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Marginalization effects on the sociocultural status of Yakkure and Henanigala indigenous groups in Sri Lanka

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Sri Lankan indigenous people (IP - Vedda people) are considered a specific group of people due to their cultural and biological uniqueness. The majority of them continued their traditional lifestyle with their valued cultural system until they were resettled by the development projects initiated during the mid-20th century. Marginalization is both a process and a condition that prevents individuals or groups from full participation in social, economic, and political life. People can be marginalized due to multiple factors; sexual orientation, gender, geography, ethnicity, religion, and displacement/resettlement. Political discrimination may marginalize some ethnic groups, migrants, or particular regions of the country. Social discrimination can impact a wide range of groups and Economic marginalization can prevent equal access to basic services, income opportunities, and access to jobs. This research was conducted specially to find out 'the way IP become a marginalized population and how the marginalization effect on their life'. Among a few of the indigenous groups that can be seen in Sri Lanka, Yakkure IP belong to Polonnaruwa district and Henanigala IP belong to Ampara district were selected for the study. Empirical data were gathered through ethnographic methods. The research was conducted from 2014 to 2019. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics review committee of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Among the above-stated factors, displacement/resettlement is identified as the major factor behind the marginalization of Yakkure and Henanigala IP. From 1963 onward these people have not considered as a separate ethnic group in the censuses. Due to the impact of the development projects, they were resettled into new villages, new occupations were introduced, and paddy lands were provided. Assimilation with other populations, and lesser cultural adaptation has transformed them into marginalized communities. Both the Yakkure and Henanigala IP now have forgotten their traditional identity and acculturated into the dominant Sinhalese. Traditional language, religious practices, and rituals are no longer performed due to their tendency towards Buddhism. However, the forced resettlement disturbed their cultural system and not being able to socialize well into the newly introduced market economy ultimately turned them into marginalized populations. Then marginalization affects every aspect of their life and caused problems such as Insufficient lands, debt burdens, land mortgage, minor marriages, alcoholism, poverty, lower levels of education, unemployment, cultural loss, and language loss. These people should consider as a living heritage and government-level policy decisions should be taken to preserve their culture as cultures cannot be restored.

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