

Youth on Freedom of Religion or Belief in Sri Lanka

A Study of an Online Opinion Survey



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Abstract

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and religious country that has gone through many sorts of social and political conflicts during the past few decades. Ethnicity or religion has become a cause of conflict all the time. After 26 years of armed conflict, the ethnic tension shifted and converted into religious tension. While all the population was facing different types of conflicts, especially the youth population was more involved in all sorts of social activities. Education, social motives, age, attitude, and opinions are some of the fundamentals which encourage youth to be involved in socio-political activities today. While having tension and mistrust among different religious groups, the freedom of religion or beliefs of people were challenged. Some religious groups were targeted negatively when there was social tension such as the Easter Sunday attack in 2019 and the recent Covid-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka.

This online survey on Youth and Freedom of Religion or Belief (FORB) is to assess the knowledge, attitudes, practices, and the associated factors on FORB among the youth of Sri Lanka. It was found that more than 20% of youth have faced violence or discrimination against the FORB. Furthermore, they were not capable enough to take sustainable action to prevent or combat such incidents. Though some of the youth have tried to combat violence against FORB as they were stuck in personal and social level issues. The youth finds lots of challenges when they enjoy their FORB. For instance, religion has been given by birth and it is so hard to leave or change on their own will. There is no sufficient motivation, platforms, or space for youth to enjoy their FORB. There are policy-level weaknesses such as the minority religions or language groups are not equally treated in the common social spaces. For instance, some university students were facing violence against religion or belief.

There were certain suggestions to strengthen youth in FORB. Best uses of social media platforms are raising awareness among youth on FORB, inter-religious activities and also including religion in the school syllabus. These were some of the suggestions that came up by the youth. However, these suggestions can be strong enough when there is a supportive policy background and a culture in Sri Lanka. Therefore, religious institutional performance, social and attitude change as well as the revision of the law and order is required to strengthen youth on FORB in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Youth, Freedom, Religion, Belief, challenges, opportunities, suggestions

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Table of Content

Chapter 01	Introduction	1
Chapter 02	Literature Review	2 - 11
Chapter 03	Methodology	12 - 13
Chapter 04	Findings	14 - 53
Chapter 05	Discussion	54 - 63
Chapter 06	Recommendation	64 - 65

List of tables

Table 2.1	Degree of religious freedom enjoyed by Muslims in Sri Lanka	5
Table 2.2	Different definitions of Youth	10
Table 4.1	Demographic data of the respondents	14
Table 4.2	Age Groups - I	16
Table 4.3	Distribution of the religious Identity/ belief of youth	17
Table 4.4	Distribution of age and the gender of the respondents	17
Table 4.5	Distribution of Respondents by District	18
Table 4.6	Distribution of the answers received for the question asked on, do you think freedom of religion and belief is a universal human right?	19
Table 4.7	Distribution of answers received for the question asked whether Buddhism is the state religion of Sri Lanka?	20
Table 4.8	Distribution of answers given to the question on, which Article in the Sri Lankan Constitution provides for the freedom of religion? And the comparison with different religious or belief groups	21
Table 4.9	Distribution of the answers given for the question on, Is it a legal requirement for religious centers to be registered in Sri Lanka?	21
Table 4.10	Distribution of the answers received for the question on have the respondents ever faced any sort of violence/ discrimination against their freedom of religion or belief	22

Table 4.11	Distribution of Agreement of Respondents on the following statement; Deprivation/violation of freedom of religion or belief can lead to violent conflicts in Sri Lanka”	27
Table 4.12	Agreement of the respondents on “Worship in public places is good”	27
Table 4.13	Cross tabulation of the distribution of religious identity/ belief and the statement on “Religious rituals play an important role in my life”	28
Table 4.14	Distribution of the answer for the question on, are you willing to disclose your religious identity while you are accessing public services?	28
Table 4.15	Cross tabulation of the distribution of agreement on the statement on 'I believe religious freedom helps to build social cohesion among diverse communities and the religious Identity/ belief	29
Table 4.16	Frequency of seeing any posts on social media by the respondents that violate freedom of religion or belief	29
Table 4.17	Distribution of frequency of reporting social media posts which violate freedom of religion or belief	30
Table 4.18	Comparison of the distribution of use of social media as a platform to make public awareness on freedom of religion or belief and age group	30
Table 4.19	Cross tabulation of age and the frequency of the reaction to the statement of “I practice my religion or belief as an individual”	31
Table 4.20	Cross tabulation of age and the frequency of the reaction to the statement of “I practice my religion with my community”	31

Table 4.21	Cross Tabulation between Age - Group and how the respondents have indicated their knowledge about other religions/ belief	32
Table 4.22	Cross tabulation of the age and the willingness of the respondents to engage in interreligious activities or dialogue	33
Table 4.23	Cross tabulation of the Ethnic Identity and the willingness of the respondents to engage in interreligious activities or dialogue	33
Table 4.24	Use of WhatsApp, Viber chats/calls	34
Table 4.25	Use of zoom/Google Meet/Skype	34
Table 4.26	Use of Facebook	35
Table 4.27	Use of YouTube	35
Table 4.28	Use of Instagram	35
Table 4.29	Use of websites/Blogs	36
Table 4.30	Use of other social media (such as Twitter, and LinkedIn)	36
Table 4.31	Use of phone calls/SMS	36

List of Figures

Figure 4.1	Distribution of the gender of the respondents	15
Figure 4.2	Distribution of age of the respondents	15
Figure 4.3	Age Groups - II	16
Figure 4.4	Education background of the respondents	18
Figure 4.5	Distribution of Respondents by Districts	19
Figure 4.6	What has been protected by the freedom of religion or belief	20
Figure 4.7	Distribution of overall knowledge of the respondents on the other religion/ belief	32
Figure 4.8	Conceptual Framework on strengthening Y-FORB	38

Chapter 01- Introduction

Youth have been identified as a potential group of the society to make influence and social change. While analyzing the recent history of violent conflicts in Sri Lanka, there are root causes related to religious freedom. Youth are vulnerable to radicalization and extremist views, especially related to religion. While the causes of youth vulnerability to religious extremism are many and not dependent on any single variable, there are many underlying structural issues, such as lack of engagement with other religious groups, education, and other social factors that create favorable conditions for violence against religion or belief.

COVID-19 has had a dramatic impact on Sri Lanka's economic growth and psychosocial social well-being. While Sri Lanka was facing the pandemic, different ethnic and religious groups were highly recognized in some cases like COVID-19 dead body management. When exploring recent history there are violent incidents that can be identified as violence against religious freedom and belief. For instance, the Easter Sunday Attacks in 2019 deliberately targeted a specific religious group in Sri Lanka.

This online survey on Youth and Freedom of Religion or Belief (FORB) is to assess the knowledge, attitudes, practices, and associated factors on FORB among the youth of Sri Lanka. This survey was conducted under the Y-FORB project implemented by Resilience Research, Training, and Consulting funded by the Small and Mighty grants program of the U.S. Embassy to Sri Lanka and Maldives and administered through Sri Lanka Unites. Under the Y-FORB project, our intention is to capacitate youth in FORB strategically.

