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**The Sri Lankan community of descent in the UK:**

**A neglected population in demographic and health research**

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## **Abstract**

The Sri Lankan diaspora population is substantially neglected in UK demographic and health research and not captured in census and survey ethnic group questions, though 127,242 Sri Lankan-born migrants were enumerated in England and Wales in 2011. Important intersections are reported between period of arrival of these migrants, the purpose behind their movement, and related population characteristics, with 47% having arrived during 2001-11. Between 1984-2004 around 50,000 asylum applications were made by Sri Lankan Tamils. Sri Lankan migrants generally display more favourable circumstances on key socio-economic variables than do other diaspora populations from South Asia. These include generic health status and mortality. This may be attributable to the 'healthy migrant' effect, given the community's recent migration, though application of its effect to this population requires caution as a significant proportion came to Britain as asylum-seekers (forced migration) rather than as self-selecting migrants. A more advantageous socio-economic profile may also have contributed. (151 words)

**Keywords** Sri Lankan, Tamil, migrants, 'healthy migrant' effect, health status, socio-economic position

## **Introduction**

The Sri Lankan community of descent is substantially neglected in demographic and health research in the UK. It is not captured as a pre-designated ethnic group category in the decennial census nor in official surveys, though identified as a category for which census stakeholders would like more specific information (ONS 2007). Most people of Sri Lankan

descent identified as ‘Sri Lankan’ in the 2011 England and Wales Census ‘Other Asian’ write-in category and, therefore, saw themselves as a discrete and legible ethnic group. A measure of the neglect of the group’s marginalisation is its negligible capture as a search term in the NHS Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC, now NHS Digital)’s database: ‘Indian’ retrieves 241, ‘Pakistani’ 251, and ‘Bangladeshi’ 246 items, but ‘Sri Lankan’ just 10. Sri Lankans were scarcely mentioned in the standard text on health care for Asians (McAvoy and Donaldson 1990). Yet according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS 2017), the size of the migrant population in 2016-17 was 142,000 ( $\pm$  18,000), the eighteenth largest country of birth group in the overseas-born UK population. Indeed, the migrant Sri Lankan population was over half (57%) the size of the Bangladeshi migrant group (of 247,000) - though probably less in terms of ethnic group - but generated negligible interest in the HSCIC database.

The disregard and invisibility of the Sri Lankan ethnic group, stemming from the lack of census or other reliable statistics, places it amongst several large national origin populations confined to and concealed within the residual ‘other’ write-in categories in the 2011 Census and only identifiable by country of birth: Poland (a community of 907,000 migrants in 2016-17), Romania (340,000), Germany (299,000), South Africa (245,000), Italy (220,000), Nigeria (190,000), Lithuania (190,000), France (164,000), USA (163,000), Spain (157,000), and the Philippines (143,000). This increasing diversity in the migrant and ethnic group composition of the country’s population, now labelled ‘superdiversity’ (Vertovec 2007), is challenging the utility of the census ethnic group classification and presents a dilemma for those scholars wishing to explore specific diaspora groups in the UK.

With 18 ethnic group categories in the 2011 England and Wales Census, there are clearly limits to which the census can accommodate smaller diaspora populations. Moreover, other factors may have affected the candidature of ‘Sri Lankan’, including strength of expressed

need amongst census data users, the perception that country of birth or ethnic group write-in answers may be a suitable proxy, and the fact that Sri Lankans are never the largest of minority ethnic groups in local authority areas.

Lindley and Van Hear (2007, 13) have written that ‘...there has been little research on the Sri Lanka Tamil population in the UK as a whole since the first part of the 1990s’, important contributions including Siddhisena and White (1999) and Daniel and Thangaraj (1995), and, more recently, Rutter (2015) and Jones (2015). This paper attempts to redress this lack of knowledge by providing an essentially descriptive and expository account of the demography of this largely invisible community of descent using recent census and survey data. Two key arguments are then explored: that the time period of arrival of migrants from Sri Lanka reflects the purpose behind their movement and, in turn, is itself reflected in a population with characteristics that vary according to that period of entry; that the population identified as Sri Lankan generally displays more favourable circumstances on several key variables, including health, than do other diaspora populations from South Asia.

### **Measures of the demography and characteristics of the Sri Lankan population**

Outside the Middle East, the UK and Canada have the largest Sri Lankan diasporas, though with substantial Sri Lankan Tamil asylum seeker populations in France, Germany, Switzerland, and Scandinavia. Compared with Canada, relatively little is known about the demography of the UK Sri Lankan population. In the absence of a Sri Lankan census ethnic category, other data must be exploited, including that on cultural characteristics such as country of birth, religion, national identity, and language, none identifying the complete population. These characteristics define groups which may overlap or cross-cut each other.

The specific approach outlined suggests a possible model for better describing other diaspora communities.

Country of birth is routinely collected in the census and some surveys but with few tables at country level. This drawback was addressed in the 2011 Census by ONS through the release of 'Small Population' tables (ONS 2016), by age group for 17 country of birth groups (Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Cyprus EU, France, Ghana, India, Ireland, Jamaica, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Somalia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, and Turkey). ONS estimates indicate that the migrant Sri Lankan community has an excess of females: of the 142,000 migrants in 2016-17, 67,000 ( $\pm$  12,000) were male and 75,000 ( $\pm$  13,000) female (ONS 2017). This represents a shift from parity in 2015-16 but a previous excess of males in the series since 2001. This 2016-17 estimate of Sri Lankan migrants compares with a 2011 Census count of 127,242 persons born in Sri Lanka and resident in England and Wales. The migrant population has grown rapidly since the 2001 UK Census (67,938) and the 1991 Great Britain Census (39,387), making Sri Lankans a relatively newly-settled community.

