Suicide and the morality of

kinship in Sri Lanka

Tom Widger

*Ethnographic research amongst Sinhala Buddhists in community and clinical settings in the Madampe Division, northwest Sri Lanka, suggests that local understandings and practices of suicidal behaviour reflect the kinship structure. In particular, acts of self-harm and self-inflicted death arise in response to the breaking of core kinship rights, duties, and obligations, or as a challenge to inflexibility or contradictions within the system. In either case, the morality of kinship is closely associated with the causes of suicidal behaviour, as the 'inevitability' or 'evitability' of kin relationships is negotiated and lived in practice. This article analyses how local political economies give rise to particular kinship and moral conditions, with special attention paid to those between household (*gē*) members and brothers-in-law (*massinā*).*

Key words: Suicide, kinship, morality, Sri Lanka

Tom Widger is an ESRC Post Doctoral Fellow (R30033) in Social Anthropology at Brunel University, Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB8 3PH, UK. Email: tomwidger@hotmail.com

I

Introduction

Suicidal behaviour has long been observed to occur at unusually high rates in Sri Lanka (Eddleston et al. 1998; Eddleston and Phillips 2004; Kearney and Miller 1985).

As in many 'non-western' societies, acts of self-harm and suicide stand as an apparently 'legitimate' means by which individuals can respond to accusations of wrongdoing or make social demands (Brown 1986; Counts 1980; Firth 1951, 2000 [1961]; Giddens 1964; Malinowski 1949 [1926]). The work that has been conducted in Sri Lanka on this problem (for example de Alwis this volume; Marecek 1998; Marecek and Senadheera this volume; Spencer 1990a, 1990b; Widger 2009; Wood 1961) suggests that the communicative function of suicidal behaviour is particularly effective when interlocutors exist in a close relationship, and then usually a kin relationship, with the suicidal individual. Working in a village of Sinhala Buddhists in central Sri Lanka, Spencer (1990a, 1990b) posited that suicide arose as a response to problems when the parties involved were hierarchically unequal. At the base of Spencer's argument was the assumption that the social structure inhibits how people can legitimately express or release their complaints about or frustrations towards others. Inferiors daren't respond to perceived wrong-doing by superiors, because under normal circumstances the nature of their relationship disallows direct confrontation; suicidal behaviour provides a legitimate means by which inferiors can respond indirectly (for a similar theory see: Littlewood 2002).

The contingency of the communicative function of suicidal behaviour is likely to be deeply complex, and depend on personal as well as social structural issues. The particularism of personal contingencies may only be known through detailed individual case studies which are

not easily accessible ethnographically, and anyway sociologically speaking are only of interest in terms of their relationship to structural issues. Structural contingencies, by contrast, are accessible and analysable both ethnographically and sociologically. By tracing general quantitative patterns of suicidal behaviour against normative social structures and then investigating those 'fractures and fissures' in social relationships that seem most often to give rise to suicidal behaviours, an increasingly detailed ethnographic understanding of suicidal behaviour may be gained. Individual case studies may then be illuminated through an analysis of how personal and structural issues interconnect and relate.

In this article my intention is to describe the structural patterns of suicidal behaviour in a peri-urban locality of Sri Lanka in terms of the material and social experiences of families and communities. A particular emphasis will be placed on understanding how certain kinds of relationship may be more likely to manifest suicidal responses when they encounter problems—and others not. It will be argued that when the moral 'inevitability' of such relationships is brought into question, both the social 'legitimacy' and the likelihood of suicidal behaviour increases; morally 'evitable' relationships, by contrast, make suicide 'illegitimate' and less likely. Which relationships are considered to be morally inevitable and thus how, when, and where suicidal behaviours arise as a denial of sociality depends upon the class bases of the kinship system.

II

Patterns of suicidal behaviour

Brief orientation

Madampe Division, a southern portion of the Puttalam District in the Northwest Province of Sri Lanka, lies some 70 km north of the capital, Colombo. Best described as a 'peri-urban' area,

Madampe is predominantly Sinhala Buddhist, although substantial communities of Sinhala Roman Catholics and Muslims also exist.[1] In 2001 the Division had a population of some 43,000, the majority of whom were resident in fifty-two suburbs and villages of less than 1,000 people (unpublished data obtained from Madampe Government Agent 2004). Across the whole of the Puttalam District in the same year, the working population was employed equally between three main economic sectors: 'primary' agricultural and commodity production, 'secondary' manufacturing, and 'tertiary' public and private sector services. Based on what I know of Madampe, I would expect to find a slightly different distribution to the District pattern with a greater emphasis towards employment within the secondary and tertiary sectors (Widger 2009).

My field work, which took place between October 2004 and June 2006, was based around two village ethnographies and several parallel organisational ethnographies. My village ethnographies attempted to capture the effects of economic and social changes occurring in Madampe since the mid 1800s that have manifested different socio-economic groups and classes across the Division, largely as a result of differential land holdings and inheritance opportunities and the birth of a local 'meritocracy' in the labour market. To that end I concentrated on one self-consciously 'traditional' (*purana*) village called Udagama and one 'modern' housing colony (*estate*) called Alutwatta. During my research suicidal behaviours occurred in both communities, with at least three suicides in Udagama and two in Alutwatta, and several more cases of self-harm in each. Furthermore, suicide threats, existing as 'part and parcel' of daily discourse, occurred frequently. The result was a 'deep and wide' set of ethnographic materials concerning the various understandings and practices of suicidal behaviours found in Udagama and

---

[1] See Department of Census and Statistics. 2003. *Census of population and housing—2001.Population and Housing Data, Puttalam District*. Available at: http://www.statistics.gov.lk/index.asp. Accessed on 1 June 2009.

Alutwatta, set within historical, social, and political frameworks (for a fuller discussion see: Widger 2009).

Over the same period I conducted ethnographies 'in and of' one field hospital in Madampe, the Divisional police station, a coroners' court, and finally a mental health clinic in the district town of Chilaw, some twenty km up the coast. The case histories held by those organisations, which in total ran into more than seven hundred, provided further examples of self-harm and suicide viewed from different perspectives (those of suicidal individuals, family members, and medical and law enforcement professionals). Analysis of these cases allowed not just a broader understanding of the ethnographic materials I had collected at Udagama and Alutwatta but also scope to develop some simple statistical patterns and correlations according to key social status indicators such as gender, age, and marital status. The primary and secondary datasets I collected, then, afforded me the opportunity to investigate the run up to, incidence of, and consequences following a range of suicidal acts in their close relational, emotional, moral, as well as wider public, settings.

Epidemiology of suicidal behaviour

In Madampe, no popular equivalent of the English term 'suicide' was used. However, the phrase '*siya diivināsā ganimā*,' which translates best as 'to take one's own life,' was sometimes used. But in Madampe that phrase was not very popular, and instead people much more frequently talked about suicidal behaviour in terms of its most common method: self-poisoning. Reflecting this, the phrase '*wāha bonnāva*'('drinking poison') was used when people talk about suicidal behaviour in others, but also, importantly, when people make suicide threats of their own. The allusion to poison is important. Beyond reflecting the preferred method of suicidal behaviour, it

highlights an inherent ambiguity between intention, action, and outcome. In Madampe, wāha bonnāva is readily known to be about causing some other party negative social and emotional affect, not one's own death.

Raw data on acts of suicidal behaviour was obtained from four sources across the Madampe Division and the wider area (see Figure 1; Table 1). All four sources dealt with cases from the Division, two of them exclusively. Sources dealing exclusively with the Division were the Galmuruwa Peripheral Unit (GPU), one of two community first aid medical centres, and Madampe police station (MPS), which investigated all unnatural and suspicious deaths. The two other sources, Chilaw Mental Health Clinic (CMHC) and Kuliapitiya Magistrates' Court (KMC), dealt with residents of the Madampe Division and residents of the wider Puttalam and Kurunegala Districts. CMHC counselled self-harm patients admitted to the Chilaw Base Hospital (CBH) as a 'voluntary condition' of discharge, while coroners attached to KMC gave verdict on suicides investigated by the police.

Reviews of the available records yielded an interesting picture of suicidal behaviour taking place within and around Madampe Division. Cases of non-fatal suicide attempt—self-harm—were found to be most frequent amongst males and females aged sixteen to twenty-four and lowest amongst middle-aged men and women. Cases of self-inflicted death, meanwhile, were most frequent amongst middle-aged men and lowest amongst middle-aged women (see Figures 2–4). Sinhala Buddhists were most likely to commit suicide or attempted suicide; Roman Catholics, Hindus, and Muslims least likely. Roman Catholics and Hindus committed suicidal behaviour at very low rates, while Muslims were not identified in any of the records that I reviewed. Finally, marital status appeared to be correlated with suicidal behaviour. Unmarried females were more likely to commit suicide attempt than married females and unmarried males;

separated and divorced males more likely to commit suicide than their married male and female counterparts (see Figures 5–6).