This survey has provided remarkable findings relating to the Sri Lankan context on Y-FORB. It was found that Sri Lankan youth need support to build their capacity to think outside the box and actively engage in FORB of self and others. These findings will be utilized to conduct follow-up activities that promote FORB among youth in Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, researchers and policymakers can utilize these data and findings with goodwill.

Chapter 02- Literature Review

Youth and Freedom of Religion or Belief (Y-FORB) project engages with youth to promote forgiveness, trust, and tolerance to create a culture favorable for the protection of FORB in Sri Lanka. This survey has been conducted to assess the knowledge, attitudes and practices, and associated factors on Y-FORB among the youth of Sri Lanka. This literature survey has conducted prior to the online survey in order to analyze the relevant literature on Y- FORB in Sri Lanka. Secondary sources have been utilized to gather information on the key thematic areas of the survey. Newspaper articles, webpages, and most recent survey reports have been incorporated in this analysis in addition to books and journal articles.

Context Analysis - The country context in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's diverse social fabric is made of different ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic groups. Out of a total population of 20.3 million, 70.2 % is Buddhist, 12.6 %Hindu, 9.7% Muslim, and 7.4 % Roman Catholic and other Christian (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). Sri Lankan society is composed of four major religions in the world. Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic country and Sri Lanka's ethnic composition is Sinhala: 74.9%, Sri Lankan Tamil: 11.2%, Sri Lankan Moors: 9.2%, Indian Tamil: 4.2%, others 0.5% (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012).

Like all societies, Sri Lankan society is layered based on class, status, caste, regional, and gender identities. Although Sri Lanka is predominantly a Buddhist country, its society is plural in nature. From its early history, the Religious dimension is one of the characteristics of a plural society. Sri Lankan society has also been plural in nature consisting of a Buddhist majority with Hindu and Muslim minority religious groups. From the arrival of Western colonials, Christianity was also introduced in Sri Lanka (Yusoff & Sarjoon, 2019). Very clearly, at present, plurality based on ethnic and religious identities in the demography of Sri Lanka is self-evident. Buddhism is the religion practiced by a majority of the country's Sinhala population, a larger portion of Tamils is Hindu, and Muslims are adherents of Islam. Christianity is followed by both Sinhala and Tamil people (Peiris, 2019). There are many identity groups in Sri Lanka. One of the foremost in this recent history, we can find emerging ethnic and religious conflicts in Sri Lanka.

International and National Provisions in place to protect the Freedom of Religion or Belief in Sri Lanka

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance (United Nations, 1948). In addition, Article 18.1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966) states that ‘everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching’. Moreover, Article 18.2 says that ‘No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice’ (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966). As a member state of the United Nations Sri Lanka has international obligations to protect, promote and fulfill the freedom of religion.

Though the freedom of religion or belief is proclaimed in the constitution, there are many pieces of literature that showcase that freedom of religion or belief has been violated for many reasons. For example, attacks on religious places, hate speech that targets specific religious practices.

In Sri Lanka, Article 9 of the Constitution (1978) affords Buddhism the ‘*foremost place*’. It says that the ‘*The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana*, while assuring the rights of all religions stipulated by Articles 10 and 14(1)(e)’. Art. 10 of the Constitution has been drafted as an absolute right that is not subject to any restrictions in Article 15 of the Constitution. According to Sri Lankan Supreme Law, citizens have the right to adopt and hold a religious belief or the freedom to manifest a religious belief on the other. Hence, the Sri Lankan Constitutional framework on FORB complies with international standards.

The right to choose and practice a religion or a belief is an important part of an individual's life and a fundamental human right. Freedom of religion or belief means that the state has an obligation to safeguard this right. Article 10 of the Sri Lankan Constitution guarantees the citizen's freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Article 12 of the Constitution guarantees to all persons the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of religion. According to article 12(2), *'No citizen shall be discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion, place of birth or any such grounds.* In addition to that article 12(3) describes that no person shall, on the grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, or anyone such grounds, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to shop, public restaurants, hotels, places of public entertainment and places of public worship of his own religion' (*Article 10, 12 and 14 Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1978, n.d.*).

Article 14(1)(e) of the Constitution provides: *"Every citizen is entitled to the freedom, either by himself or in association with others, and either in public or in private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching"*. This particular provision guarantees the rights of citizens to manifest their religious beliefs. According to Rifai (2020), legal institutions are not free and independent in many third-world countries including Sri Lanka. In theory, the Sri Lankan Constitution guarantees religious freedom to all minority communities. However, Rifai (2020) has mentioned that the Muslim clerics in Sri Lanka are free to give talks on any religious topics. The following chart illustrates the degree of religious freedom in Sri Lanka. The government has given many provisions and facilities for the Muslim community to perform religious duties. Likewise, many other religious groups have a higher degree of religious freedom in Sri Lanka.

Table 2.1: Degree of religious freedom enjoyed by Muslims in Sri Lanka

<i>Provisions to hold religious meetings and religious functions.</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Provisions to take breaks for Friday prayers.</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Provisions to take one- month holiday for the month of Ramadan.</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Provisions to have official holidays for Eid.</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Provisions to have Muslim schools.</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Provisions to have Muslim teacher training colleges for Muslim ladies.</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Provisions and special time allocation for Islamic program in the national Radio Broadcasting.</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Provisions for Muslim children to wear Islamic dress in schools, colleges, and universities.</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Freedom to speak about Islam in public.</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Many other Provisions for religious groups.</i>	<i>Yes</i>

Source: (Rifai, 2020)

Violence against Religions or belief in Sri Lanka

The ethnic and religious tension between communities in Sri Lanka dates back to ancient history. The post-civil war era witnessed a radical increase in anti-minority religious sentiment and violence in Sri Lanka (Yusoff & Sarjoon, 2019). In the aftermath of the armed conflict, the ethnic tension shifted to religious tension. Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, which initially focused on dismantling a corresponding form of nationalism among Tamils for several decades, focused on Muslims once the war had ended (Gunetilleke, 2015). As a country with significant religious and cultural diversity, religion is a compulsory subject at the primary and secondary levels in public and private schools. Parents may elect to have their children study Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, or Christianity (United States Department of State - Office of International Religious Freedom, 2019). According to Rifai (2020), the Buddhist

extremists and nationalist political parties have been exploiting this excessive political power to discriminate, violate and sabotage the religious freedom and democratic rights of minority communities in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, there are social, cultural, economic, and political root causes that are leading to religious violence.

There are significant incidents in history relating to violence against religion or belief. On Easter Sunday, suicide bombers killed at least 253 people and injured some 500 at churches and top-end hotels across Sri Lanka in 2019 (“Sri Lanka Attacks,” 2019). In the immediate aftermath of the Easter Sunday bombings, media reported several days of mob violence that occurred in towns primarily across Northwestern Province; mosques and Muslim-owned homes and businesses were attacked. One man was killed with a sword (United States Department of State - Office of International Religious Freedom, 2019). Furthermore, damage estimates from the May mob violence varied widely, with former government minister Nalin Bandara conservatively estimating the damage to include the destruction of 14 mosques, 86 houses, and 96 shops. In the ethnically and religiously mixed area of Minuwangoda, Gampaha alone, the local government divisional secretariat reported 12 houses, 64 business places, one mosque, and nine vehicles damaged. At the same time, in the mostly Sinhala Buddhist area of Kurunegala, the NGO Muslim Aid assessed that 147 houses, 132 business places, 29 mosques, 52 vehicles, and two common facilities were damaged due to the anti-Muslim violence (Freedom House, 2020). This attack has been defended as an attack that was targeting to violate religious freedom or belief.

