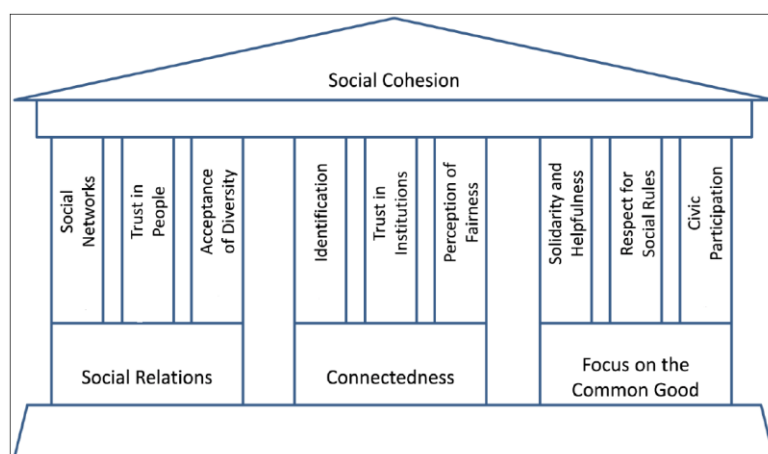


Figure 1 – Social Cohesion – Definition

Source: Dragolov, Georgi and Ignácz, Zsófia and Lorenz, Jan and Delhey, Jan and Boehnke, Klaus (2013)

In this study, dimension of cohesion has been further identified and customized as shown in Table 1.

Domain	Dimension	Students in the University
<b>Social Relations</b>	Social networks	...have strong social networks
	Trust in People	...place high trust in each other
	Acceptance of Diversity	...consider individuals with different value orientations and lifestyles as equals.
<b>Connectedness</b>	Identity	...feel strongly connected with it and strongly identify with it
	Trust in institutions	...have high trust in its institutions
	Perception of fairness	...feel they are treated fairly
<b>Orientation towards the common good</b>	Solidarity and helpfulness	...feel responsible for each other and the well-being of others.
	Respect for social rules	...respect and adhere to rules and norms.
	Civic participation	...participate in social and political life.

**Table 1 - Dimensions of Cohesion**

**Adapted from Dragolov, Georgi and Ignácz, Zsófia and Lorenz, Jan and Delhey, Jan and Boehnke, Klaus (2013)**

As depicted in Table 1, the domain ‘social relations’ represent the social networks of the students at the university, the level of trust among students, and the degree of acceptance of diversity. The domain ‘connectedness’ includes the strength of identification with the entity, the level of trust in institutions and the perceived level of fairness. The third domain, emphasis on the ‘common good’ which encompasses the level of solidarity, the extent to which students are willing to recognize social rules, and the degree of community participation in the university.

There is a huge responsibility for state universities to provide hostel facilities for their students because majority of students community stay in hostels provided by the university to continue their higher studies. Therefore, that is one of the best places that can be used to promote social cohesion among university students in Sri Lanka. However, as reported in University Grants Commission (2020) report on “redressing victims of ragging and providing a regulatory mechanism to prevent ragging related abusive conduct in Sri Lankan state universities and higher educational institutions”, ragging at hostels takes place at significant level when senior students mix with the new students. The report further emphasis that the security officials in the university premises have not taken steps to prevent ragging, and the warden, sub-wardens and other officers also fail in discharging their responsibilities. They appear to be helpless and on occasions advise students to bear with ragers until the ragging is over. So, these show the need for depth research on what are the issues faced by hostel Students’ on any act which causes or is likely to cause physical or psychological injury or mental pain or fear especially when they are staying at university hostels. The objective of the paper is to identify such act (special reference to psychological acts) and thereby provide recommendations to prevent from those identified situations as well as to inform how to promote Social Cohesion among University Students in Sri Lanka.

## **METHODOLOGY**

It is important for researchers to clarify their high-level theoretical perspectives or paradigm in the beginning of their research process (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Mertens, 1998) as that guides the investigation. At an epistemological level, positivism is objectivist while interpretivism is subjectivist (Pickard, 2007). Therefore, in the positivist paradigm the researcher is detached from the research situation (Fitzgerald & Howcroft, 1998). According to the interpretivist paradigm, the results of the investigation are a product of interaction between the subject and the researcher (Pickard, 2007). In this research, both objectivist and subjectivist approach were involved with the phenomenon under investigation and the research process. In this research, both objectivist and subjectivist approach were involved with the phenomenon under investigation and the research process.