Where ethnic group (including the second generation) is uncollected (as in the case of Sri Lankans), so-called optional ethnic group, that is, the number identifying in ethnic group free-text fields, may be of utility in diaspora studies. 2011 'Small Population' tables by age group were released for 13 ethnic groups based on the write-ins (Afghan, Filipino, Greek, Greek Cypriot, Kurdish, Latin Central South American, Nepalese, Polish, Somali, Sri Lankan, Tamil, Turkish, and Turkish Cypriot) and multiple tables for each of Kashmiri, Nepalese, and Sikh ethnic write-ins, a Cornish national identity write-in, and a Ravidassia religion write-in, though generally undercounting these communities. 'Sri Lankan' ethnic group write-ins in the England and Wales 2011 Census were larger than the migrant count: 146,627 in the 'Any other Asian background', 998 in the 'Any other ethnic group', 784 in the 'Other White', 905 in the 'Other Mixed', and 193 in the 'Other Black' open response fields,

making a total of 149,507. Further, 25,018 identified in free-text as ‘Tamil’ and 1,710 as ‘Sinhalese’, raising the total to 176,235 (though some Tamils may have been of Indian descent). Clearly, ‘Sri Lankan’ was the salient or primary identity, with around only 15% declaring their Tamil or Sinhalese origins.

These ethnic data provide only a partial picture of the heterogeneity and granularity of the Sri Lankan community in Britain, Sri Lanka’s 2011 Census listing eight ethnic groups (Sinhalese, Sri Lanka Tamil, Indian Tamil, Sri Lanka Moor, Burgher, Malay, Sri Lanka Chetty, and Bharathar). The Tamil and Sinhalese origins of the 150,000 identifying only as ‘Sri Lankan’ in the England and Wales 2011 Census ethnicity question are unknown. However, several sources suggest that Tamils are likely to be the majority. ‘Tamil’ write-ins exceeded ‘Sinhalese’ by a factor of 15:1 and the extended ethnic categories in the School Census yield similar proportions. In 2005 the numbers of ‘Other Asian Background’ pupils in the 19 local authorities using extended ‘Asian Other’ codes for 90% or more of their Asian Other pupils included ‘Sri Lankan Tamil’ (n=3,762) and ‘Sri Lankan Sinhalese’ (n=311), the former prevailing by a factor of 12:1 (Department for Education and Skills 2006). However, in the birth notification dataset for 2008 to 2012, though the ethnic group of the baby was nearly always stated by the mother to be ‘Sri Lankan’ (n=2073), those identified as ‘Tamil’ (n=77) outnumbered ‘Sinhalese’ (15) by 5.1:1. Given the likely significant second generation, Rutter (2015, 159) has estimated the Sri Lankan Tamil ethnic group population alone as ‘likely to be about 200,000 persons’. Community estimates vary widely, the Tamil Information Centre’s 2007 estimate being 170,000 Sri Lankan Tamil migrants resident in the UK.

The 2011 Census also collected data on religion, main language, and national identity. With respect to religion, half (50.0%, n=63,647) Sri Lankan migrants were Hindu (largely identified with the Sri Lankan Tamil population), 22.2% Christian, 15.4% Buddhist

(n=19,591, the religion of most Sinhalese), and 6.7% Muslim (a group that is completely invisible) in the 2011 England and Wales Census. A significant minority of both Sinhalese and Tamils are Christians. Clearly, Hindus are substantially over-represented compared with religions recorded in the Sri Lanka 2011 Census (Hindu, 12.6%, Buddhist, 70.2%, Christian, 7.4%, and Muslim, 9.7%).

With respect to language, amongst ‘Other Asians’ in the 2011 England and Wales Census 74,317 residents (age 3 or over) were reported as having Tamil as their main language (the first language of the Tamil ethnic group) and 13,538 as Sinhala, a ratio of 5.5:1<sup>1</sup>. Of the 142,000 migrants estimated by ONS in 2016-17, 84,000 (±14,000) were British nationals, 48,000 (±10,000) Sri Lanka nationals (reasonably consistent with the 55,702 usual residents who gave a ‘Sri Lankan’ national identity in the England and Wales 2011 Census question), and 10,000 (±5,000) other nationalities.

### **Intersections between period of arrival of migrants, the purpose behind their movement, and related population characteristics**

Customised table data shows that of the 127,242 Sri Lankan-born migrants in England and Wales in 2011, 13.4% (17,001) arrived before 1981, 40.1% (50,969) between 1981-2000, 25.9% (32,893) between 2001-2006, and 20.7% (26,379) 2007-2011. These flows are largely explained by the Sri Lankan civil war which began in 1983 and did not conclude until 2009. While numbers of arrivals started to rise during the 1980s, they increased substantially in the 90s, with around 60,000 arriving in the first decade of the new century. Between 1984 and 2004 a total of 49,545 asylum applications were made by Sri Lankans, 30,400 over the period 1991-2001, nearly all of whom are likely to have been Tamils.

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<sup>1</sup> ONS 2011 Census, England and Wales, Table CT0517. Sex by age by ethnic group by main language.



These migration flows have been heterogeneous with respect to ethnicity (table 1), religion (table 2), and reason for migration, thereby demonstrating the ‘super-diversity’ of this population. While 88.4% of Sri Lankan migrants selected the free-text ‘Other Asian’ option, a significant proportion (2.6%) chose White British (most in the period before 1981, whose presence in Sri Lanka may have been associated with Britain’s colonial past). The third largest group was Indians (2.2%), probably Tamil Indians.

While persons of Hindu religion comprised only 23.8% of migrants arriving before 1981, this proportion increased to 63.0% for those who arrived 1981-2000 and 51.7% for 2001-2006, reflecting the flows of Sri Lankan Tamils. Buddhist migrants (reflecting Sinhalese ethnicity) ranged from 8.4% (1981-2000) to 26.1% in the most recent period (2007-2011). Muslim Sri Lankan migrants have gradually increased from 2.2% (arrived before 1981) to 11.9% (arrived 2007-2011).

Reasons for migration have added further diversity. Lindley and Van Hear (2007) identify several different waves, each associated with family reunion migration. Professionals arrived from around independence in the late 1940s. From the 1960s Tamil students migrated to the UK as their route to higher education was blocked by discrimination in Sri Lanka. From the late 1980s increasing numbers of Sri Lankan Tamil asylum seekers sought refuge in the UK from the civil war in their country, numbers increasing substantially in the 1990s. Finally, since around 2000 there has been a significant onward migration of Tamils to the UK from EU countries, motivated by economic opportunities, education and language, and the social and cultural environment. These are mainly Dutch, French, German, and Scandinavian citizens, though there is a lack of data on the numbers involved.