Hospital staff, police officers, and coroners kept records on causes of suicide and attempted suicide. Such records are interesting because they shed light on the circumstances that led to acts of suicidal behaviour and also how people in Madampe conceptualise such causes. They reveal, then, both 'practice' and 'discourse.' Clinicians at CMHC recorded patients' histories in terms of social and psychological factors. They wrote in English and generally used 'medic-speak' to describe the circumstances leading to suicide attempts. Conversely, police officers and coroners wrote in Sinhala and used terms and phrases common in the local vernacular.

However, both sets of language focused on the same set of core 'social' issues. At CMHC, these included: romantic problems and loss; disputes between spouses, parents and children, and other family members; failure at school, work, or other 'occupational' problems; legal problems; somatic complaints; grievous loss; physical and sexual abuse; and the effects of alcohol or alcoholism (see Figure 7). At MPS, police officers summed-up cases using the following phrases: '*ardari prashna*'('love problem'); '*pavula prashna*' ('wife problem'); '*gedara prashna*' ('family problem'); '*arthika prashna*' ('economic problem'): '*asanipaya*' ('physical illness'); '*malla dukkhayi*' ('suffering following death of a loved one'); and '*bebadda*' ('drunkard').

Relational context of suicidal behaviour

At both CMHC and MPS social causes were highly gendered, and also related to status positions within the *gē* (nuclear family unit). Married men's suicidal behaviours were more often

associated with 'occupational' problems (unemployment, financial problems, and legal problems) and those of women were associated with 'domestic' problems (disputes with husbands, children, and other family members). However, the single largest cause of suicidal behaviour recorded for married men was also disputes with spouses and other family members. That is: occupational problems usually led to suicidal behaviour due to the conflicts they produced at home. Amongst the unmarried, male and female suicidal behaviours were caused in equal numbers by romantic problems. Males were more likely to be associated with occupational problems, while females were more likely to be associated with disputes in the immediate family, or be identified as the victims of sexual abuse.

Analysis of the relational context within which cases of self-harm arose adds further depth to the emerging picture (see Figures 8–10). Amongst patients presenting at CHMC, unmarried females (N=67) were more likely to self-harm following disputes with parents than their male (N=66) counterparts (55.4 per cent and 26.2 per cent). On the other hand, unmarried males were slightly more likely to self-harm following disputes with older siblings (13.8 per cent and 7.7 per cent), and much more likely following disputes with older kin outside the gē (12.3 per cent and 6.2 per cent). Thus, while the problems leading females to self-harm appeared to be limited within the gē, problems experienced by males extended beyond its borders.

Married men (N=82) and women (N=90) were equally and overwhelmingly likely to self-harm following disputes amongst themselves (79.5 per cent and 79.7 per cent respectively). Reflecting this, disputes with a person's own parents triggered self-harm in a tiny number of cases (4.4 per cent amongst males and 4.3 per cent amongst females), as did disputes with husbands' parents amongst married women (6.5 per cent). However, amongst married men

disputes with wives' parents led to self-harm in double the number of cases than did disputes with the suicidal individuals' own parents (8.8 per cent and 4.4 per cent).

Similarly, disputes with wives' siblings—in most cases her brothers—led men to self-harm in more than twice the number of cases than did disputes with men's own siblings (8.8 per cent and 3.3 per cent). Conversely, married women self-harmed following disputes with their own or their husband's siblings in a tiny number of cases (2.2 per cent and 3.2 per cent). Finally, both men and women self-harmed following disputes with their own children (13.2 per cent and 11.8 per cent respectively). As seen in relation to unmarried self-harmers, then, problems troubling females tended to be restricted to the gē, but problems troubling men extended beyond the household to involve other kin.

Fractures and fissures in Madampe

The evidence suggests that patterns of suicidal behaviour correlate with close interpersonal relationships. This appears to be most usually due to an individual's failure to respect the demands, expectations, or proper duties of kinship. If we take these examples to be indicative of the kinds of relationships and problems that most often give rise to suicidal behaviours, we may suggest that the following configurations are most likely to aggravate such reactions:

1. Unmarried children, and especially daughters, in dispute with parents;

2. Unmarried males in dispute with older siblings or older kin outside the gē;

3. Disputes between husbands and wives;

4. Married men in dispute with wives' parents; and

5. Disputes between brother's-in-law.

How might we account for these patterns? The obviously much greater frequency of interaction between parents and children, husbands and wives, and some extended kin is one possibility, which implies that the patterns are simply a statistical mirage. But I would argue that the correlation goes beyond the simple fact that members of gē happen to associate most often and so are more likely to come into dispute with one another. After all, unmarried sons presumably interact with parents at roughly the same degree as unmarried daughters, but daughters engage more often in suicidal behaviours when their relationships run into problems. Rather, what appears to be the important issue is not the frequency at which people interact, but instead the kind of investment associated with their interactions. The significant fact here is the qualitative, not the quantitative, nature of the relationship. In the next section I will argue that it is the *morality* implied by such relationships that not only accounts for the patterns of suicide in a quantitative sense, but also in a social and emotional – qualitative – sense.

III

Moralities and structures of kinship

The epidemiology of suicidal behaviour in Madampe suggests that the causes and relational contexts of self-harm and suicide are kinship contingent. However, only certain kinds of kin relationship are likely to be associated with suicidal behaviours; there seems to be a qualitative difference between kin relationships that do give rise to suicidal behaviours and those that do not. While the personal nature of this experiential quality is only accessible through detailed psychological case studies of the kind pioneered by Obeyesekere (1981) in Sri Lanka, the structural nature of experiential quality is amenable to ethnographic research and analysis. I

submit that one way of understanding the structural nature of the experiential quality of kin relationships is through a consideration of their moral natures.

The morality of kinship

The morality of kinship has been variously defined in terms such as 'prescriptive altruism' (Fortes 1969, 1978, 1983) and 'generalised reciprocity' (Sahlins 1965). Kin relationships, unlike other kinds of relationship, are supposed to be characterised by a fundamental morality of 'sharing' without 'reckoning' (Fortes 1969: 238 cited in Bloch 1973: 76). Bloch (1973) has suggested that it is the level of inequality—or apparent absence of reciprocity—within a relationship which acts as a barometer for how 'moral' a relationship actually is. Relationships that are characterised by a high degree of 'take' by one party may be assumed to be based upon morality, while relationships defined by immediate reciprocity may be assumed to be lacking morality and defined by 'utilitarian' aims. While the former may prove to be reciprocal in the long-term, the latter are always so in the short-term. Moreover, while failure to reciprocate in the long-term may not jeopardise moral relationships because they are governed by a belief in 'sharing without reckoning,' a lack of reciprocity in utilitarian relationships will almost certainly result in their abandonment.

In Madampe, kin relationships are spoken about as the only kind of relationships that are truly definable in moral terms. Relationships that constitute the smallest atom of kinship, the household (gē), are characterised by strong imbalances of give and take, and may be regarded as being the most moral of all. But so too are, under certain conditions, some extended consanguineal and affinal links such as men's relationships with wives' brothers, sisters' husbands, and male cross-cousins (all termed *massinā*), as well as the mother's brother (*māmā*).

By contrast, relationships between other kin, for example married brothers and sisters, parallel cousins, and fathers' brothers, are usually considered to be short-term. Acts of give and take, if they occur at all, take place in rapid succession; reciprocity is immediate and unions are seen as fulfilling utilitarian ends.

Consequently, there is a distinction between what people in Madampe see as 'inevitable' kin relationships within the gē, between massinā, and with māmā, and 'evitable' relationships with just about everybody else, including non-kin.[2] While inevitable relationships are understood as being—or are at least hoped to be—supportive and able to withstand demands and challenges over the long-term, evitable relationships are always seen as being ultimately untrustworthy and best treated that way. It is in the inevitability or evitability of relationships that the link between suicide and kinship may be found. This is in terms of, first, the expectations that are placed on inevitable relationships and, secondly, the process of negotiating inevitability in the first place.