In this study, quantitative and qualitative research methodology were used to gather and analyze data to achieve the research objective. i.e. to identify issues faced by hostel students' on any act (special reference to psychological acts) which causes or is likely to cause physical or psychological injury or mental pain or fear especially when they are staying at university hostels and to inform how to promote social cohesion among university students in Sri Lanka. This is part of a bigger research project. Based on one selected state university this research was carried out. Stratified sampling technique were used to select appropriate sample from university undergraduates (n=1765). Level of students' degree program, and Faculty have been used as strata. This study used structured close-ended questionnaires as well as structured interviews to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Said data collection tools were developed from an extensive review of the literature and was designed on the basis of research objectives. Due to the limited pages of this full paper, qualitative data has not presented. Completed questionnaires were collected directly from the respondents. Data were analyzed using the SPSS software packages. ANOVA, Crosstabulation and Frequency analysis was used to achieve the objectives of the research.

## **FINDINGS**

This section present study findings identifying whether students have been experienced to suffer from any psychological harassment acts during their time enrolled at the university. It does not matter who created the harassing experience or where the students are experiencing it. In this study psychological harassment acts include not allowed to access a telephone, family and friends, another person, made to feel alone/social isolation, other persons controlling what you do, being treated as a child or a servant, having rumors spread about you, harassment through social media, and harassment through the phone.

Table 2 shows how psychological abuse occurs depending on where students are staying around the university. Frequency is out of 99.8% with a missing percentage of 0.2. Majority stays in Campus Hostel making it the highest frequency recorded of 43.2% while the lowermost stays in other hostels outside of the university giving it a frequency of 0.6%. Boarding and Home takes on an almost equivalent frequency reading of 24.7% and 21.6% respectively. And also, of the 762 students staying in Campus Hostels, 602 (79.2%) are female students. The number of female students staying in outdoor hostels is 138 (80.7%). 294 (67.6%) female students stay in Boarding places. There are 284 (74.5%) female students come to university from home and 7 (63.6%) female students come to university from other places.

Descriptive of Psychological Acts Based on Where Student Stay									
	N	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean			Minimum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Campus Hostel	762	43.2	6.6089	.81337	.02947	6.5511	6.6668	.00	7.00
Outside hostel	171	9.7	6.3567	.98590	.07539	6.2079	6.5056	1.00	7.00
Boarding	436	24.7	6.4702	.89006	.04263	6.3864	6.5540	2.00	7.00
Home	381	21.6	6.3570	.96444	.04941	6.2598	6.4541	.00	7.00
Other	11	.6	6.2727	.78625	.23706	5.7445	6.8009	5.00	7.00
Total	1761	100.0	6.4935	.89003	.02121	6.4519	6.5351	.00	7.00

Table 2: Descriptive (Psychological Acts and Where Stay)

Source: Survey Data, 2019

As identified in Table 2 there was a significant effect of Place of Stay on Psychological Acts. Considering the Psychological Acts or the fully met standards, Campus Hostel had significantly higher Psychological Acts compared with Outside hostel (MD = .25220,  $p < .05$ ). Campus Hostel had significantly higher Psychological Acts compared with Boarding (MD = .13874,  $p < .05$ ). Campus Hostel had significantly higher Psychological Acts compared with Home (MD = .25197,  $p < .05$ ). Other and Campus Hostel had statistically equal level of Psychological Acts. It seems the psychological abuse that occurs in campus hostels is greater than the psychological abuse that occurs outside the dormitory, boarding, and indoors.