Once migrants settle, they establish families yielding differences in age structure between Sri Lankan migrants and those identified by the ethnicity write-ins. The Sri Lankan 2011 country of birth group shows a typical population distribution for a migrant community with small numbers in the under 20 and over 65 age groups and peak numbers amongst young adults aged 30-34 and 35-39 and declining numbers thereafter (fig. 1). However, the age structure of ethnic Sri Lankans is quite different with two peaks, one in the 0-4 age group and the other in the 30-34 age group. All the young age groups (0-4, 5-9, 10-14, and 15-19) have very substantially higher numbers than the Sri Lankan country of birth group, representing the second generation resident in England and Wales. Numbers are also higher in the 20-24 and 25-29 age groups. The Sri Lankan ethnic group approximately follows the migrant trend in the age groups 30-34 to 80+, though numbers in each age group are lower. The relatively small numbers who identified as of Tamil ethnicity show a similar pattern with peaks in the 5-9 and 35-39 age groups.

The main component of population change in the size of the Sri Lankan community between 2001 and 2011 has been migration, especially in young adult and older age groups. However, amongst the younger (<20) age groups natural increase has been the main contributor, with almost 30,000 births to Sri Lankan-born mothers over the years 2001-10. Sri Lankan migrant women have an estimated total fertility rate of 2.62 (based on 3,431 births in 2011 in England and Wales and using country of birth of the mother in birth registrations and census data on country of birth by age and sex), more akin to that of Indian women (2.35, 14,892 births) than Bangladeshi (3.25, 8,371 births) and Pakistani (3.82, 18,434 births) women. Births to Sri Lankan mothers rose from 2001-2007 and have subsequently plateaued (fig. 2).

Limited information is available on household and family size and type. Only a proxy average size of Sri Lankan migrant households of 2.3 persons can be estimated from the 2011 England and Wales Census (based on the migrant count divided by the number of households where the country of birth of the household reference person was Sri Lanka). In 2005/6, Sri Lankan-born households (3.9 persons) were smaller than Bangladeshi (4.8) and Pakistani (5.1) migrant households but larger than Indian migrant households (3.3). However, Sri Lankan migrant households had the highest average number of families per household (1.7%).

2011 Census data reveals that across world regions/countries a high proportion of married couple families was seen in families with family reference persons (FRPs) born in Sri Lanka (84%), in common with FRPs born in India (85%), Afghanistan (83%), Pakistan (80%), Bangladesh (79%), and Kenya (79%), reflecting cultural attitudes to family structures and marriage (ONS 2014)., The lowest proportions of lone parent families with dependent children were found for FRPs born in ‘Southern Asian Other’ (6.9%), India (9.5%), Sri Lanka (11%), and Afghanistan (11%). Families with a Sri Lankan-born FRP had the greatest proportion with two dependent children (28%). The lowest stepfamily proportions among couple families with dependent children were seen for those with a FRP born in ‘Other Eastern Asia’ at less than 3 in 100 families (2.3%) and Sri Lanka (2.5%).

### **The more favourable socio-economic position and health status of Sri Lankans than other South Asian diaspora populations**

Sri Lankan migrants have a more favourable socio-economic profile than other South Asian diaspora populations. In 2013 a higher proportion of the basic economic activity population (excluding under 16s) born in Sri Lanka was employed (61.1%), compared with the

Bangladeshi-born (46.8%), Indian-born (58.3%), and Pakistani-born (45.50%) (table 3). Moreover, the Sri Lankan migrant population had the lowest unemployment (4.7%), compared with Bangladeshi (7.7%), Indian (5.4%), and Pakistani (7.4%) migrant populations.

Data from the 2011 Census for the London Borough of Greenwich (which had commissioned special tabulations) corroborates these findings. Excluding economically active and inactive students, Sri Lankan migrants had the highest proportion who were economically active (64.5%, compared with 52.1%-62.8% amongst other South Asian migrants). Economically inactive migrants were much lower amongst Sri Lankan migrants (24.1%) than other South Asian migrants (32.5%-40.9%), though unemployment was lower amongst Indian and Pakistani migrants. These differences are relatively stable. For example, Labour Force Survey (LFS) data for 2005-06 (Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) 2007) also found a higher proportion of Sri Lankan migrants were employed than for Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi migrants, amongst the working age population and an inactive population that was much lower than for Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants.

While 2011 Census national data is unavailable for industries in which Sri Lankan migrants were concentrated, there is information on all usual residents aged 16-74 in employment in the London Borough of Greenwich. Much the largest group was 'wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles' which employed 36.1% of 725 Sri Lankan migrants, followed by 'accommodation and food service activities' which employed 13.1%. There were also small proportions in 'human health and social work activities' (11.0%), 'education' (6.3%), 'transport and storage' (5.4%), and 'professional, scientific and technical activities' (5.1%). This accords with an estimate from 2013 LFS data that 42% of the Sri Lankan-born population aged 16-64 were employed in the hotel and distribution sector, including retailing (Rutter 2015).

Other socio-economic indicators reveal that Sri Lankan migrants are advantaged compared with other South Asian migrant groups (IPPR 2007) (table 3). Self-employment rates amongst the economically active working age population were lower in the Sri Lankan than other South Asian migrant populations, suggesting that barriers to employment may be lower. Age when full time education was completed for Sri Lankan migrants was two years higher than for Bangladeshi and Pakistani migrants. Average gross hourly pay of the economically-active working-age population and average weekly hours worked were higher for Sri Lankan than Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants.

However, home ownership was weaker in the Sri Lankan migrant community, lower than for Indian and Pakistani migrants in 2005/6 and, in the London Borough of Greenwich in 2011, lower (42.5%) than Indian (59.3%), Pakistani (49.6%), and Bangladeshi (43.7%) migrants. Generally fewer Sri Lankan migrants claimed unemployment-related benefits and sickness or disability benefits, compared with the other South Asian migrant communities.