While the constitution gives special status to Buddhism, members of religious minority groups and congregations periodically face discrimination and sometimes deadly violence. While there were no major instances of interreligious violence in 2020, past anti-Muslim rioting has left many Muslims afraid that they may be targeted, and that any attackers may enjoy impunity. Leading up to the 2020 parliamentary elections, some Buddhist figures pledged to prohibit Buddhists from shopping at Muslims stores, ban the burqa, eliminate madrasas, and forcibly reform laws governing Muslim education and marriage (Freedom House, 2020).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, religious freedom and belief came into discussion in Sri Lanka with regard to the handling of fatalities due to COVID. Government must listen to Cultural and religious aspirations by communities in relation to Covid-19 dead body management. Further, cultural and religious aspects of Covid-19 dead body management must be considered and respected. (Resilience Research, Training, and Consulting, 2020). When the spread of COVID-19 became apparent, some government officials blamed the Muslim community for its spread. The government also forced Muslims to cremate relatives thought to have died from the coronavirus, even though the practice is contrary to Islamic beliefs, and the World Health Organization (WHO) had stated that those who died from the virus could be either cremated or buried (Freedom House, 2020). The dramatic decline in religious freedom impacts not only peace and stability but also slows global economic growth (Grim, 2019). Restrictions on religious freedom can come from two main sources: governments and groups in society (Finke & Grim, 2007). The government does not interfere in the personal or religious affairs of minority communities. The fringe Buddhist groups do not have national recognition and public support among the Sinhalese public. We cannot blame the entire Sinhalese community for the actions of a few Buddhist extremists (Rifai, 2020).

Youth involvement in FORB in Sri Lanka

The rapid development of social media and its increased usage amongst the young population has become a matter of serious concern in the post-war context. Even in Sri Lanka, youth are highly engaged in social media. Social media has been identified as one of the most powerful tools to spread messages. There were 5,454,000 Facebook users in Sri Lanka in June 2019, which accounted for 25.9% of its population. The majority of them were men (67.8%) (Search for Common Ground–Sri Lanka, 2019). The estimated computer literacy rate is 32.0% and the digital literacy rate is 49.5% for the first six months in 2020 (Department of Census and Statistics, n.d.). Social media statistics for Sri Lanka show that there were 7.90 million social media users in Sri Lanka in January 2021. The number of social media users in Sri Lanka was equivalent to 36.8% of the total population in January 2021 (Digital in Sri Lanka, 2021). There are only a limited number of social media networks that promote peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka when compared to hate-provoking sites (Search for Common Ground–Sri Lanka, 2019). For an instance, the recent religious /racial tensions which took place in Digana area

in the central province was claimed to be a foul play set on social media (Regional Center for Ethnic Studies, 2019)

Search for Common Ground–Sri Lanka (2019) has done a study on Young People Countering Hate Speech on social media in Sri Lanka. According to this study, the following pages listed below are the active social media networks that promote peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

1. Sri Lanka Unites <https://www.facebook.com/srilankaunites.org/> 19,245 people like this
2. Rise Up Sri Lanka <https://www.facebook.com/RiseUpSL/> 11,255 people like this
3. Hashtag Generation <https://www.facebook.com/hashtaggenerations/> 8,391 people like this
4. Interfaith Colombo <https://www.facebook.com/Interfaithcolombo/> 1,535 people like this
5. International Youth Alliance for Peace <https://www.facebook.com/IYAP.org/> 12,239 people like this
6. Sarvodaya <https://www.facebook.com/SarvodayaSriLanka/> 14,760 people like this
7. Minor Matters <https://www.facebook.com/MinorMatters.org/> 703 people like this
8. National Peace Council of Sri Lanka <https://www.facebook.com/npcsl/> 2,887 people like this
9. Search for Common Ground Sri Lanka <https://www.facebook.com/SFCGSriLanka> 7,238 people like this
10. Youth for Sri Lanka <https://www.facebook.com/youthforsrilanka.lk/> 1,195 people like this

Contemporary, social trends can lead to generate new types of conflicts and trends. The study on Stigma and Moral Panic about COVID-19 in Sri Lanka has highlighted that the outbreak of stigma has reinforced and further deepened the already existing social cleavages along ethnic, religious, and class lines. For instance, hate speech against Muslims already well-established in sections of Sinhala and Tamil societies during the past decade also escalated due to the Easter Sunday attacks have been reinvigorated during the pandemic at least in part due to pandemic related grievances such as the legitimate demand for the burial of Muslim dead bodies (Silva, n.d.).

The involvement of youth in promoting peace through social media is minimal compared to hate speech propaganda. The organizations currently working in promoting peace through

social media are doing a pleasing job. Moreover, it was noted that there is a lack of coordinated efforts of organizations/groups working in promoting peace. It was noted that there are two views of countering hate speech. Use of facts, figures, logic to design peace-promoting messages countering hate speech is considered one way of countering the hate speech while using imagery messages and designing the messages that are more appealing to youth (Search for Common Ground–Sri Lanka, 2019).

Youth have many potentialities to engage in promoting and protecting the freedom of religion or belief. However, there are few opportunities or platforms for youth to actively engage. Many stakeholders have researched how to get youth involved in promoting religious rights. Furthermore, they are suggesting tools and instruments in reaching this goal. For instance, dialogues and conversations are the best way to dispel mistrust and misunderstanding (Regional Center for Ethnic Studies, 2019). There are governmental and civil societal initiatives in promoting reconciliation and religious harmony in Sri Lanka. Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) has launched a project known as “Heal the past, build the future” that brings together the religious leaders, youth, government representatives, and civil society actors to raise awareness in transforming conflict (ONUR’s “Heal the Past Build the Future” Project Expanded, 2018). Meanwhile, religious leaders seem to come together across different religions to promote interreligious harmony at grassroots levels. For example, several District Interreligious Committees are functioning at the district levels under the support of the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka (Interreligious Peacebuilding for Communities, 2020) and the Interreligious Forum by Caritas Sri Lanka.

The impact of the COVID -19 pandemic caused several changes in the application of religious rituals and indigenous knowledge in Sri Lanka. It appeared that some changes occurred in the rituals and offerings as well as customs and manners to maintain the protective measures related to COVID 19. The affairs at religious places accomplished by the devotees, in general, were withheld until further notice (The Social Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka, 2020) while many religious institutions are functioning virtually.

Student for Liberty (SFL) is the world’s largest pro-liberty network that consists of students, professionals, and concerned citizens from around the globe who work for the common goal of advancing the liberty of everyone. Founded in 2008 by a group of students who saw the

wide gap between youth and liberty, the movement grew rapidly into an international network of students and youth leaders who value their freedom and rights.

SFL works to strengthen and empower Sri Lankan youth and connect them with global ideals and trends that define the rights of youth and the opportunities that come along with it. Focusing on topics such as freedom of expression, trade liberalization and free markets, progressive law reforms, peace and justice, democracy and human rights, religious and cultural freedom (Youth Rights and Liberty in Sri Lanka, 2020).