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Psychological Acts						
LSD						
(I) Wherestay	(J) Wherestay	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Campus Hostel	Outside hostel	.25220*	.07482	.001	.1054	.3989
	Boarding	.13874*	.05310	.009	.0346	.2429
	Home	.25197*	.05548	.000	.1432	.3608
	Other	.33620	.26852	.211	-.1905	.8629
Outside hostel	Campus Hostel	-.25220*	.07482	.001	-.3989	-.1054
	Boarding	-.11346	.07978	.155	-.2699	.0430
	Home	-.00023	.08139	.998	-.1599	.1594
	Other	.08400	.27505	.760	-.4555	.6235
Boarding	Campus Hostel	-.13874*	.05310	.009	-.2429	-.0346
	Outside hostel	.11346	.07978	.155	-.0430	.2699
	Home	.11323	.06201	.068	-.0084	.2349
	Other	.19746	.26995	.465	-.3320	.7269
Home	Campus Hostel	-.25197*	.05548	.000	-.3608	-.1432
	Outside hostel	.00023	.08139	.998	-.1594	.1599
	Boarding	-.11323	.06201	.068	-.2349	.0084
	Other	.08423	.27043	.755	-.4462	.6146
Other	Campus Hostel	-.33620	.26852	.211	-.8629	.1905

Outside hostel	-.08400	.27505	.760	-.6235	.4555
Boarding	-.19746	.26995	.465	-.7269	.3320
Home	-.08423	.27043	.755	-.6146	.4462

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

*Table 3: Multiple comparisons (Psychological Acts and Where Stay)  
Source: Survey Data, 2019*

Table 4 shows psychological abuse activities faced by students during their university life.

Psychological abuse	Response	Frequency	Percent
<b>Other persons controlling what you do (ex: Not allowed to access a telephone) not allowed to contact family and friends, another person</b>	No tick	410	23.2
	Ticked	1355	76.8
	Total	1765	100.0
<b>Made to feel alone/social isolation</b>	No tick	101	5.7
	Ticked	1664	94.3
	Total	1765	100.0
<b>Being treated as a child or a servant</b>	No tick	75	4.2
	Ticked	1690	95.8
	Total	1765	100.0
<b>Having rumours spread about you</b>	No tick	123	7.0
	Ticked	1642	93.0
	Total	1765	100.0
<b>Harassment through social media</b>	No tick	39	2.2
	Ticked	1726	97.8
	Total	1765	100.0
<b>Harassment through the phone</b>	No tick	59	3.3
	Ticked	1706	96.7
	Total	1765	100.0
<b>Stalking, following in and maintaining them in in humiliating way</b>	No tick	85	4.8
	Ticked	1680	95.2
	Total	1765	100.0

*Table 4: Psychological abuse activities faced by students during university life  
Source: Survey Data, 2019*

According to Table 4, Out of the total respondents' of 1765 majority of 1355 (76.8%) mentioned that when they are in their 1<sup>st</sup> year, senior students do not allow them to access a telephone, family and friends, another person while only 410 which is 23.2% of the total frequency not mentioned. Out of the total respondents of 1765 a massive majority of 1664(94.3%) were reported that they made to feel alone/social isolation while only 101 which is 5.7% of the total frequency not mentioned. Out of the total respondents of 1765 again a majority of 1690(95.8%) were reported that other persons like seniors, they are controlling what they do. Out of the total respondents' of 1765 majority of 1642(93.0%) students further reported that they have been treated as a child or a servant. Out of the total respondents of 1765 again a massive majority of 1726(97.8%) reported that having rumours spread about students and as depicted in Table 4, harassment through social media, harassment through the phone were also reported as major psychological abuse activities students face while they are living in the hostels.

The Table 5 below illustrates how psychological abuse occurs on the basis of gender from the 1762 respondents.