Relationships that are deemed to be inevitable are, to put it simply, worth dying for; they carry extensive social and emotional meaning and consequence. By contrast, evitable relationships are of course known to be transient—or 'fickle,' as one Madampe informant liked to say—and therefore hardly worth risking one's life over. But by the same token a claim of inevitability is not lightly made, and only those kin who truly believe long-term reciprocity can be sustained are likely to enter into such relationships. Thus, not all Madampe people agree about which relationships are inevitable and which are evitable. Disagreement exists and problems occur when normative assumptions are sought to be put into practice, only to fail. There exist, then, 'fault lines' within local understandings and practices of moral relatedness and the inevitability or evitability of kinship and these map onto local understandings and practices

---

[2] The exception are romantic relationships, which people regard as ideally being a precursor to the marriage relationship and thus highly moral.

of suicidal behaviour.

The making of kinship moralities in Madampe

So far I have argued that patterns of suicidal behaviour can be read in terms of the morality of relationships with which they are associated, and that only those relationships that are deemed to be moral and inevitable are valued or ever problematic enough to lead to suicidal behaviour. I have also argued that suicidal behaviour arises when disagreement exists over which relationships should be treated as moral and inevitable. This implies that people in Madampe are able to make certain choices over who they call kin and what they mean by that. However, those choices are not 'freely' made but are constrained by the material and class basis of Madampe society. It is to the creation of these constraints of kinship that I now turn.

The Sinhala kinship system is related to the Dravidian system of South India. Within Sri Lanka, the 'Kandyan kinship system' is considered by most authorities to be the best (most authentic) example, because the Kandyan region of the island was colonised by European powers for the least number of years.[3] In the Kandyan system, kin relationships were defined within a strictly endogamous 'sub-caste' group, the '*variga*,' according to relationships between groupings of gē (households), referred to as the '*pavula'* (Leach 1961; Tambiah 1965; Yalman 1967). Pavula themselves were created through any manner of bilateral relationships that shifted and changed according to the utilitarian needs of gē. The gē itself, then, was of little interest sociologically speaking, as it was to extended kin relationships, and those between massinā in particular, that economic, social, and political relationships looked. However, as suggested by the amorphous sounding nature of pavula, this structure was only formed on the material grounds

---

[3] The coastal regions of Sri Lanka, Madampe included, were colonised by the Portuguese from the 16th century, and later by the Dutch then British, until Independence in 1948. The Kandyan highlands resisted colonisation until the British era, when it fell in 1815.

of village life in the time and place that the studies of Kandyan kinship were conducted. Indeed, even a good deal of variation existed even within that 'system,' to the extent that village studies conducted a few miles apart exposed differences of practice and opinion between them (Robinson 1968; Stirrat 1977: 280). Similarly, kinship structures and terminologies vary across the island to such a degree that in some communities, non-Dravidian forms are evident (Stirrat 1977). In this sense, it is difficult to speak meaningfully of 'Sinhala kinship'; what exists rather are temporary formations employing the logic of Dravidian kinship and importantly the morality it represents to serve economic, social, and political realities and aspirations in the present.

In Madampe, the logic of Dravidian kinship is used to describe very different practices on the ground. Udagama and Alutwatta are two communities in the Madampe Division with forms of kinship that diverge from the Kandyan example, and also from each other. To pre-empt my discussion below, in both the gē is far more significant sociologically than it was in the old Kandyan system, but is also more significant at Udagama than at Alutwatta. Conversely, the massinā relationship is less important in both, and is again less important at Udagama than at Alutwatta. In order to understand the bases of these differences—and their relationship with the patterning of suicidal behaviour—one must consider the socio-economic history of the Madampe Division, and also each community. What that history suggests is that while the emergence of a class based society has to a very large extent occurred in Madampe (eclipsing, in many contexts, caste), kinship has not been replaced as the principle means of social organisation, even if its formations and moralities are deeply entwined in class structures and moralities.

Political economy and history of the Madampe Division

Briefly, since the mid 19th century the Madampe Division has been located at the centre of the island's lucrative coconut economy. This economy was established by the British colonial government and served demand in European markets. Locally, the economy supported a wide variety of derivative industries, but also required extensive land and labour investment (de Silva 2005: 366). As such, less profitable paddy fields were drained and given over to coconut cultivation, villages were hemmed-in by expanding coconut estates, and labour shortages attracted inward migration to the area. The end result was over-population, landlessness amongst migrant and poorer local families, and a shortfall in the production of the staple, rice.[4] In response, the government implemented a land resettlement and development programme aimed at easing the effects of the coconut economy.[5] In 1935 this movement reached a zenith with the Land Development Ordinance (LDO). The LDO aimed to distribute habitable and cultivatable plots of land to land-poor and landless families in order to re-house families in over-crowded villages, incoming families, and kick-start food production. In the Madampe Division most LDO 'colonies' were located upon coconut estates. Applicants were chosen by raffle and successful individuals (in most cases males but also some females) allocated a plot of land between half- and one-acre squared. Colonists paid a nominal annual rent but were under contract to build a house, dig a well, and begin cultivation. They were also expected to tend coconut trees on their land.

One final and significant clause of the LDO was to limit succession on plots to one named descendent, usually the oldest child. Policy-makers had noted that land pressures were

---

[4] See Administration Report of the Ceylon Government [AR] 1884: S1, 95A; AR-1956: A228; Department of Census and Statistics n.d.; de Silva 2005.

[5] See AR-1947: S1, P7; AR-1951: S1, JJ3; de Silva 2005.

especially intense within villages due to the practice of equal land inheritance at least between sons, and sometimes daughters as well. The consequence had been a fragmentation of land across successive generations to the point that holdings had become unworkable and uninhabitable. In Madampe, at any rate, this policy proved unworkable and notes were subsequently attached to LDO contracts granting dispersal to multiple successors.

The Madampe Division today is characterised by two kinds of 'village' community (gama): those that pre-existed the LDO and those established under the LDO. Alutwatta is an LDO colony that was colonised from the 1950s and Udagama is a pre-existing village with a self-conscious purana (ancient) identity (c.f. Hettige 1984). Reflecting their different histories the socio-economic status of each community is somewhat different, with Udagama populated by members of high-caste *goyigama* (cultivators) and a sizeable middle-class minority. Alutwatta is mixed high- and middle-caste and mostly formal/informal working and day-labour class.

It is, however, the system of land holding and inheritance that has greatest importance for the practice of kinship within each community. At Alutwatta land is (relatively speaking) 'in abundance,' and even amongst third generation colonists most sons and daughters assume they will be able to inherit a parcel of land whereupon they can build a house, and/or start some kind of business venture. Moreover, Alutwatta people can use land as a dowry in order to arrange marriages for their daughters with financially wealthy but land poor individuals. At Udagama, by contrast, land is scarce. Udagama is precisely one of those villages that was over-populated and hemmed-in by the coconut estates, with individual landholdings becoming defunct as places of residence or business. As such, Udagama people are far less likely to view what little land they may have or stand to inherit as a basis for a secure future, and tend to seek success through education and employment.

The differential status of land as an asset at Alutwatta and Udagama shines through onto how people within each community perceive kinship and its inevitability or evitability. At both Alutwatta and Udagama it is never the case that gē always assume they can, let alone will, associate with bilateral kin. At Alutwatta this may be the result of the colonisation process, which alienated individuals from natal villages and thrust them into a community of unrelated gē, for whom all external relationships were, to begin with at least, evitable. At Udagama this is almost certainly the result of landlessness and engagement within a labour economy in which ideologies of meritocracy are becoming increasingly important and kin dependencies less so.

The Madampe *paramparā*

In any case, the starting point for most people when thinking about kinship is the patrilineal *paramparā,* formed by clusters of gē that share the same *vāsagama* (patronymic). The formal translation of the term paramparā is 'ancestor,' and it is significant that in Madampe this term is also used to identify specific living relatives. The term stresses the lineal nature of kin identity, as opposed to the bilateral Kandyan 'variga' (c.f. Gamburd 1979: 162; Obeyesekere 1967: 262–66, 1984: 409–10). Yet with that said, beyond the vāsagama line paramparā may also seek to incorporate massinā and māmā.

Only gē of equal material and social status refer to themselves as paramparā and so benefit from the forms of support they offer. But at the same time, paramparā are highly informal groupings that exist only so long as individual members are happy to exist in relationships of reciprocity with one another. Other relatives may compete for relationships over the same gē and, because resources are not unlimited, gē must decide with whom they wish to associate and who they will ignore.

