A Study on Detainees: Effects of War on Health and Rights

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Abstract

The recently concluded ‘war’ in Sri Lanka has cost thousands of lives and disabled many people. A proportion of the disabled people and some able men and women are still languishing in detention centers awaiting retribution for their suspected crimes. Since most of them are “hardcore LTTE cadres”, ‘human rights’ activists keep continuous vigil on them to see whether they are maltreated. Medico-legal examinations are routinely performed on them in the following occasions, immediately after taking into custody, prior to release into the community and before and after confession.

To assess the socio-demographic details, effects of war on health and outlook on violation of rights of the detainees of war a retrospective study was carried out on 50 cases by reviewing Medico Legal documents of detainees who have been referred for medico-legal examination.

Out of 50 cases analyzed majority (98%) of the detainees were young males with mean age of 35 ½ years and from the Northern Province. Most of them had participated in war (74%) and having consequences of war related injuries. 94% of them were detained for more than 3 months in the detention camp and almost all of them didn’t declare ill treatment during their detention. There were no convicted individuals in the sample population.

There are severe effects of war injuries on detainees such as amputated extremities (4%), post traumatic epilepsy (10%) and multiple scars following shrapnel or firearm injuries (58%). They do not complain on mal treatment while in detention. However due process of trial is needed as early as possible to safeguard their rights.