The most notable difference was found in school performance. In 2003 the Sri Lankan ethnic group out-performed the other South Asian ethnic groups, substantially so in the case of Bangladeshis and Pakistanis. Similar data (including maths and English) is reported for 2010-11, based on freedom of information requests to local authorities (Rutter 2015). On this measure the Sri Lankan group were +32.5% (only exceeded by the Chinese, +38%) and above Indians (+29.9%), Bangladeshis (+1.8%), Pakistanis (excluding Mirpuris) (-8.6%), and Pakistani Mirpuris (-23%).

The high proportion of the Sri Lankan migrant population in the 2011 Census whose main language was English or could speak English well may have facilitated their high level of labour market participation. Amongst usual residents aged 3 and over (n=126,896) born in Sri Lanka, over a third (34.0%) had a main language of English. Of those whose main language

was not English, over four-fifths (81.5%) could speak English very well or well. Thus, only 12.2% of the migrant community could not speak English well or at all.

### **The health of the Sri Lankan community**

Few sources provide an insight into the health of the Sri Lankan population as ONS did not release 2011 Census data on limiting long-term illness (LLTI) or general health by the detailed write-in ethnic groups or detailed country of birth for England and Wales. However, commissioned data for the London Borough of Greenwich provides sufficient counts to estimate proportions for the Sri Lankan community. Of the 1,382 Sri Lankan migrants usually resident in the London Borough of Greenwich, information is available for 1,179 migrants aged 16-64 who answered the LLTI question. Only 4.4% were limited a lot in day-to-day activities, the lowest percentage amongst the other South Asian migrant groups: Indians, 6.5% (n=3,369); Pakistanis, 7.7% (n=1,106); and Bangladeshis, 5.4% (n= 745). Sri Lankan migrants also fared better than other South Asian migrant groups on the general health question and the proportion of the economically inactive who were long-term sick. However, as fig. 4 shows, Greenwich is an area of only minor Sri Lankan residence in London compared with Newham, Brent, and Merton and may not be representative of this population.

However, national findings from earlier censuses (2001 and 1991) yield similar differentials (Piggot, 2006). In 2001 Sri Lankan migrants resident in London had an age-standardised rate (ASR) of LLTI of 87, while those living in the rest of England and Wales had an ASR of 77. In London this was substantially better than Bangladeshi (ASR 159), Pakistani (ASR 140), and Indian migrants (ASR 116). This advantage also applied to Sri Lankan migrants living in

the rest of England and Wales whose ASR (77) was much better than for Bangladeshi (ASR 142), Pakistani (ASR 152), and Indian (ASR 119) migrants.

On the measure of not good health, Sri Lankan migrants had even better health. In London they had an ASR of 75, whilst those living in the rest of England and Wales had an ASR of 57. In London this again was much better than Bangladeshi (ASR 186), Pakistani (ASR 172), and Indian (ASR 127) migrants. In the rest of England Sri Lankan migrants' ASR (57) was substantially better Bangladeshi (ASR 162), Pakistan (ASR 184), and India (ASR 129) migrants, an even greater differential than in London.

Similar differentials were reported amongst these migrant communities in the percentage of households with LLTI in the 1991 Census (Piggott, 2006, p. 30). 14.3% of Sri Lankan-born households had someone with LLTI, compared 33.0% of Bangladeshi households, 27.2% of Indian households, and 25.9% of Pakistani households.

Sri Lankan migrants also had a favourable mortality profile compared with other migrant groups. With respect to standardised mortality ratios (SMR) by country of birth (11 groupings<sup>2</sup>), for persons aged 20-69, England and Wales, 1999-2003, people born in Sri Lanka (SMR 74) had the statistically significant lowest SMR of all eleven groupings (Fitzpatrick, Jacobson, and Aspinall 2005). They also had the lowest SMR for cancer (although not statistically significant with respect to the India group) and one of the lowest SMRs for circulatory disease (only the Other Western Europe group having a lower rate).

The findings for generic health status are significant, given that a notable proportion in the Sri Lankan community of descent are likely to be post-flight refugees. Although there is no data on the prevalence of serious mental disorders amongst Sri Lankan migrants in the UK, a

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<sup>2</sup> England and Wales; Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland; Scotland; India; Pakistan; Bangladesh; Sri Lanka; West Africa; East Africa; Caribbean Commonwealth; Eastern Europe; Other Western Europe; and Rest of the World.

study of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in Canada (Beiser et al, 2015) found the rate of post-traumatic stress disorder to be high at 17% or one in six of these refugees. Moreover, refugees are known to suffer from depression and anxiety disorders although, again, these are largely unmeasured in the UK Sri Lankan Tamil population.

The reasons for such a large gap in the measures of generic health status and mortality between Sri Lankan and other South Asian migrants may be multiple and complex. A 'healthy migrant' effect has frequently been observed in epidemiological studies, whereby migrants are healthier than people of similar ethnic backgrounds who were born in the host country. Over time the newcomers' health advantage diminishes (Lee et al, 2013). The health advantage is assumed to be due to (self-) selection at the time of migration. It has also been observed in studies of self-reported morbidity where it has also diminished with length of residence in the host country.

The 'healthy migrant' effect may be stronger in the Sri Lankan migrant community than the other South Asian country of birth groups because of the recentness of the migration, almost half (46.6%) of Sri Lankan migrants resident in England and Wales in 2011 having arrived since 2001 (compared with 33.0% Bangladeshi, 39.0% Pakistani, and 45.4% Indian migrants) (fig. 3). 35.8% of Indian migrants had arrived before 1981 compared with just 13.4% of Sri Lankan migrants. This recentness of migration was also reflected in the Sri Lankan country of birth group's younger age structure. In 2011 52.1% of Sri Lankan migrants were under 40 years of age, similar to proportions in the Bangladeshi (60.7%) and Pakistani (52.8%) but higher than in the Indian (46.3%) migrant groups. However, application of the 'healthy migrant' effect to this population requires caution. A significant proportion of the Sri Lankan population came to Britain as asylum-seekers forced to migrate rather than as self-selecting voluntary migrants and the healthy migrant effect is less likely to apply to this group, especially those fleeing conflict in their home countries who have experienced violence and



persecution. A recent study has shown that there was no strong evidence of any associations of time in the UK with health indicators for asylum seekers and refugees (Kearns et al., 2017). Part of the explanation for better health status may lie in the more favourable socio-economic profile of Sri Lankan migrants after they have settled, given that adverse socio-economic circumstances are associated with poorer health outcomes.