The complexities of paramparā as a system of moral relatedness are clearly illustrated by its various manifestations amongst the goyigama-caste Weerasinghe Arachchilage vāsagama at Udagama. Due to a number of illustrious ancestors and living relatives within the Weerasinghe Arachchilage line, Weerasinghe Arachchilage people tend to think of themselves as rather superior to other Udagama people, including other goyigama, and in this sense identify themselves as forming a single paramparā. But at this level of discourse, 'the Weerasinghe Arachchilage paramparā' is an ideological description only, and it is far from the case that all Weerasinghe Arachchilage people associate or cooperate or form an 'effective' paramparā (c.f. Leach's [1961] description of the effective pavula and sub-caste at Pul Eliya). Despite their ideology of shared ancestry, Weerasinghe Arachchilage people do not associate on equal grounds and large socio-economic differences exist between them. In fact, at least two quasi-effective Weerasinghe Arachchilage paramparā exist in Udagama. The two paramparā have been created by unequal claims to the Weerasinghe Arachchilage vāsagama itself, alongside differential levels of ownership of Udagama lands, occupational wealth, and positions within local government.

All Weerasinghe Arachchilage people resident at Udagama are descended from two male cross cousins: Dingiri Banda and Tikiri Banda, who lived at the beginning of the 20th century. Only Dingiri Banda was Weerasinghe Arachchilage by agnatic descent, while Tikiri Banda was a sister's son who was adopted 'back into' the Udagama Weerasinghe Arachchilage by the mother's brother. As an adopted child, Tikiri Banda apparently received a smaller inheritance of Udagama land than Dingiri Banda, and the respective children and grandchildren of these men have been unfriendly ever since. While the descendants of Dingiri Banda inherited ample lands, the ancestors of Tikiri Banda have been forced to squabble over his more limited share. As a

result, two distinct patrilineages emerged and these have never intermarried and never cooperated.

Even at this level the paramparā is an ideological description only. Amongst Tikiri Banda's sons and daughters, continued disputes over land have meant that individual gē do not recognise each other as kin in any practical sense. Tikiri Banda's three sons—Appuhami, Mudalihami and Gamini—were for several decades locked into violent battles over an acre of their father's land that allegedly resulted in two attempts on Mudalihami's life and a final deadly sorcery attack in the summer of 2004. Mudalihami's wife and children accused Appuhami and Gamini of sponsoring the attack, an allegation that seemed for many Udagama people to have some truth when neither brother attended Mudalihami's funeral. Due to Mudalihami's poverty and the relative wealth of his wife's brothers, Mudalihami had been unable to create more than the simplest association with his massinā. As a consequence, Mudalihami's gē was 'nucleated' to an extreme degree. Reflecting upon this, Ranil, his son, complained: 'I know that I cannot depend upon my relatives for anything. I have to do things on my own.'

At Alutwatta a similar emphasis is placed upon patrilineal and patrilateral aspects of kinship. While the Udagama Weerasinghe Arachchilage share deep ancestral roots that have fragmented into separate socio-economic lineages in the present, the colonisation process of Alutwatta meant that almost all gē in the community were originally unrelated to all the others. Only over the past few generations have locally-based paramparā been able to form, as the sons and daughters of Alutwatta gē started to marry. Two goyigama Buddhist lineages in particular, the Ramanayake Gamage and the Liyanage Don, have exchanged children. In fact, the pattern has been for Ramanayake Gamage men to marry Liyanage Don women. The result has been the expansion of Alutwatta plots within the Ramanayake Gamage lineage from one at time of

colonisation to more than ten today. As a result, all gē of Ramanayake Gamage people are of similar socio-economic standing and together with their Liyanage Don massinā say they form a single paramparā—a claim borne out in practice through their marriages to each other over successive generations and cooperation on economic and political matters in the colony. Ironically, then, paramparā at 'modern' Alutwatta resemble much more strongly bilateral kin groups similar to the 'traditional' Kandyan variga than paramparā at purana (ancient) Udagama.

The gē and gendered division of domestic labour

Returning to the gē, these material and kinship differences form different kinds of family structure that can be defined as 'nuclear' and 'extended' respectively. The gē of traditional middle class Udagama more strongly resemble the nuclear type than the gē of modern working class Alutwatta, which strongly resemble the extended type. As implied by the discussion concerning paramparā, this means that Udagama gē tend to be more inward looking and 'self-reliant' while Alutwatta gē are more outward looking and can rely on relatives for support. Either state can be a blessing and a curse. To be able to depend on other gē during times of economic, social, and emotional turmoil is certainly useful, but, in a context where ideals of the inevitability of kinship cannot be taken for granted, there often comes a time when what is given must be repaid, which may of course be no straightforward matter.

Udagama gē suffer from not being able to so readily call upon relatives when times are hard but equally benefit by not having to divert resources to kin when they are in need. As a family unit, Udagama gē are ordered on the premise that men and unmarried women of working age must support the unit financially, while wives with children remain at home and invest their time and resources in child rearing. This division of domestic labour results in the creation of

highly gendered roles and responsibilities; these ascribe 'public facing' duties to men and 'inward facing' roles to women. Men's public facing roles include engagement in the labour market and the creation and maintenance of networks of colleagues and friends that will support his career opportunities through relationships of patronage and mutual support—that is, the development of evitable relationships for the support of inevitable ones. A middle class primary school teacher, Bandara, summed up the overriding patriarchal view of the Udagama gē especially well. For Bandara, the gē functioned like a machine, with each person in the family unit ascribed a clearly defined role according to their age and gender. While people remained in and respected those roles, Bandara told me, the gē functioned successfully. Problems arose when those roles were changed or abandoned.

Alutwatta gē, meanwhile, benefit from being able to call upon gē within Alutwatta for forms of support but suffer as a result of having to reciprocate when asked to do so. As a family unit, all members are expected to engage in economic activities, including after marriage. Women's domestic role, while still carried out solely by them, does not define their status in totality, and their labouring role is seen as being crucial for the economic success of gē. In this way, Alutwatta men and women of all ages hold public facing roles, and to some extent are responsible for the creation and maintenance of relationships outside the gē, for example with massinā and māmā. Reflecting this, the dominant patriarchal view of gē in Alutwatta is loser, allowing more flexibility in the gendering of public-facing roles and responsibilities than Bandara's 'machine' comparison. As such, if the primary social unit of Udagama was the nuclear unit, in Alutwatta it was the extended unit.

To recap, then, forms of moral relatedness in Madampe are built upon historical and contemporary economic forces that have manifested different class and kinship systems across

the area. Madampe people resident in traditional purana villages may ascribe more fully to the notion that only gē relationships imply duty and obligation while paramparā relationships do not. Those who are resident in estates may extend the notion of inevitability further, to encompass extended kin relationships. Meanwhile, within the gē these beliefs and practices manifest in the division of domestic labour and gender norms, with clearly defined economic roles within purana families but a greater sharing of economic responsibilities within estate families.

IV

Structures, experiential qualities, and suicide in practice

In the final section of this paper I will present three case studies drawn from each community that best capture these structural and moral issues and experiential qualities. While I do not wish to argue they are 'representative' of Udagama or Alutwatta kinds of suicide respectively, they do, I think, provide a feeling for the kinds of fractures and fissures that are most likely to be found in traditional, middle class, purana villages and modern, working class, estates by virtue of the emphasis placed on nuclear and extended forms of kinship and morality in each. The first case involves suicide in the context of the breakdown of Udagama gē, the second involves suicide in the context of failures between Alutwatta massinā, and the third case draws together the emerging themes to illustrate more broadly the fractures and fissures of kinship when families stretch across both purana and estate villages. A common theme between the cases too is the phenomenon of international labour migration. At the Chilaw Mental Health Clinic, migration was associated with suicidal behaviour amongst 11.2 per cent of male and 8.8 per cent of female self-harm patients; the level of migration from the Puttalam District was, by contrast,

just 5.1 per cent. While I discuss the relationship between suicide and migration in greater detail elsewhere (Widger 2009), the significant issue here is the incredible challenge that migration is seen to pose (and arguably does pose: Gamburd 2000, 2008) to all kinds of kinship morality, be it nucleated or extended. Migration not only brings large sums of money into families that extended kin such as massinā, traditionally anyway, may lay claims to, but also upsets the gendered division of labour so that women take on men's roles as wage earner while men or other kin are required to take on child caring roles.

