

Role of Social Networks in Paddy Farming Communities on the Formation of Ethnic Occupational Niches: An Empirical Investigation Based on the Ampara District

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ABSTRACT. The role of social networks, which exist in the form of linkages amongst the individuals in the society and are built up particularly to strengthen friendships/kinships and/or financial exchange, towards concentration and specialization of members of a particular ethnic group working for a particular occupational activity, which is commonly referred to as an “ethnic occupational niche” (EON), is examined in this paper in the context of paddy farming sector in the Ampara district of Sri Lanka. The Model’s Concentration Index was used in the theoretical model to estimate the relative strength of EON along with the Contact Availability, the levels of knowledge and attitudes of farmers to evaluate the role of social networks on EON. Given the multi-ethnicity of the Ampara district [i.e. Muslims (44.7%); Sinhalese (35.8%); Tamil (19.5%)], a multi stage sampling procedure was employed to select the respondents (n = 60 paddy farming households) and a face-to-face in-depth interview was carried out with a support of a structured questionnaire during April to June 2010 to collect the primary data. Further, the secondary data required to specify the empirical model were obtained from the respective Agrarian Services Centers in Ampara district. The outcome of analysis, which used the Binary Logistic Regression techniques to estimate the coefficients of econometric model, shows that the formation of EON has a positive and significant association with the operations of social networks as well as the financial availability and scale of operation of the farming system and the Tamil ethnic group in the Ampara district is likely to be concentrated in activities related to paddy farming almost twice as their counterpart (i.e. Sinhalese and Muslims).

Key words: Ethnic Occupational Niche, Multi-Ethnicity, Paddy Farming Sector, Social Networks.

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