### **Where Sri Lankans live**

The Sri Lanka migrant population is concentrated in a number of urban centres across England and Wales, with two-thirds (84,542, 66.4%) living in London and 42,700 in the rest of the country. The main provincial regional concentrations are the East Midlands (3,832), West Midlands (4,538), East (9,151), and the South-East (14,650)<sup>3</sup>.

Sri Lanka was the eleventh largest country of birth group in London in the 2011 Census (and after Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis), comprising around 1.0% of the total population of London. Sri Lankans in London are a reasonably segregated population, ranking 21<sup>st</sup> out of 46 'Onomap subgroups' with an index of dissimilarity of 0.665, similar to Bangladeshis (0.644) and more segregated than 'India North' (0.574), 'Hindi Indian' (0.573), and 'Pakistanis' (0.495) (Mateos 2014, 226). Rutter (2015, 160) has commented: 'Within London there is some residential clustering, but to a lesser degree than in many other migrant and minority-ethnic groups, as there is less reliance on social networks for employment and accommodation'.

The 84,542 Sri Lankan migrants resident in London in 2011, lived predominantly (84%) in Outer London in three main areas: Redbridge (7,248)/Newham (5,052), Merton (6,327)/Croydon (5,270), and Ealing (6,687)/Harrow (10,392)/Brent (7,702) (fig. 4). The

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<sup>3</sup> ONS. 2011 Census, England and Wales, Table QS203EW.

average count per ward was 135.3. However, the community was concentrated in certain wards in these Outer London boroughs. Six electoral wards have over 1,000 Sri Lankan migrants (Wall End in Newham, 1,448; Roxbourne, Rayners Lane, and Roxeth wards in Harrow, 1,111-1,294; Newbury ward in Redbridge, 1,102; and Broad Green ward in Croydon, 1,071). Patterns were similar for those identifying ethnically as Sri Lankan, with the main concentrations in Redbridge (9,201)/Newham (5,820); Merton (6,759)/Croydon (6,460); and Ealing (7,762)/Harrow (12,409)/Brent (9,276). The substantially larger Outer London population born in Sri Lanka (70,619) than that in Inner London (13,923) may be evidence of some movement out of core urban to suburban areas. However, Sri Lankans were already concentrated in these three areas in 1991 (Siddhisena and White 1999).

Around one third of the Sri Lankan-born group lived outside London at the time of the 2011 Census. Less is known about these communities as ‘outside the capital this group has rarely been mentioned in local authority strategy documents, for example, those that relate to employment or education’ (Rutter 2015, p. 160). Indeed, in one of the largest out-of-London communities, the Leicester Joint Strategic Needs Assessment of 2012 has one incidental reference to Tamils and none to Sri Lankans (NHS Leicester City and Leicester City Council 2012). The largest migrant Sri Lanka communities in 2011 were Milton Keynes, 1,724; Leicester UA, 1,629; Greater Manchester (Metropolitan County), 1,444; Watford, 1,262; Slough UA, 1,219; Crawley, 1,128; Coventry, 1,101; Merseyside (Metropolitan County), 1,068; Birmingham, 974; and Luton UA, 774. Amongst Sri Lankans who identified ethnically in free-text, the largest communities outside London were similarly distributed in the merged local authorities of Leicester, 2379; Milton Keynes, 2311; Slough, 1725; Crawley, 1500; Coventry, 1419; Birmingham, 1369; and Luton, 1068.

The London distribution map for Sri Lankan migrants is very similar to that for school pupils who were Tamil speakers in 2008, mapped at Middle Level Super Output Area (MSOA)

level (Eversley et al, 2010). In 2008 there were a total of 16,386 Tamil speaking school pupils. The top three boroughs where Tamil was spoken were Harrow, Redbridge, and Ealing. This Tamil language community has increased substantially since 1998/99, being five times as large a decade later. Almost two-thirds (61%) live in six boroughs with more than 1,000 Tamil-speaking pupils each. The same three areas of clustering hold for Tamil pupil speakers as for Sri Lankan migrants. The largest concentration of Tamil speakers remains in NW London, with Harrow, Ealing, Brent and also Hillingdon accounting for 37% of the Tamil-speaking community in London. While Brent had the largest community in 1998/99, it has been overtaken by Harrow and Ealing and also by three other boroughs in east and south London. The second largest cluster is in east London, with Redbridge, Newham and Waltham Forest together accounting for a further 23% of Tamil speakers. There is also a concentration of Tamil speakers in SW London (as there was in 1998/99), with Merton, Croydon, Kingston and Sutton together accounting for another 22%. Significantly, around 10% of Tamil speakers state their ethnicity as Indian with the remainder identifying themselves as Sri Lankan Tamil or Other Asian. In all, there were 16 MSOAs with 155 to 314 pupil speakers, 30 MSOAs with 85 to 155 pupil speakers, 47 MSOAs with 51 to 85 pupil speakers, 102 MSOAs with 22 to 51 pupil speakers, and 788 MSOAs with 0 to 22 pupil speakers.

Mateos' analysis of traditional dimensions of residential segregation show that the Sri Lankan Onomap Subgroup to be intermediate (rank 23) across 46 Subgroups in London at Output Area level when the four dimensions of evenness, isolation, concentration, and clustering are combined as an average composite index. Where own (Sri Lankan) ethnic group density is high, as is the case in the wards indicated in Newham, Harrow, Redbridge, and Croydon, there may be benefits for the group. Lindley and Van Hear (2007) have argued that one of the motivations for onward movement from EU countries was the pull factor of the socio-cultural environment associated with the greater critical mass of the Tamil population, including

temples, Tamil language classes, Saturday schools, Tamil-run advice and welfare associations, and diminished racism.