Suicide in a puran□a   village: The break-up of gē

I have argued that Udagama kinship is nucleated, with an emphasis placed on the family unit and a gendered division of domestic labour. The implication is that while the extended kin relationships of paramparā are assumed to be evitable, the gē is assumed to be inevitable. Reflecting this, Udagama people pay a great deal of attention to the moral order and conduct of the gē, which in practice leads to a high level of debate concerning its proper workings, and dispute over what that means in practice. Many kinds of suicidal behaviours that arise amongst husbands and wives, parents and children, and between siblings, can be traced back to negotiations over kin status, duty and expectation.

This concern with the functionality and morality of the gē is so strong, in fact, that for Udagama people the causes of suicidal behaviour are always traced back to it. While for me the questions that surfaced following a suicide case in the village were always more of the causal type (why did she do it? What problems in life did he have?), my informants were apparently more interested in questions of the moral type (who can be blamed? Who can be held to account?). This difference played out especially clearly early on during my field work in

Udagama, when a twenty-one year old man called Ravi died by drowning. Ravi had gone swimming in a fast moving river after drinking alcohol and smoking ganja, and had been washed away. According to accounts provided by four of Ravi's friends who were present at the time, he took a drag from a cigarette, said 'that was my last,' and jumped in the water. He resurfaced downstream, caught up against a tree branch, by which time he was dead.

Following the incident my first reaction was to ask causal questions of the kind mentioned above. For many Udagama people, on the other hand, the real interest was in how Ravi's death could be fit into a moral story about the gē, and in this case the confusion of divisions of domestic labour as a consequence of female labour migration. At Ravi's funeral, all that mourners seemed to talk about was *why* he had died; *how* he died through suicide was not mentioned at all. The most popular explanation that I heard blamed his mother and went something like this:

> Ravi came from a broken home. His mother has worked as a housemaid in Saudi Arabia for the past five years, and some people say she has a second husband there. In fact, some people say she once brought him back to visit Sri Lanka. As a consequence, Ravi's father was heart-broken and left Udagama and his family to marry again at Anuradhapura. Together with his younger sister, Ravi went to live with his māmā. With his mother absent, Ravi lacked the love and care that would guide him along the correct path in life. He became involved in drink and drugs, and did other dangerous things that eventually cost him his life. If his mother had not been so greedy, if she had love in her heart instead of only wanting money, then he would still be alive today.

The assumption was that Ravi died because his family had fallen apart after his mother, the figure keeping families together, had migrated. The father who eloped and the māmā who fostered the children were absolved of all responsibility. When I asked people if these men, and particularly the father, were in some way implicated in the death, they said no. If any other party was to blame it was the father's second wife: she should have thought about his first wife and family before stealing him away!

In this way, then, Ravi's suicide, like so many in Udagama, was interpreted in terms of the inevitability of the gē and the evitability of extended kin relationships, in this case the mother's brother. Even though the māmā had actually assumed a guardian role, in the eyes of Udagama people his mother was ultimately the person responsible, for she held child caring duties all by herself.

Suicide in a modern colony: Failure of massinā

Alutwatta kinship encompasses more fully extended kin relationships, and especially those of massinā. People in Madampe talk about massinā relationships as if they were defined by absolute morality and also equality; in practice, however, and as Bloch (1973) and Stirrat (1975, 1982) also noted, relationships between true massinā are defined by inequality. Marriages are never, or are at least very rarely, between equals. Some extent of caste and class hypergamy is always assumed to exist, if only by virtue of the unequal relationship between 'wife receivers' and 'wife givers.' But these status differentials are also complicated by the on-going duty of care that is supposed to be shown by brothers to married sisters.

On the one hand, and resembling 'true' hypergamy, sisters' husbands are perceived as being of higher status than wives' brothers. But on the other hand, sisters' husbands not only owe

a duty of care to their wives, but also a duty of respect to their wives' brothers. In this way, the deference typically shown by wife givers to wife receivers is reversed, and the structural logic of hypergamy breaks down. This duty comes in several forms, the most important of which involves providing economic, social, and political support. Under such circumstances, disputes may arise between massinā if the higher-status sisters' husband does not provide for their lower-status wives' brothers.

In the following case, a higher-status massinā swallows poison following a dispute with his wife's brother. Pradeep was a forty-two year-old Sinhala Buddhist man, living in Alutwatta. He had worked in Italy for several years in a menial job, but had been able to save a substantial amount of money. While abroad Pradeep claims that he began to drink heavily as a way of dealing with his feelings of loneliness and isolation. However, upon returning to Alutwatta, Pradeep did not reduce his drinking and in time came to argue with his wife about the problem and in particular the drain on household resources that it represented. Around nine months later Pradeep presented at CMHC following an act of self-harm whilst intoxicated. Pradeep explained to the clinician that the act had been precipitated by an argument with his massinā (wife's brother), concerning his 'excessive spending' on alcohol.

In this case, it seems that Pradeep's dispute with his massinā arose following the transgression of two sets of moral expectation. In the first, Pradeep was obliged to care for his wife in such a way as to please his massinā, her brothers, who after marriage retain a duty of care, and also material interests. Under traditional Sinhala marriage law, a woman retains title of all the property that she brings to a marriage; upon separation or divorce, this is returned to her family in total. In practice, this customary foundation for the marriage contract often manifests in the contemporary period as a continued and legitimate interference in the lives of married

daughters and sisters by parents and brothers, often to the annoyance of husbands and affines. Moreover, Pradeep, as the higher-status wife receiver, no doubt regarded himself as occupying the superior position vis-à-vis his wife's brothers, who in his mind should have submitted to him.

Secondly, and as an extension of this, sisters' husbands are expected, whenever possible, to help support wives' brothers. Pradeep had migrated and returned to Sri Lanka as a wealthy man. Under such circumstances, his massinā would expect Pradeep to share the wealth, as it were, with them. Pradeep's tendency to fritter his money away on alcohol and other lavishes not only risked his massinā's sister's future wellbeing, but also their own. Pradeep was a wealthy man who viewed his massinā as poor and therefore ineffective relatives; the massinā, by contrast, wished to stake their claim to Pradeep's wealth. Pradeep's act of self-harm arose in the context of disputes over whether or not their relationship implied moral qualities; whether it was evitable or inevitable.

Between Udagama and Alutwatta:

Living different kinds of kinship in Madampe

The final case study reported here did not actually lead to an act of suicidal behaviour, but is included for its particularly graphic illumination of the kinds of disputes that often did. It is also interesting because it involves an extended family living between Udagama and Alutwatta, and how the implications of those different backgrounds come together in conflict over kin duty and expectation.

Buddhika was born into a goyigama-caste, middle-class Udagama family, related by marriage to the Weerasinghe Arachchilage paramparā. Given the only ideological significance of

that relationship, Buddhika did not, like other Udagama people, expect to depend upon kin patronage in life, but instead his own 'hard work.' After finishing school with three A-Levels, Buddhika migrated illegally to work in Singapore, where he stayed for two years. During that time he saved around ` 50,000 (roughly £ 2,500), which he sent home to his brother for safe keeping. Buddhika claimed that he sent the money home for fear of it being confiscated had he been caught by Singaporean immigration authorities. In fact, towards the end of his two year stay Buddhika was arrested and detained for several months, before being returned to Sri Lanka.

Upon returning home, Buddhika discovered that his brother had spent the money he had earned, and also sold their parents house and lands. Penniless, Buddhika migrated abroad again, this time legally, to the Maldives. There he stayed for another two years and saved twice what he had managed in Singapore, which he kept in a local bank account. His contract coming to an end, Buddhika returned to Sri Lanka and befriended the employment agent who had arranged his work visa. The agent offered him a job as a recruiter, and Buddhika returned to Udagama to begin business.

Alienated from his family, Buddhika invested his savings in his work. He used money earned abroad to finance loans for women who sought to migrate abroad gain the proper paper work and pay for flights. After two more years, at the age of twenty-nine, Buddhika had earned enough money to buy land and build a house. He arranged a marriage with a goyigama Catholic woman, Namali, from Negombo, and the following year she gave birth to boy-girl twins.

Namali had three sisters, two of whom were older than her and were already married. One couple lived with their children at Alutwatta, while another lived at another colony in the Madampe Division settled during the 1970s. The third sister was younger and married in 2005. Although Namali had no brothers of her own, her sisters' husbands fell into a classificatory

sibling relationship. However, Buddhika referred to them as his massinā, as they likewise referred to him. In line with the presumed hypergamy of his marriage, Buddhika considered all three massinā—the 'wife givers'—to be of a lower status, in this case in class terms (like many Madampe people, Buddhika did not indicate much interest in caste status). On the other hand, the two older massinā assumed a higher status than Buddhika by virtue of age seniority, but also by virtue of the fact that as their wives' sister's husband, Buddhika was from their point of view the inferior wife-giver.