Definition: Youth

The UN Secretariat uses the terms youth and young people interchangeably to mean age 15-24 with the understanding that member states and other entities use different definitions. Several UN entities, instruments and regional organizations have somewhat different definitions of youth, which the United Nations secretariat recognizes. The following table summarizes these differences.

Table 2.2: Different definitions of Youth

Entity/Instrument/Organization	Age	Reference
UN Secretariat/UNESCO/ILO	Youth: 15-24	UN Instruments, Statistic
UN Habitat (Youth Fund)	Youth: 15-32	Agenda 21
UNICEF/WHO/UNFPA	Adolescent: 10-19, Young People: 10-24, Youth 15-24	UNFPA
UNICEF/The Convention on Rights of the Child	Child Until 18	UNICEF
The African Youth Charter	Youth: 15-35	African Union, 2006

Source: *DEFINITION OF YOUTH*. (n.d.)

Definition of youth perhaps changes with circumstances, especially with the changes in demographic, financial, economic, and socio-cultural settings; however, the definition that uses the 15-24 age cohort as youth fairly serves its statistical purposes for assessing the needs of the young people and providing guidelines for youth development.

Definition: Freedom

The Black's Law Dictionary Free Online Legal Dictionary (2nd Ed.) defines “ *Freedom* ’ as *the state of being free, liberty, self-determination, absence of restraint, the opposite of slavery. The power of acting, in the character of a moral personality, according to the dictates of the will, without another check, hindrance, or prohibition than such as may be imposed by just and necessary laws and the duties of social life*”.

Definition: Religion

There are many definitions of Religion and there is no common agreement on it. However, according to Yandell (1999), religion is a conceptual system that provides an interpretation of the world and the place of human beings in it, bases an account of how life should be lived given that interpretation, and expresses this interpretation and lifestyle in a set of rituals, institutions, and practices.

Religion is commonly, but not always, associated with a particular system of faith and worship of a transcendent deity or deities. In human rights discourse, however, the use of the term “religion” also includes support for the right to non-religious beliefs, such as atheism or agnosticism (University of Minnesota Human Rights Center, 2016). In 1993 the Human Rights Committee, an independent body of 18 experts selected through a UN process, described religion or belief as theistic, non-theistic, and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. The terms “*belief*” and “*religion*” are to be broadly construed. Article 18 is not limited in its application to traditional religions or religions and beliefs with institutional characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions (CCPR General Comment No. 22: Article 18, 1993).

This literature review’s purpose is to help the reader understand different aspects posed by the survey on Y-FORB in Sri Lanka. There have been a few pieces of research and discussion conducted on religious violence, discrimination. However, there are no recent studies done on the engagement of youth in freedom of religion or belief in Sri Lanka. More research and testing are required to gain a better understanding of the Y-FORB in the contemporary context in Sri Lanka.

Chapter 03- Methodology

This online survey was conducted from 12th July 2021 to 31st July 2021 to gather data and this survey was open only for Sri Lankans who were residing in the country. Social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and email communications were used to disseminate the survey questionnaire. The online survey questionnaire was boosted on Facebook by customizing the audience as Sri Lankans age above 15 to get more reach.

The quantitative data was gathered in this survey. In addition, few open-ended questions were included to get suggestions from the respondents. However, the majority of data is quantitative data which provides close-ended questions. Therefore, this survey can be identified as a mixed-method survey.

The survey covered socio-demographic data namely age, gender, district, ethnicity, and religion, etc. In addition, questions were developed by aiming to measure the knowledge and the attitude of Y-FORB and to identify what youth do for FORB. Agreement and involvement were measured on a Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree/ Always to strongly disagree/ not at all. The survey was constructed in Sinhala, Tamil, and English, and all were translated into English at the end. The survey responses were imported to excel and analyzed. The responses to open-ended questions were analyzed using content analysis. SPSS software has been used to analyze quantitative data. To analyze and to come to a conclusion the secondary data also has been utilized occasionally. Data, as well as the findings, are presented by using charts, tables, and other infographic tools.

Limitations and Ethical considerations

Limitations:

This survey was conducted only for two weeks to finalize the report to extract the findings for the execution of the youth workshops. Therefore, it was done in a very short period. In terms of coverage, it is widely recognized that online surveys use only samples of Internet users. Therefore, this survey brings the analysis of the responses made by the people who have internet facilities.

As found in the literature survey, the age of youth has been defined as 15 to 24. However, it was discussed and agreed with the team of consultants that most of the youth in the Northern and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka missed the time to enjoy their lives as youth due to the armed conflict. It was discussed that there should be adequate opportunities for them to express and voice for themselves though they have exceeded the generally agreed age limit of the youth. To include their responses and opinions, the individuals aged 15 to 35 have identified as the youth in this survey by considering local context and general practicalities.

Ethical considerations:

This survey has been designed and conducted by a team of consultants representing different fields of expertise such as academic, development, judicial, and peace-building. The team of consultants had to conclude the survey and submit the report within one month. Therefore, instead of ethical clearness, the team itself came into an agreement to sustain within the team since the team has been equipped with different types of expertise such as academics.

All the gathered data has been presented anonymously. In the online survey form itself, personal data such as name, identity card number, and email address has not been gathered. The survey form has been made available in Sinhala, Tamil, and English to make sure that all ethnic and language groups can respond equally. All the findings are analyzed only based on received responses in both qualitative and quantitative ways.

Chapter 04 - Findings

The results of the survey are presented in major two parts.

Part 1 – Quantitative Analysis

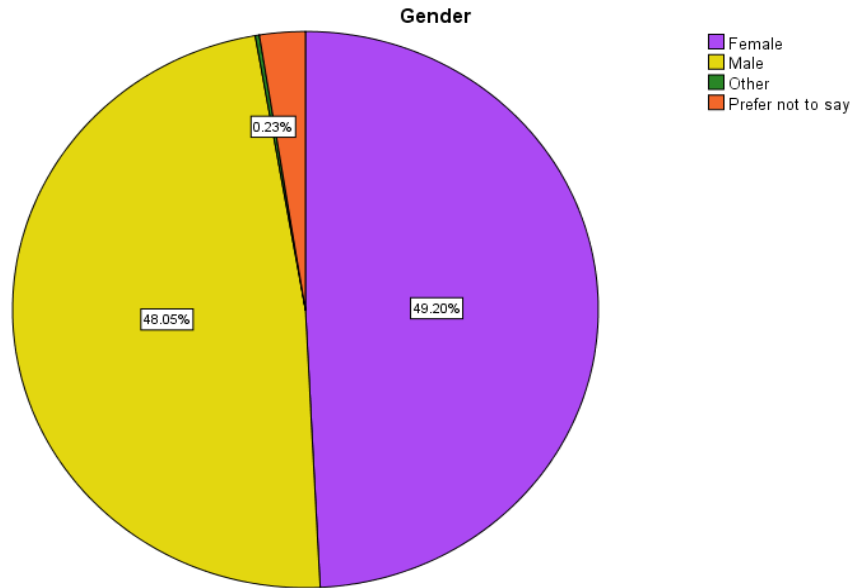
Table 4.1: Demographic data of the respondents