Indeed, positive ‘ethnic density’ or ‘group density’ effects have been reported for a wide range of outcomes, including psychological well-being, physical health, alcohol consumption, educational attainment, social cohesion, and civic participation (Bécares et al, 2012). Explanatory or mediating effects (often partial) have been reported to include reduced exposure to racism, discrimination, and intimidation in everyday encounters and the protective effects from within one’s community, including improved social support, improved social networks, and improved access to culturally specific facilities and services.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has shown that the Sri Lankan community of descent is substantially neglected and invisible in demographic and health research in the UK as it is not captured as a pre-designated ethnic group category in the decennial census and surveys. While 127,242 Sri Lankan-born migrants were enumerated in England and Wales in 2011, some estimates suggest that the full size of the community (including descendants of migrants) is now 200,000. There are important intersections between period of arrival of migrants, the purpose behind their movement, and related population characteristics. Nearly half of migrants have arrived in the decade before the 2011 Census and asylum seeking Sri Lankan Tamils have contributed significantly since the mid-1980s. Natural increase is now also contributing significantly to the community’s growing size.

Previously unreported health advantage in both generic health status and mortality measures in Sri Lankan compared with other South Asian migrants is described. This may be attributable to the ‘healthy migrant’ effect, given the community’s recent migration, though application of its effect to this population requires caution as a significant proportion came to

Britain as asylum-seekers (forced migration) rather than as self-selecting migrants. A more advantageous socio-economic profile may also have contributed. Given the substantial and growing size of the Sri Lankan community and its distinctive demographic and socio-economic characteristics, the community merits significantly greater attention in analytic and policy studies and recognition as a pre-designated ethnic group in official surveys if not the 2021 Census.

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Table 1: All usual residents born in Sri Lanka by year of arrival by ethnic group: England and Wales, 2011.

|                                   | Arrived before 1981 | Arrived 1981-2000 | Arrived 2001-2006 | Arrived 2007-2011 | TOTAL   |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------|
| Total: Ethnic group               | 17,001              | 50,969            | 32,893            | 26,379            | 127,242 |
| English/Welsh/Scottish/NI/British | 2,896               | 300               | 77                | 93                | 3,366   |
| Irish                             | 41                  | 24                | 4                 | 16                | 85      |
| Gypsy or Irish Traveller          | 1                   | 1                 | 1                 | 1                 | 4       |
| Other White                       | 253                 | 593               | 461               | 377               | 1,684   |
| White & Black Caribbean           | 7                   | 7                 | 1                 | 5                 | 20      |
| White & Black African             | 4                   | 29                | 13                | 14                | 60      |
| White & Asian                     | 673                 | 263               | 124               | 141               | 1,201   |
| Other Mixed                       | 162                 | 244               | 180               | 137               | 723     |
| Indian                            | 511                 | 1,025             | 629               | 654               | 2,819   |
| Pakistani                         | 56                  | 241               | 190               | 216               | 703     |
| Bangladeshi                       | 24                  | 99                | 67                | 155               | 345     |
| Chinese                           | 152                 | 351               | 264               | 381               | 1,148   |
| Other Asian                       | 12,023              | 46,863            | 30,128            | 23,497            | 112,511 |
| Black African                     | 11                  | 129               | 71                | 148               | 359     |
| Black Caribbean                   | 13                  | 17                | 34                | 8                 | 72      |
| Other Black                       | 21                  | 97                | 64                | 71                | 253     |
| Arab                              | 13                  | 82                | 65                | 84                | 244     |
| Any other ethnic group            | 140                 | 604               | 520               | 381               | 1,645   |

Source: ONS. Commissioned Table CT0263: Country of birth by year of arrival by ethnic group.

Table 2: All usual residents born in Sri Lanka by year of arrival by religion: England and Wales, 2011.

|                     | Total:<br>religion | Christian | Buddhist | Hindu | Jewish | Muslim | Sikh | Other<br>religion | No<br>religion | Religion<br>not stated |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----------|----------|-------|--------|--------|------|-------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Arrived before 1981 | 17001              | 7631      | 2795     | 4039  | 11     | 381    | 9    | 39                | 1256           | 840                    |
| Arrived 1981-2000   | 50969              | 9772      | 4282     | 32105 | 6      | 2211   | 28   | 37                | 1125           | 1403                   |
| Arrived 2001-2006   | 32893              | 6250      | 5629     | 16993 | 2      | 2738   | 18   | 15                | 373            | 875                    |
| Arrived 2007-2011   | 26379              | 4618      | 6885     | 10510 | 3      | 3137   | 35   | 16                | 348            | 827                    |
|                     | 127242             | 28271     | 19591    | 63647 | 22     | 8467   | 90   | 107               | 3102           | 3945                   |

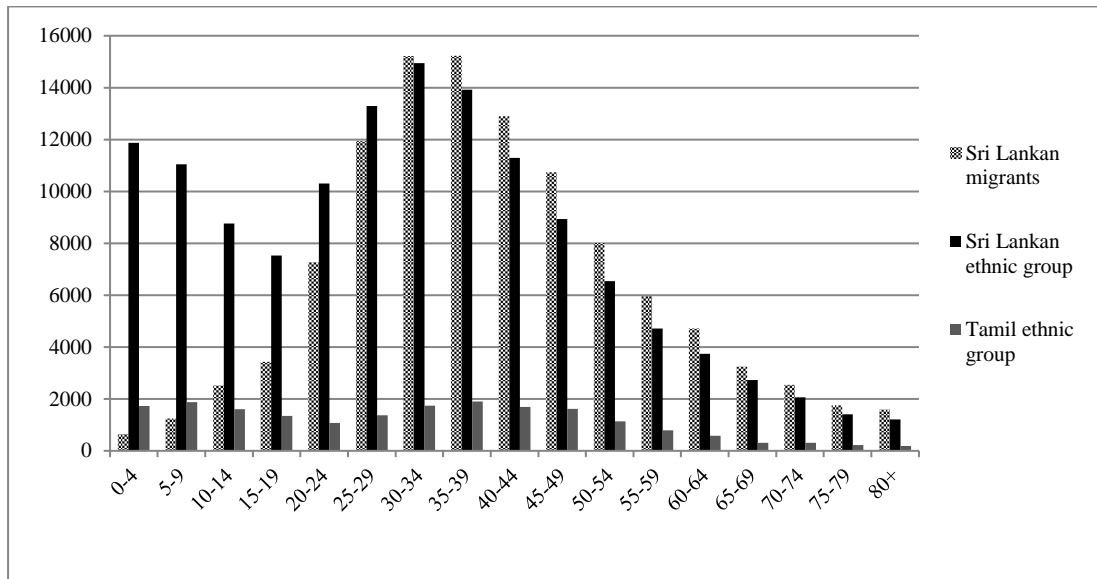
Source: Source: ONS. Commissioned Table CT0265: Country of birth by year of arrival by religion.