Psychological abuse activities faced by students during university life * Gender Crosstabulation									
Psychological abuse		Gender						Total	
		Male		Female		Other			
<b>Other persons controlling what you do (ex: Not allowed to access a telephone) not allowed to contact family and friends, another person</b>	No tick	87	21.2%	321	78.3%	2	0.5%	410	100.0%
	Ticked	342	25.3%	1006	74.4%	4	0.3%	1352	100.0%
	Total	429	24.3%	1327	75.3%	6	0.3%	1762	100.0%
<b>Made to feel alone/social isolation</b>	No tick	22	21.8%	79	78.2%	0	0.0%	101	100.0%
	Ticked	407	24.5%	1248	75.1%	6	0.4%	1661	100.0%
	Total	429	24.3%	1327	75.3%	6	0.3%	1762	100.0%
<b>Being treated as a child or a servant</b>	No tick	27	36.0%	47	62.7%	1	1.3%	75	100.0%
	Ticked	402	23.8%	1280	75.9%	5	0.3%	1687	100.0%
	Total	429	24.3%	1327	75.3%	6	0.3%	1762	100.0%
<b>Having rumours spread about you</b>	No tick	31	25.2%	92	74.8%	0	0.0%	123	100.0%
	Ticked	429	24.3%	1327	75.4%	6	0.4%	1762	100.0%
	Total	429	24.3%	1327	75.3%	6	0.3%	1762	100.0%
<b>Harassment through social media</b>	No tick	11	28.2%	28	71.8%	0	0.0%	39	100.0%
	Ticked	418	24.3%	1299	75.4%	6	0.3%	1723	100.0%
	Total	429	24.3%	1327	75.3%	6	0.3%	1762	100.0%
<b>Harassment through the phone</b>	No tick	8	13.6%	51	86.4%	0	0.0%	59	100.0%
	Ticked	421	24.7%	1276	74.9%	6	0.4%	1703	100.0%
	Total	429	24.3%	1327	75.3%	6	0.3%	1762	100.0%
<b>Stalking, following in and maintaining them in in humiliating way</b>	No tick	25	29.8%	58	69.0%	1	1.2%	84	100.0%
	Ticked	404	24.1%	1269	75.6%	5	0.3%	1678	100.0%
	Total	429	24.3%	1327	75.3%	6	0.3%	1762	100.0%

Table 5: Psychological abuse activities faced by students during university life according to Gender Crosstabulation

Source: Survey Data, 2019

According to Table 5, it is clear that female students are more likely to be subjected to psychological abuse in their university life than male students. The majority of respondents, 1006 (74.4%) of female students reported that the other persons controlling what you do (i.e., Not allowed to access a telephone, not allowed to contact family and friends, another person). Moreover, the majority of respondents, 1248 (75.1%) of female students further reported that they made to feel alone/social isolation. As reported in Table 5, majority of Female students reported following psychological abuse activities faced by them during their university life. They are being treated as a child or a servant, having rumours spread about you, harassment through social media, Harassment through the phone and Stalking, following in and maintaining them in in humiliating way.

## CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH AREAS

According to the analysis of this research, Campus Hostel and some of the outside hostel had statistically equal level of Psychological Acts. The psychological abuse that occurs in campus hostels is greater than the psychological abuse that occurs outside the dormitory, boarding, and indoors.

Based on findings, this study concludes that considerable number of participants psychological activities are controlled by another person/s. At the same way, students were not allowed to access a telephone, family and friends, another person especially during their 1st year of study. It is a large drawback for them when they are living in a technology-based society. Because of psychological violence, a substantial number of participants who feel alone/ social isolation. Mostly, the victims of the problem were students who were the only child of the family, having a lack of public relations, etc. It was highlighted that a considerable number of participants were being treated as a child or a servant. That situation also will be having an adverse effect on participants while they are independent learners. At the same way, a noticeable number of participants were violated by having rumors spread about them, harassment through the phone, Stalking, following and maintaining them in a humiliating way. Also, it is significant that 2.2% were harassed through social media. While social media is the fastest information distributor, it can spread any news in few seconds. According to that, it will have a bad effect on students and their university life. All these factors negatively impact on social cohesion among university students.

To minimize identified psychological abuse activities, this study recommended that senior students should not be given permission to enter into hostels or do not provide accommodation in hostels provided for new students/freshers. Any types of conflict can be minimized when there is community cohesion in a society. The university is a sub-community of society. This implies that psychological abuse can be prevented by creating coexistence within the university community.

To increase/promote social cohesion among university students, it is vital to improve social cohesion competencies (knowledge, skills, tools) while they are studying at the university. Further, standard mechanism should be implemented especially in the hostels to increase high levels of trust in each other. Thereby, it is important to promote students consider individuals with different value orientations and lifestyles as equals. It is also vital to enhance the mainstreaming of social cohesion sensitive considerations across all sectors of the university and improve connectedness as well as to move orientation towards common good.

Although this study identified that psychological abuse activities (only one act) negatively impact on social cohesion among university students, it is urgent to carry out proper research to identify and test dimension of cohesion (as depicted in Table 1) in the context of state universities in Sri Lanka. This kind of research will definitely be useful for promoting social cohesion among university students and thereby decrease ragging and gender-based violence especially in the state universities in Sri Lanka.



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