N=437

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Language	Sinhala	265	60.6
	English	112	25.6
	Tamil	60	13.7
Gender	Female	215	49.2
	Male	210	48.1
	Other	1	0.2
	Prefer not to say	11	2.5

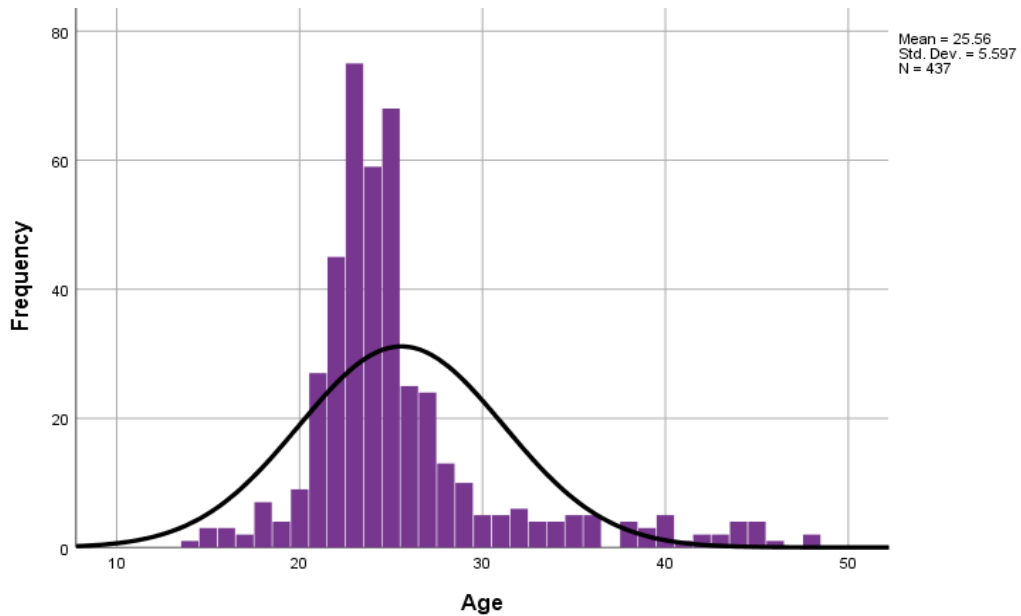
The table shows the total number of respondents who participated in the survey. The total number of respondents was 437. Among them, 60.6% of respondents have used Sinhala medium survey form to respond to this survey. Tamil medium form has been filled by only 13.7% of respondents. Out of 437 respondents, 215 (49.2%) the respondents were females and 48.1% were male, respectively.

Figure 4.1: Distribution of the gender of the respondents



90% of the respondents were youth aged between 15 to 35. This is an interesting finding that people who are above 35 also have responded by considering them as youth.

Figure 4.2: Distribution of age of the respondents



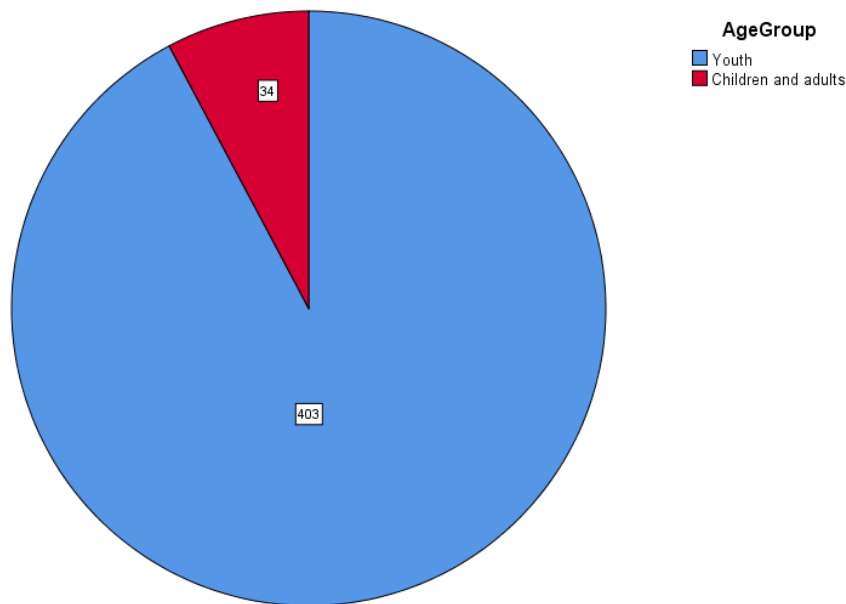
The above histogram shows that the majority of the respondents were between 20 and 30 years old and the mean age was 25.56.

Table 4.2: Age Groups - I

Age category	Frequency	Percentage
Bellow 14	1	.2
15 - 35	403	92.2
Above 36	33	7.6
Total	437	100.0

In order to achieve the objective of the survey, we have filtered the age from 15 to 35 as the youth. It helps to identify more accurate data which are more relevant to the youth.

Figure 4.3: Age Groups - II



The figure shows that to fulfill the purpose of the survey, a total of 437 individuals were selected and the number of individuals (34) who were excluded from the survey was below 14 and above 35. As mentioned under the limitation, it has been mentioned that this survey was only focusing on Y-FORB in Sri Lanka.

Table 4.3: Distribution of the religious Identity/ belief of youth

N=403

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Buddhist	269	66.7
Islam	62	15.4
Roman Catholic	24	6.0
Hindu	18	4.5
Christian	15	3.7
Atheists	13	3.2
Other	2	.5

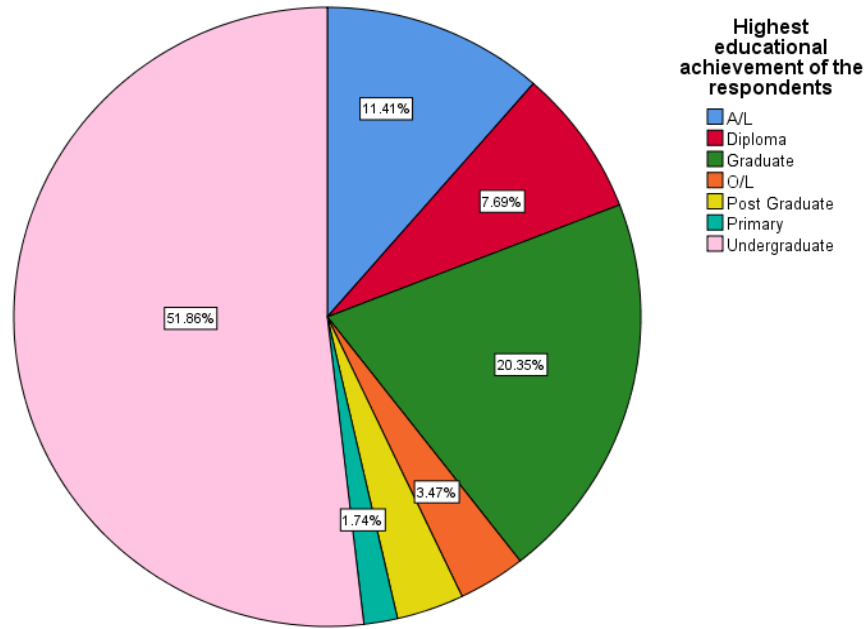
The table shows the religion of the respondents. The majority (66.7%) of the respondents were Buddhists while the second-highest number of respondents adhered to Islam and it is 15.4% of the total sample population.