Table 3: Indicators of socio-economic position

|   | Country of Birth |         |           |             |
|---|------------------|---------|-----------|-------------|
|   | Sri Lankan       | Indian  | Pakistani | Bangladeshi |
| Economic activity, 2013 <sup>1</sup>                                      |                  |         |           |             |
| Employed  | 75,658           | 403,029 | 215,934   | 99,077      |
| Unemployed  | 5,810            | 37,055  | 35,316    | 16,280      |
| Inactive  | 42,394           | 251,354 | 222,910   | 96,427      |
| Under 16  | 5,467            | 43,053  | 28,131    | 4,882       |
| Total   | 129,329          | 734,491 | 502,291   | 216,666     |
| Self-employment <sup>2</sup>  |                  |         |           |             |
|   | 9%               | 11%     | 33%       | 21%         |
| Age when full-time education completed <sup>2</sup>                       |                  |         |           |             |
|   | 19.5             | 19.5    | 17.5      | 17.5        |
| Average gross hourly pay <sup>2</sup>                                     |                  |         |           |             |
|   | £10.50           | £11.50  | £10.20    | £9.30       |
| Average weekly hours worked <sup>2</sup>                                  |                  |         |           |             |
|   | 37.5             | 38.5    | 36.5      | 32.0        |
| Home ownership <sup>2</sup>   |                  |         |           |             |
|   | 69%              | 86%     | 75%       | 50%         |
| % claiming unemployment related benefits <sup>2</sup>                     |                  |         |           |             |
|   | 1%               | 1%      | 2%        | 5%          |
| % claiming sickness or disability benefits <sup>2</sup>                   |                  |         |           |             |
|   | 2%               | 5%      | 10%       | 6%          |
| Mean percentage difference from England mean for GCSEs, 2003 <sup>2</sup> |                  |         |           |             |
|   | +8.0             | +7.0    | -11.3     | -9.3        |

Sources: <sup>1</sup>Annual Population Survey, 2013 (created on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2014 by ONS). Weighted 2011, not seasonally adjusted. <sup>2</sup>Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) 2007 (2005-6 data).

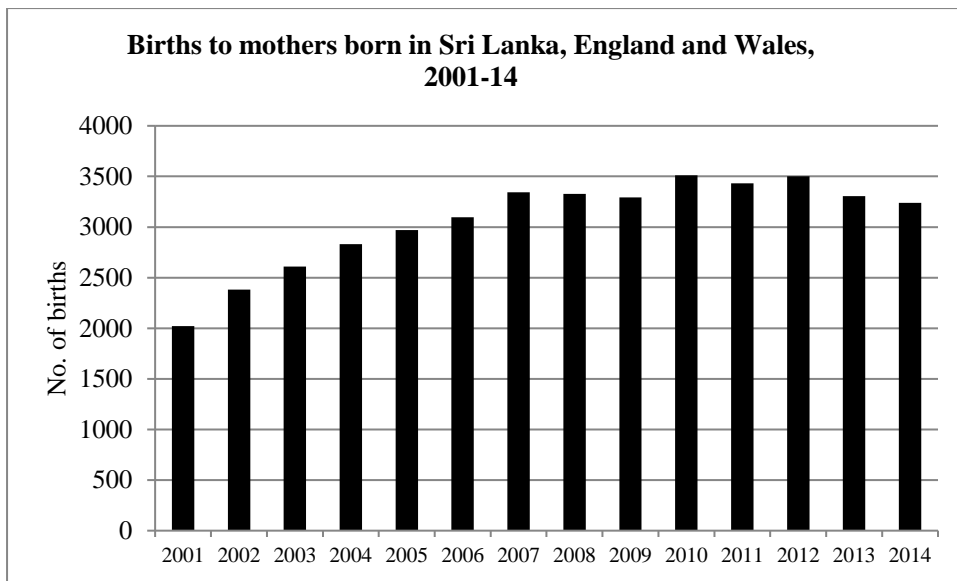
Fig. 1: The age-structure of the Sri Lankan and Tamil ethnic groups and Sri Lankan country of birth group, England and Wales, 2011



Source: Data for Sri Lankan migrants and Sri Lankan and Tamil ethnic groups are taken from ONS ‘small population’ tables: SP010 (Sri Lankan ethnic group), SP011 (Tamil ethnic group), and SP029 (Sri Lankan country of birth group).

