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**Reanalysis of the minimum number of individuals at Bellan-bandi Palassa prehistoric site using skeletal remains**

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Bellan-bandi Palassa is a Mesolithic heritage site in Sri Lanka. Bellan-bandi Palassa fossil remains at present are being stored at the National Museum, Colombo. According to the published literature the Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI) estimated using skeletal remains excavated from Bellan-bandi Palassa open-air habitation site is controversial and it ranges from 9-25. Due to the variation in the reported MNI an attempt was made to reanalyze the MNI in the present available collection. The exact bones used by the previous researchers to estimate the MNI has not been well documented.

The MNI is best derived from the number of unpaired single bones present. Regarding skulls the MNI estimate is simply equal to the number of complete or nearly complete skulls. For paired elements MNI is generally the number of either left or right elements, depending which is the greater. In the absence of complete bones, using the bone fragments alone to identify the side of the particular bone fragment could be hard. Present collection contained mixture of fragmented bones. In this study the number of mandibles, number of long bones and atlas and axis vertebrae were used to estimate the MNI in the collection. When different bones are considered the estimated MNI value varied. With regard to mandibles it was 15, lower ends of left and right side of humerus 13, upper ends of radius 09, upper ends of left ulna 09, left femoral fragments 11, left tibial fragments 12, right fibula fragments 11 and atlas and axis vertebra 07. Thus, MNI varied from 07 to 15 in the studied fragmented bone collection. Due to highly fragmented state of the osseous remains the MNI estimated using the complete or partially complete mandibles are considered most accurate and in this Bellan-bandi Palassa fossil remains the estimated MNI is most likely 15. DNA studies are in need to derive the most accurate number.

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