Table 4.4: Distribution of age and the gender of the respondents

Age - Group		Gender			Total	Total %
		Male	Female	Prefer not to say		
Age - Group	15 - 19	7	10	2	19	5%
	20-24	100	110	5	215	53%
	25-29	72	66	2	140	35%
	30-35	13	16	0	29	7%
Total		192	202	9	403	
Total %		48%	58%			

5% of the respondents who had responded to this survey were between the 15- and 19 age group and 10 out of 19 were female. 88% of the respondents were between the 20 and 29 age group.

Figure 4.4: Education background of the respondents



According to the educational qualification of the respondents, more (51.86%) than half of the respondents were undergraduates while the total of graduate or undergraduate respondents was over 72%. The respondents have an optimal status of educational achievements.

Table 4.5: Distribution of Respondents by District

District	Respondents	%	District	Respondents	%
Ampara	9	2.23%	Kurunegala	51	12.66%
Anuradhapura	11	2.73%	Mannar	4	0.99%
Badulla	9	2.23%	Matale	11	2.73%
Batticaloa	7	1.74%	Matara	41	10.17%
Colombo	53	13.15%	Monaragala	3	0.74%
Galle	20	4.96%	Mullaitivu	1	0.25%
Gampaha	53	13.15%	Nuwara Eliya	3	0.74%
Hambantota	17	4.22%	Polonnaruwa	2	0.50%
Jaffna	6	1.49%	Puttalam	8	1.99%
Kalutara	36	8.93%	Ratnapura	14	3.47%
Kandy	25	6.20%	Trincomalee	4	0.99%
Kegalle	12	2.98%	Vavuniya	2	0.50%
Kilinochchi	1	0.25%	Total	403	100.00%

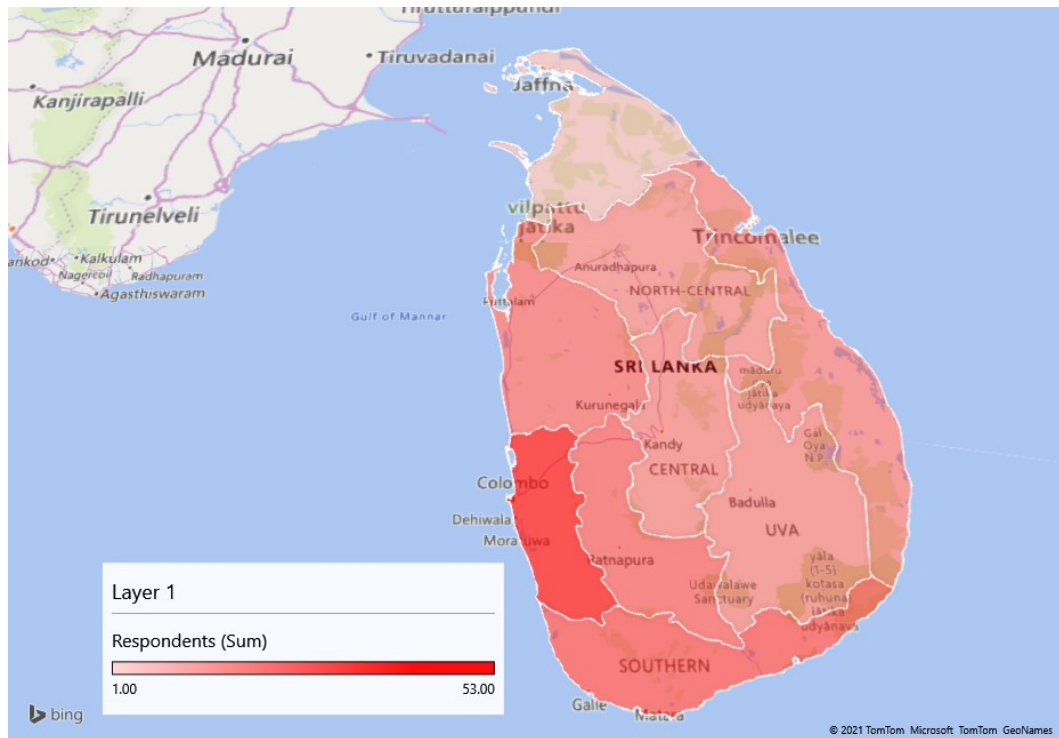


Figure 4.5: Distribution of Respondents by Districts

As per the above map, the respondents are more likely to be centered towards the Western Province and it was 35.23%. Very few respondents were representing the Northern Province.

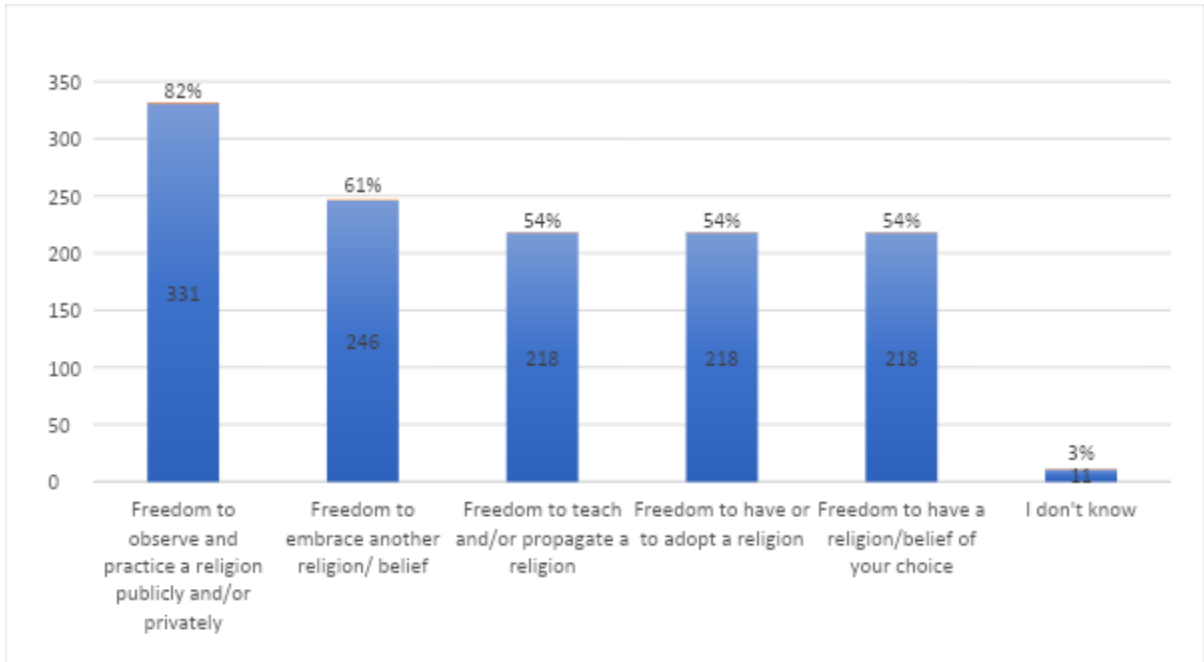
Table 4.6: Distribution of the answers received for the question asked on, do you think freedom of religion and belief is a universal human right?