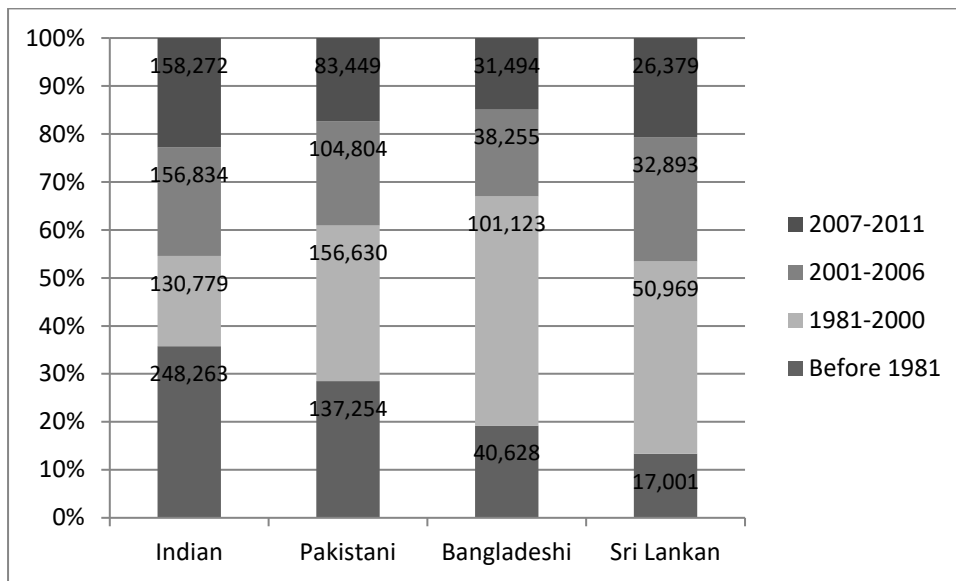
Note: Figures are for usual residents and 5-year age groups and summed for merged local authorities. Small population tables provide census data for some of the key characteristics of people in specific small population groups - for example individuals of an ethnic group, a country of birth, a religion or a national identity - in which the small size of the total population in that group means confidentiality constraints limit the release of more detailed standard statistics. These small population data are produced only for geographic areas in which the small population being counted is or exceeds a threshold of 200. Only the areas in which the population exceeds these thresholds are included in each table. This means that all tables do not contain the same geographic areas, because those exceeding the threshold will vary depending on the small population being counted. c of b = country of birth.

Fig. 2: Births to mothers born in Sri Lanka, England and Wales, 2001-14



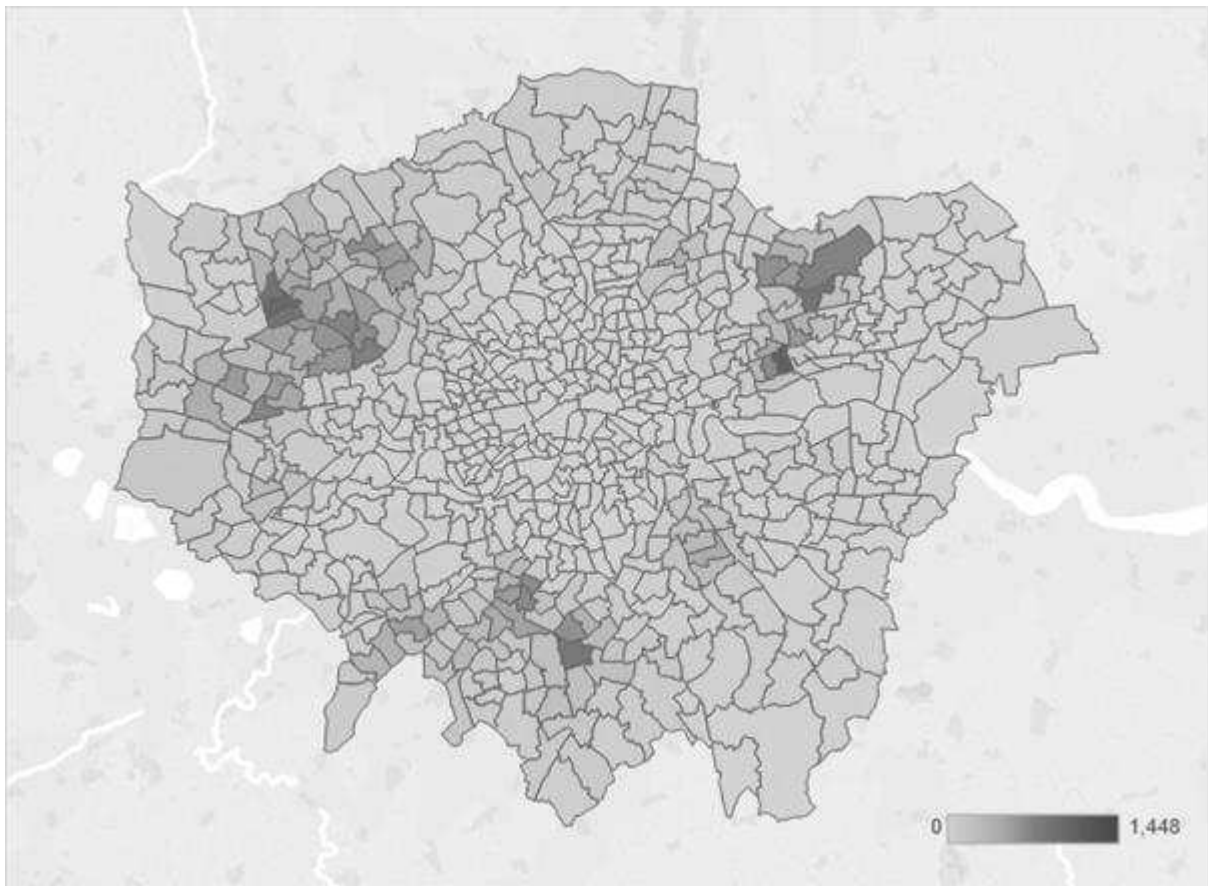
Source: Births in England and Wales by Parents' Country of Birth, 2014. Accessed at: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/parents--country-of-birth--england-and-wales/2014/stb-pcb-2014.html>

Fig .3: Usual residents born outside of the UK by country of birth and period of arrival, 2011 (%)



Source: 2011 Census, England and Wales, Commissioned Table CT0263. Numbers on bars indicate number of migrants in each period of arrival.

Fig. 4. Where Sri Lankan migrants live in London, 2011



Source: Data taken from 2011 Census, England and Wales, Commissioned Table CT 0226. Notes: The mapping tool is from the Greater London Authority Datastore (© OpenStreetMap contributors). Key shows counts of persons.