Buddhika claimed the contradiction confounded his dealings with his massinā, and also his wider business pursuits. On the one hand, Buddhika's massinā expected him to help them financially and socially, and asked him to make use of the wide range of contacts in local government and police that he had built, to aide their own ventures. In this way, the Alutwatta 'penchant for bilaterality' came up against the Udagama 'penchant for patriliny.' It pressed home a customary commitment to massinā that Buddhika understood, but was in contradiction with the material reality of his own life and expectations. This was not just a matter of kin morality, but also of capital, in Bourdieu's sense. Buddhika moved in quite a different economic and social world to that of his massinā, and the favours that he required to do business were beyond the capacity of them to provide. Indeed, as a result of his lower-status massinā, Buddhika claimed to be lacking opportunities that men with more prestigious relatives enjoyed. Often he told me: '[My massinā] are not educated, you have met them— they are masons. They are not intelligent. How can I rely on them for anything?'

Thus, most men in Madampe recognise the ideological commitments of massinā (in customary terms, and as an aspect of 'culture,' *sanskrutiya*), but only some can or will act in recognition of them. Massinā find themselves in different occupations to each other and as such

with different needs and expectations. While residents of purana villages such as Udagama may also have given up on the prospect of land inheritance and thus the importance of bilaterality and cross-cousin marriage, men in LDO colonies such as Alutwatta may be more sensitive to such traditional concerns. By the nature of Udagama kinship Buddhika was constrained from the beginning in terms of the kinship network from which he could draw. For example, his 'other massinā'—male cross-cousins—were unreservedly uninterested in cooperating with him (although as likewise was he with them). But after marriage Buddhika found that his wife's classificatory brothers were not only unhelpful, but expectant that he should help them.

V

Conclusion

Patterns of suicidal behaviour in Madampe map onto the kinship system. Within this, relationships that are considered to be long term and defined by a morality of altruism are especially related to acts of self-harm and suicide, when the supposed inevitability of such relationships fails. Within the gē, and despite the obvious great variety in practice, morality and inequality exist at extreme degrees. But outside the gē, only very few relationships are *a priori*, at least customarily speaking, assumed to be so defined. One of these is the massinā relationship. Yet in practice the morality of this relationship is frequently put to the test, and challenges those men who find themselves exposed to an ambiguous massinā relationship. It is in relation to this 'stretching' of kinship morality, and its perceived inevitability, that the higher rate of suicidal behaviour associated with disputes between men and their wives' brothers can be explained. At the same time, the relationship between kin morality and suicidal behaviour helps us to

understand the concentration of self-harm and self-inflicted death within that most inevitable institution: the gē itself.

Resting behind all this, and as shown during my discussion of economic and social change in the Madampe Division, is a question concerning the breakdown of the traditional social order. In Madampe, and Sri Lanka more generally, there exists a popular set of beliefs that the high suicide rate can be directly related to social change and decay (Widger 2009: chap. 4). Yet as I have shown, contemporary kin and community formations cannot be said in any way to have disintegrated, as several anthropologists have tried to argue (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 67-69; Morrison, Moore and Ishak Lebbe 1979; Sarkar and Tambiah 1979). In all communities, kinship structures have certainly transformed, and only in certain ways resemble the 'ideal' Kandyan type. Nevertheless, and ironically, in Madampe's modern colonies kinship appears to be wider and stronger than in purana Udagama. *Contra* Durkheim (1951), it is not necessarily 'too little' or 'too much' family interaction and integration that causes suicidal behaviour, but rather the qualitative expectations of individuals in relation to their past experiences of what relatives may or may not be expected to do, and how they might legitimately interfere with or ignore one's own existence.

By drawing linkages between patterns of suicidal behaviour and patterns of kinship ideology and practice, I hope to have suggested a route by which social anthropology might not only be able to make a unique contribution to the field of 'suicidology' but also approach a comparative study of suicide itself. Across the globe, the 'precipitating causes' of self-harm and self-inflicted death appear to be largely predictable: love problems, money worries, marital strife, fear, guilt, shame, sorrow, and all the rest. So too are the 'macro-level' forces—economic growth and depression, political revolution, social change—that frame such problems. But what seems

to be different across time and space is how suicidal behaviour comes to be considered of functional use within close relational contexts—when suicide becomes a legitimate option to those common human problems—in the face of certain kinds of social relationships and their particular moral statuses. In this way, the ethnographic analysis of suicidal behaviour calls for a detailed attention to local structures of political economy and interpersonal power: that is to say, systems of kinship and relatedness. It is from this starting point, I suggest, that a comparative study of suicide threats, acts of self-harm, and the self-inflicted death might begin.
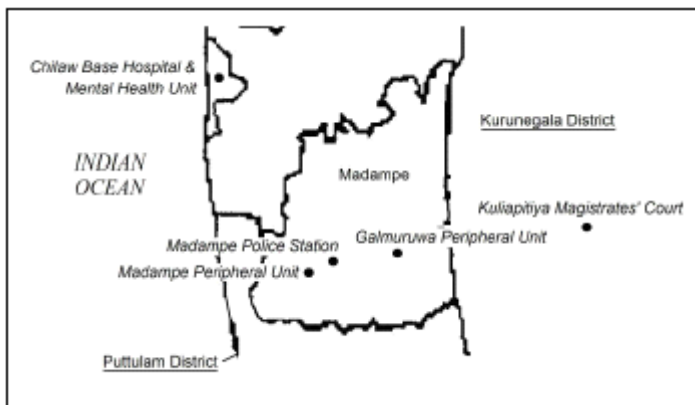
Figure 1. Locations of research populations in Madampe Division and surrounding area

Population	Period under review	Self-harm	Self-inflicted death
GPU	July 2001 –June 2006	270	-
CMHC	Jan. 2005 –June 2006	330	-
MPS	Jan. 2001 –June 2006	-	61
KMC	2003 – 05, incomplete	-	68
Total		**600**	**129**