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	389	96.5
No	4	1.0
I don't know	10	2.5
Total	403	100.0

Among all respondents, over 96% of them answered correctly for the question which was asked to evaluate their knowledge on religion or belief in the perspective of human rights. It shows that very few respondents have not recognized or are aware that all humans can enjoy their FORB in Sri Lanka.

Figure 4.6: What has been protected by the freedom of religion or belief

N=403



81% of respondents have identified freedom to observe and practice religion publicly and/or privately is being protected by FORB. However, a minimum of 218 respondents were aware that freedom to teach or propagate, freedom to adopt a religion, and freedom to have a religion/belief of their choice are protected by the FORB. Among these respondents, 03% had marked as they do not know what has been protected by FORB in Sri Lanka.

Table 4.7: Distribution of answers received for the question asked ‘whether Buddhism is the state religion of Sri Lanka?’

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	303	75.2
No	55	13.6
I don't know	45	11.2
Total	403	100.0

It shows that more than 75% of the respondents believe that Buddhism is the state religion though, ‘Buddhism is not recognized as the state religion in Sri Lanka. A 2003 Supreme Court ruling determined that the state is constitutionally required to protect only Buddhism, and other religions do not have the same right to claim the protection from the state (Freedom House, 2020)’. Around 13% of youth only answered No.

Table 4.8: Distribution of answers given to the question on, which Article in the Sri Lankan Constitution provides for the freedom of religion? And the comparison with different religious or belief groups

		Which Article in the Sri Lankan Constitution provides for the freedom of religion?		Total	Total %
		Right Answer	Wrong Answer		
Religious Identity/ belief	Buddhist	23	246	269	67%
	Islam	13	49	62	15%
	Roman Catholic	3	21	24	6%
	Christian	0	15	15	4%
	Hindu	0	18	18	4%
	Atheists	1	12	13	3%
	Other	0	2	2	0%
Total		40	363	403	

According to the table, 363 out of 403 respondents answered incorrectly to the knowledge question asked about the constitutional provision for FORB in Sri Lanka. However, 40 respondents have given the right answer. This finding showed that the knowledge of respondents on the law was not considerable.

Table 4.9: Distribution of the answers given for the question on, Is it a legal requirement for religious centers to be registered in Sri Lanka?

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	230	57.1
No	66	16.4
I don't know	107	26.6
Total	403	100.0

The above table indicates the responses to the question on the requirement of registration of a worship place with the Government in Sri Lanka though there is no such a requirement stipulated anywhere. Over 57% of the respondents answered as Yes to the question asked about the legal requirement of registering religious centers. Only 16% of respondents were aware that there is no such requirement in Sri Lanka.

Table 4.10: Distribution of the answers received for the question on have the respondents ever faced any sort of violence/ discrimination against their freedom of religion or belief

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	88	21.9%
No	298	73.9%
I Don't know	17	4.2%
Total	403	

According to the table, 73% of respondents indicated that they have not faced any sort of violence/ discrimination against their freedom of religion or belief. 21% of respondents experienced violence/ discrimination against their freedom of religion or belief. 04% of the respondents did not know whether they faced such violence or discrimination according to their knowledge.

21% of respondents have shared their experience on facing violence/ discrimination against their FORB and what action have they taken under the follow-up question.

These respondents have mentioned various types of reactions under this open-ended question in the survey form. Some of the respondents gave complex answers while some of them answered in one- or two-word for this question. The following statement reflects a complex experience shared by an anonymous respondent who encountered this experience in an educational institute where she/he studies. she/he reacted aggressively as her/his previous issue was not amicably remedied She stated *“Working in a group activity in my educational institute. I was called using various names, with so much hate in it. I silently endured for some time as I was the only person with specific beliefs and I respect other humans. One day, I lost my endurance. I called the lab assistant. I requested to provide me with everything individually, so that I can continue my practicals alone rather than in that group. I explained what happened. I’m happy I was given a separate place to learn”*.

The survey shows that some actions were linking to different dimensions of the FORB. Those actions can be categorized into a few subcategories as follows.

1. Take legal actions

Anonymously some participants have shared their experiences as follows. Some respondents mentioned that they have taken legal actions against the violence or discrimination that happened to them. *“I debated and took legal action”*. Moreover, most of them have mentioned that they have informed the relevant authorities about the incidents that happened to them. Some of the respondents said that they informed the authority.

Some respondents stated that these issues can be taken to the institutional or organizational level authority or else to the national level authorities under the Criminal Law. However, some respondents have claimed that though they wanted to take actions they have not been allowed to do that. A respondent said that *“Not provided an opportunity to take action”*. The survey also revealed that the available options were not effective or not easily accessible in an emergency situation. The survey also confirmed that though the people take action against the violence or discrimination against FORB, they were not addressed properly. One participant said that *“Though the government authority and the administrative authority were informed, they have not taken any action for that”*.

2. Nonviolent direct actions or taken action to stop or prevent.

Respondents have used different types of strategies to handle violence/ discriminations that happened to them in different setups or levels. It was found that most of the respondents used social media platforms for awareness creation. A respondent agreed that *“we need to make awareness of the communities on this aspect via social media”* and some of the respondents have specifically mentioned that they have used social media to take action against the violence or discrimination against FORB. Another respondent said that *“I reported about the fake news circulated on social media”*. The majority of the respondents of this survey were undergraduates. It indicates that the university students have trained to get support or advice from seniors when they face any violence or discrimination against their FORB. Some conceded that *“we take advice from seniors”* Another group of respondents said that their dress and cultural components also have been challenged under the theme of FORB. A respondent worried that *“we faced violence due to our dress code. We did nonviolence*

resistance and raise my voice over that and questioned about it” This shows that when they faced any sort of violence or discrimination against FORB they used to take nonviolent direct actions. And they have used those technical terms while responding to the question. Moreover, some respondents have mentioned that they have protested. Respondents could handle problems and manage them before they become worse. This was agreed by a respondent saying that *“I handled the problem smoothly, and avoided the violence got worse”* Educating people on religion was found to be an effective action that can be taken by the respondents when they face violence or discrimination on their FORB. One respondent said that *“I asked them why they do so and discussed with them about my religion”*.

After considering the issue the respondents proposed some sustainable answers for the religious discrimination saying that awareness-raising is an important element in nonviolent direct actions and also they agreed that understanding the opposite party is important. Some respondents said that they explained very well about their religion and also they found that This approach can be found to be wise in addressing an issue. And also, being the victim, still, they are able to act patiently. Another respondent while explaining this said that *“their freedom is up to my nose and no need to get onto the nose”*.

The respondents demonstrated their ability to express their standpoint on their rights. However, when they combat violence or discrimination they have to consider the family and the loved ones. One person considering this aspect responded that *“while fighting against it we were trying to protect our families and neighbors”*.

3. Using power or violent actions

The survey revealed that respondents did not seek violent measures/actions against violence or discrimination on their FORD. However, some respondents had taken few violent actions in return. One respondent acknowledged that *“I damage the religious place”* and some respondents showed their potentiality to use power. However, they have not defined their power One respondent also accepted that *“even though I had the power I could not use it”* However, it was noticeable that these statements have shown that youth are motivated to take violent actions when they face any sort of violence or discrimination on their FORB.