Table 1. Time period under review and total number of cases recorded at GPU, CMHC, MPS, and KMC
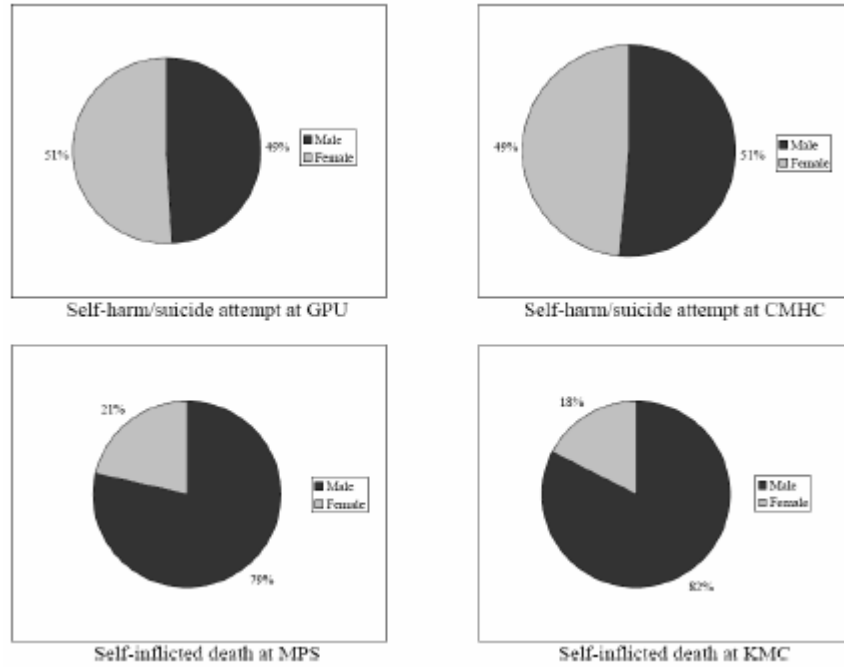
Figure 2. Sex of populations at GPU, CMHC, MPS, and KMC
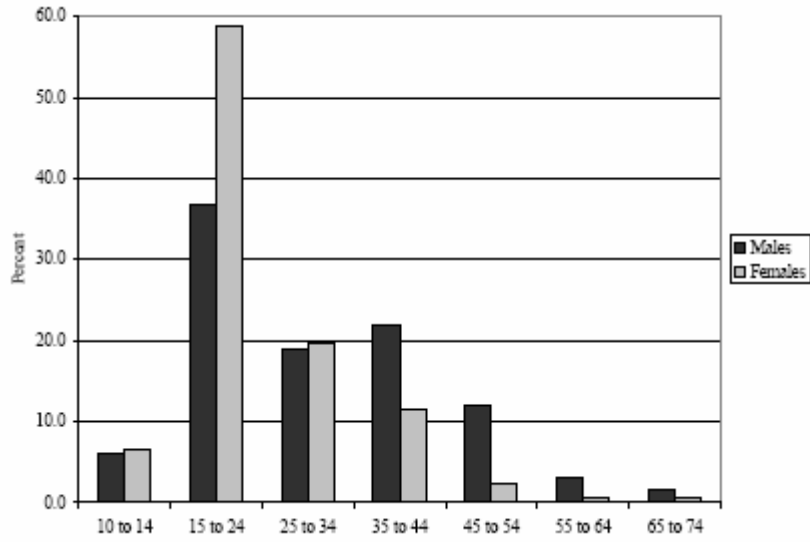
Figure 3. *GPU* – Gender and age of self-harm/suicide attempt patients
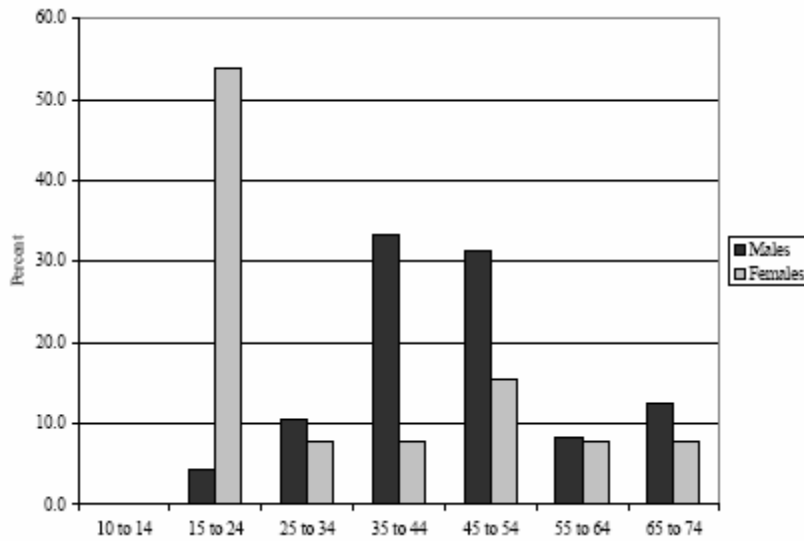
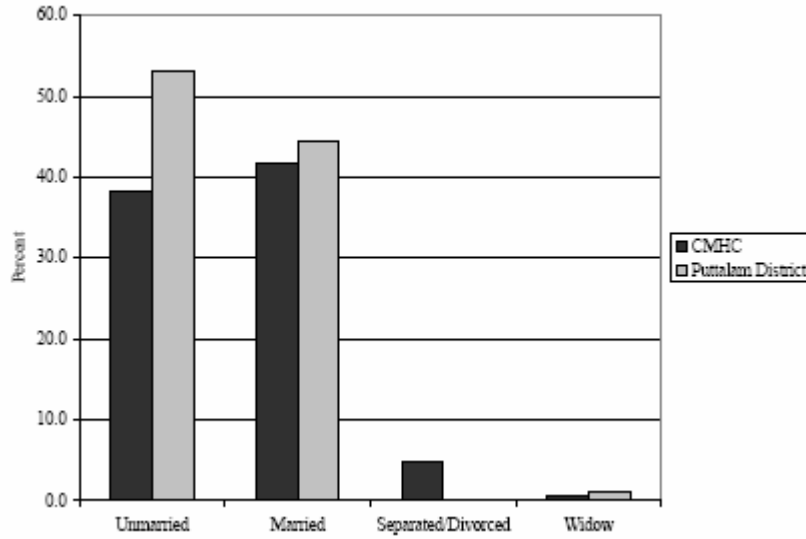Figure 4. *MPS* – Gender and age of self-inflicted deaths

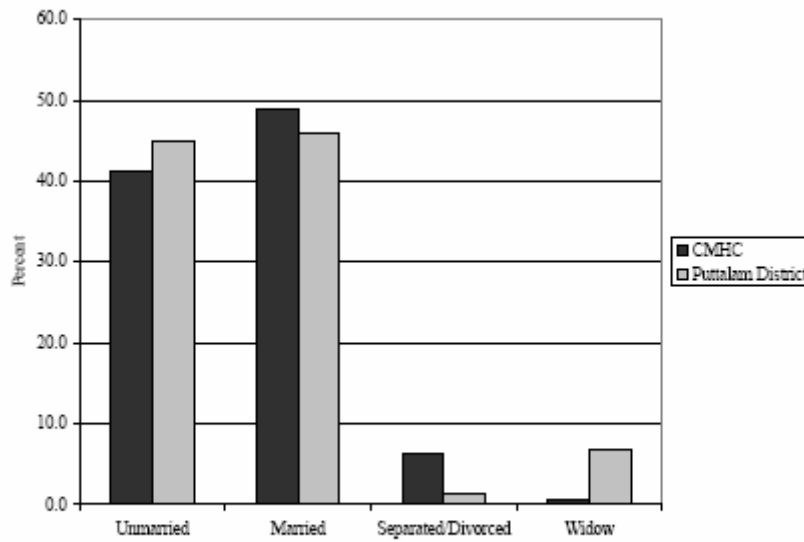Figure 5. *CMHC males* – Sex and marital status
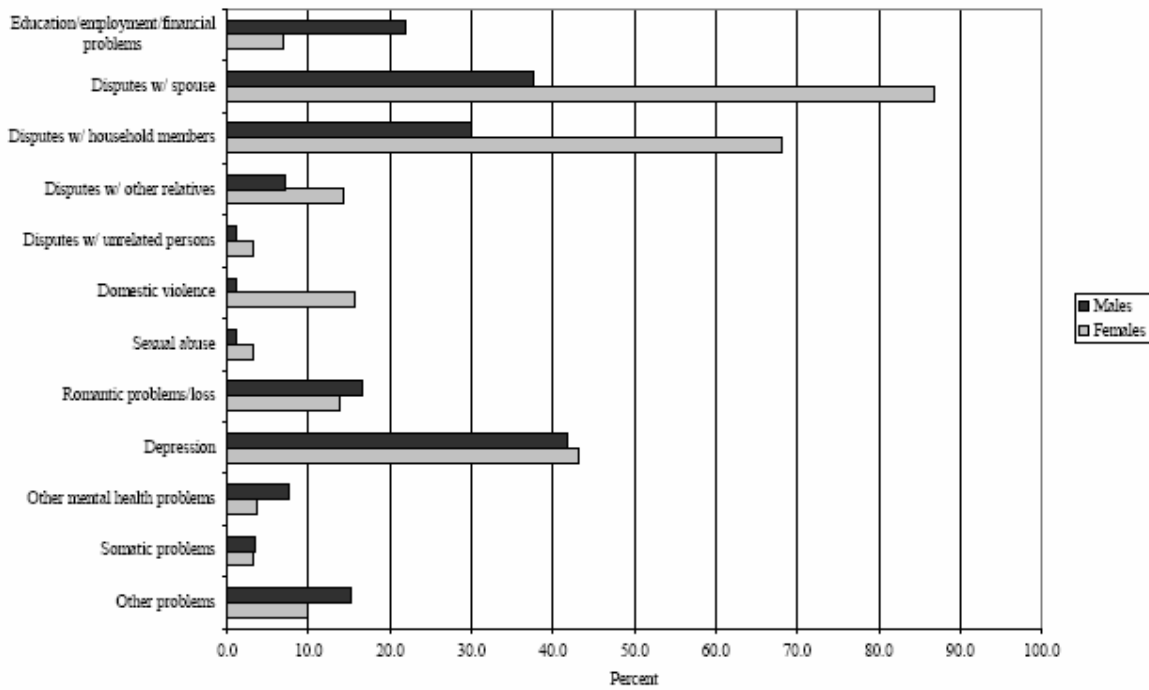
Figure 6. *CMHC females* – Sex and marital status

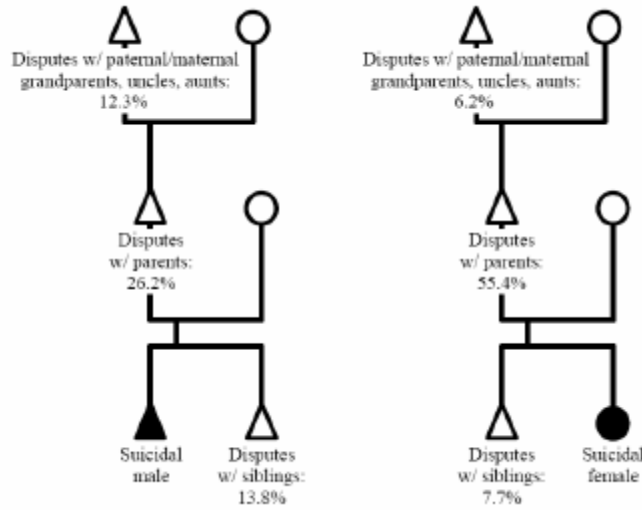Figure 7. *CMHC* – Twelve grouped reported and elicited "causes" in self-harm (depicted as percentage of patients)

Figure 8. Relational context of self-harm amongst unmarried males and females.

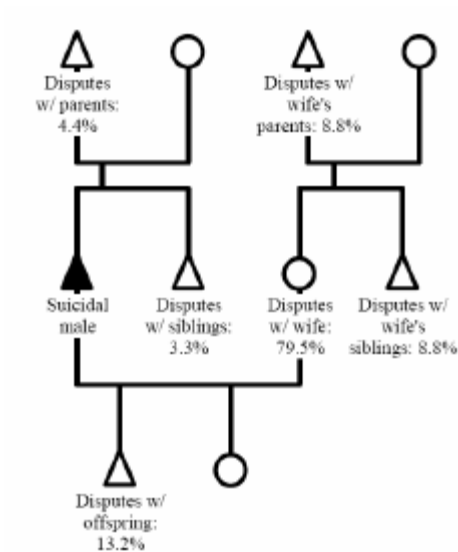Percentages do not sum to 100 percent as problems not related to kinship excluded

Figure 9. Relational context of self-harm committed by married men. Percentages do not sum to 100 percent as
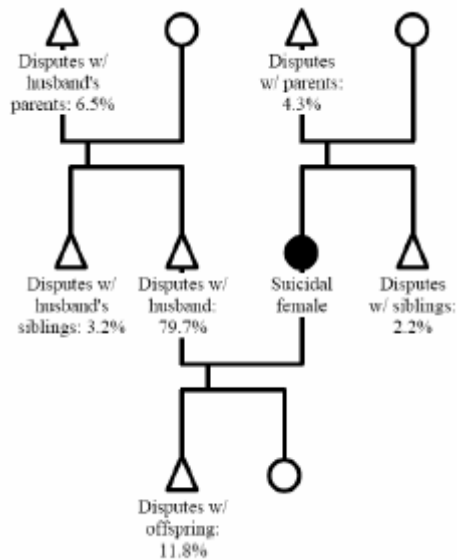
problems not related to kinship excluded

Figure 10. Relational context of self-harm committed by married females. Percentages do not

sum to 100 percent as problems not related to kinship excluded

Acknowledgements

REFERENCES

Bloch, Maurice. 1973. The long-term and the short-term: The economic and political significance of the morality of kinship. In *The character of kinship*, ed., Jack Goody, 75–87. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, Michael F. 1986. Power, gender and the social meaning of Aguaruna suicide. *Man* (N.S.) 21 (2)**:** 311–28.

Counts, Dorothy A. 1980. Fighting back is not the way: Suicide and the women of Kaliai. *American Ethnologist* 7 (2)**:** 332–51.

De Silva, K. M. 2005. *A History of Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications.

Durkheim, Emile. 1951 [1897]. *Suicide. A study in Sociology*. Spauding, J. A. & G. Simpson (trans.). London: Routledge.

Eddleston, Michael., M. H.Rezvi Sheriff and Keith. Hawton. 1998. Deliberate self-harm in Sri Lanka: An overlooked tragedy in the developing world. *British Medical Journal* 317: 133–35.

Eddleston, Michael and Michael R. Phillips. 2004. Self poisoning with pesticides. *British Medical Journal* 328: 42–44.

Firth, Raymond. 1951. *Elements of social organization* London: Watts

_____ 2000 [1961]. Suicide and risk-taking in Tikopia society. In *Cultural Psychiatry & Medical Anthropology,* eds, Roland Littlewood and Simon Dein, 314–38. London: The Athlone Press.

Fortes, Meyer. 1969. *Kinship and the social order. The legacy of Lewis Henry Morgan*. London: Routledge & Keagan Paul.

_____ 1978. An anthropologist's apprenticeship. *Annual Review of Anthropology* **7:** 1–30

_____ 1983. Rules and the emergence of society. Occasional Paper no. 39. London: Royal Anthropological Institute.

Giddens, Anthony. 1964. Suicide, attempted suicide, and the suicidal threat. *Man* 64 (Jul–Aug.): 115–16.

Gamburd, Geraldine. 1979. Rites of passage and kinship ties. In *Modern Sri Lanka: A Society in Transition*, eds, Tissa Fernando and Robert N. Kearney, 155–64. Syracuse: Syracuse University.

Gamburd, Michelle R. 2000. *The kitchen spoon's handle. Transnationalism and Sri Lanka's migrant housemaids*. London: Cornell University Press.

——— 2008. Milk teeth and Jet planes. Kin relations in families of Sri Lanka's transnational domestic servants. *City & Society* 20 (1): 5–31.

Gombrich, Richard F. and Gananath Obeyesekere. 1988. *Buddhism transformed. Religious change in Sri Lanka*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hettige, S. T. 1984. *Wealth, power and prestige. Emerging patterns of social inequality in a peasant context*. Colombo: Ministry of Higher Education.

Kearney, Robert N. and Barbara D. Miller. 1985. The spiral of suicide and social change in Sri Lanka. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 45 (1): 81–101.

Leach, Edmund R. 1961. *Pul Eliya. A village in Ceylon.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Littlewood, Roland. 2002. *Pathologies of the West. An anthropology of mental illness in Europe and America.* New York: Cornell University Press.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1949 [1926]. *Crime and custom in savage society*. London: Routledge & Keagan Paul.

Marecek, Jeanne. 1998. Culture, gender and suicidal behaviour in Sri Lanka. *Suicide & Life Threatening Behaviour* 28 (1): 69–81.

Morrison, Barrie M., M.P. Moore and M. U. Ishak Lebbe. 1979. *The disintegrating village: Social change in rural Sri Lanka.* Colombo: Lake House Investments.

Obeyesekere, Gananath. 1967. *Land tenure in village Ceylon. A sociological and historical study.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

—— 1981. *Medusa's hair. An essay on personal symbols and religious experience*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

_____.1984. *The cult of the goddess Pattini.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Robinson, Marguerite S. 1968. Some observations on the Kandyan Sinhalese kinship system. *Man* (N.S) 3 (3): 402–23.

Sahlins, Marshall D. 1965. On the sociology of primitive exchange. In *The relevance of models for social anthropology*, ed., Michael Banton, 139–86. Routledge: London.

Sarkar, N. K. and Stanley J. Tambiah. 1979. *The disintegrating village. Report of a socio-economic survey conducted by the University of Ceylon*. University of Sri Lanka: Colombo Campus.

Spencer, Jonathan. 1990a. Collective violence and everyday practice in Sri Lanka. *Modern Asian Studies* 24 (3): 603–23.

_____ 1990b. *A Sinhala village in a time of trouble: Politics and change in rural Sri Lanka.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Stirrat, Roderick L. 1975. Compadrazago in Catholic Sri Lanka. *Man* (N.S.) 10: 589-606

_____ 1977. Dravidian and non-Dravidian kinship terminologies in Sri Lanka. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 11(2): 271–93

_____ 1982. Caste conundrums: Views of caste in a Sinhalese Catholic fishing village. In *Caste Ideology and Interaction*, (ed.) Dennis B. McGilvray, 8-33. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Tambiah, Staneley J. 1965. Kinship fact and fiction in relation to the Kandyan Sinhalese. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 95 (2):131–73.

Widger, Tom. 2009. Self-harm and self-inflicted death in Sri Lanka: An ethnographic study. PhD Thesis: London School of Economics.

Wood, Anthony L. 1961. *Crime and aggression in changing Ceylon. A sociological analysis of homicide, suicide, and economic crime*. Philadelphia: Transactions of the American Philosophical Society (N.S.) 51 (8): 1-132.

Yalman, Nur 1967. *Under the Bo tree: Studies of caste, kinship and marriage in the interior of Ceylon*. California: University of California Press