4. Internal reflection and positive transformation

When respondents were facing violence or discrimination against their FORB, they tend to start an internal reflection on it. Some of them have used popular methods such as forgiveness, peace. One respondent divulged that we should forgive all of them who were involved in the April attack -2019. Another respondent said that “it is better to remain silent”. Most of the respondents have admired the patience within themselves. And they did not feel like doing anything because of intrapersonal conversation and reflection. A respondent said that *“I didn't feel like I could take any concrete steps. I felt more aware of my identity, and the importance of preserving the spaces in which I can hold on to my beliefs”* When Identity and such sensitive issues come up, the respondents realized the challenges and how to be more resilient. Also, they tended to go for a deeper discussion within the self about their own identity.

5. Avoid and walk away or kept silent

The survey showed that when the youth face violence/discrimination against FORB they tend to feel helpless. A respondent agreed with this and said *“it's the worst feeling could treat like a refugee in our own country”*. This statement is appealing that these types of ignorance or violence can hit the bottom of the heart of the victim. Some respondents have mentioned that they had to walk away when they faced violence or discrimination. A respondent said that *“I walked away when I was discriminated”*. There were some clues provided by the respondents that they had an attitude that they can't do anything as the minority in the country. A respondent lamented that *“I couldn't do anything, because they are using their power against the minorities and unfortunately, as a minority, I'm not able to any action against it”*.

They not only emphasized the majority-minority complex but also talked about power and security. It showed that some of the respondents did not have an intention to disclose the incident even now. Those people have expressed the following feelings as the answer which communicates the complexity of the problem. It was clear that not only minority religious groups, but also the majority religious group also are facing some challenges in specific situations. A respondent expressed that *“I gave priority to Buddhism when I was at the*

University student council. Then some people questioned about the religion which I observed and scolded violently. I kept silent”.

Being a member of the majority religious group is not guaranteed that everyone has 100% of FORB. They also can be challenged or questioned. Moreover, the Atheists claimed that they can't do anything against them when they faced any violence or discrimination against their way of thinking. A respondent stated that *“an atheist cannot take any action in this dump country”*.

6. Did nothing

When analyzing the actions taken by the respondents against the violence or discrimination on their FORB, the majority of the respondents gave more neutral or passive answers. But some of the respondents intentionally played a passive role when they face any sort of violence or discrimination against the FORB. *“I ignored it because we can't convince everyone to believe in what we believe. Typical people are everywhere. They just believe what they want to believe. When I got to know that those people can't be convinced, I just ignored them saying nothing”*.

Respondents did nothing by assuming that it is useless to deal with a person who has no respect towards other religions. *“Nothing. There is nothing I can do or say to a person who has no respect for another religion”*. Some respondents found that doing nothing is the best answer. They found it is useful to remain to do nothing. Furthermore, some respondents have found that the social environment was not safe or supportive to raise or voice. *“I bare it silently because there was no suitable environment to speak up against the injustice” “I did nothing. Because that is the best answer in the world”* However, some respondents could not face such incidents because of their age. *“Nothing. I was 9 when it happened”*. *“I did nothing since I was helpless”* The above content analysis indicates that different personalities have reacted differently when they faced any sort of violence/ discrimination against their FORB.

Table 4.11: Distribution of Agreement of Respondents on the following statement; “Deprivation/violation of freedom of religion or belief can lead to violent conflicts in Sri Lanka”.

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	168	41.7
Agree	124	30.8
Neutral	83	20.6
Disagree	19	4.7
Strongly disagree	9	2.2
Total	403	100.0

The cumulative percentage of agreed or strongly agreed respondents was 72% which showed that the respondents had the ability to understand the danger of the deprivation of FORB. Very few respondents (07%) only disagreed with this statement.

Table 4.12: Agreement of the respondents on “Worship in public places is good”.

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	48	11.9
Agree	126	31.3
Neutral	185	45.9
Disagree	35	8.7
Strongly disagree	9	2.2
Total	403	100.0

According to the above table, 45% of the respondents were neutral on the statement of “worship in a public place is good”. 11% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the above statement.

Table 4.13: Cross tabulation of the distribution of religious identity/ belief and the statement on “Religious rituals play an important role in my life”.

		“Religious rituals play an important role in my life”.			Total
		Agree	Disagree	Neutral	
Merged Religious Identity/ belief	Buddhist	192	10	67	269
	Islam	57	1	4	62
	Hindu	15	1	2	18
	Roman Catholic and Christian (merge)	33	2	4	39
	Atheists and Other (merge)	3	10	2	15
Total		300	24	79	403
Total %		74%	6%	20%	

The table indicates that 74% of the respondents agreed that religious rituals play an important role in their lives while 06% of them disagreed with this statement.

Table 4.14: Distribution of the answer to the question on, are you willing to disclose your religious identity while you are accessing public services?

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	233	58%
No	170	42%
Total	403	100%

The table reflects the opinion of the respondents on the disclosure of their religious identity. 42% of the respondents did not prefer to disclose their religious identity while accessing public services. However, the majority (57%) of the respondents agreed that they do not have any objection to disclosing their religious identity.

Table 4.15: Cross tabulation of the distribution of agreement on the statement on "I believe religious freedom helps to build social cohesion among diverse communities and the religious Identity/ belief"

		Religious Identity/ belief					Total	Total %
		Buddhist	Hindu	Islam	Roman Catholic and Christian	Atheists and Other		
'I believe religious freedom helps to build social cohesion among diverse communities'.	Strongly agree	106	10	46	13	3	178	44%
	Agree	127	7	14	19	4	171	42%
	Neutral	33	1	1	6	6	47	12%
	Disagree	0	0	1	0	2	3	1%
	Strongly disagree	3	0	0	1	0	4	1%
Total		269	18	62	39	15	403	100%

For the question of whether religious freedom helps to build social cohesion among diverse communities, more than 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that religious freedom helps to build social cohesion among diverse communities. However, 02% of the respondents did not agree with this statement.

Table 4.16: Frequency of seeing any posts on social media by the respondents that violate freedom of religion or belief

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	304	75.4
No	62	15.4
Not aware	37	9.2
Total	403	100.0

According to the table, 75.4% of respondents acknowledged that some posts on social media violate FORB and 9.2% of respondents were not even aware of how to recognize posts that violate FORB.

Table 4.17: Distribution of frequency of reporting social media posts that violate freedom of religion or belief

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	165	40.9
No	238	59.1
Total	403	100.0

The above table indicates that 75% of respondents witnessed Facebook posts that violate freedom of religion or belief and only 40% of respondents marked as they are reporting such social media posts in their own capacity.

Table 4.18: Comparison of the distribution of use of social media as a platform to make public awareness on freedom of religion or belief and age group.

		Do you use social media (Facebook/ Twitter/ Instagram/ WhatsApp etc.) as a platform to make public awareness of freedom of religion or belief?		Total	Total %
		No	Yes		
Age - Group	15 - 19	16	3	19	5%
	20-24	140	75	215	53%
	25-29	84	56	140	35%
	30-35	18	11	29	7%
Total		258	145	403	
Total %		64%	36%		

The information shows that the majority of the respondents who represent the age group 20-24 used social media as a platform to make awareness on FORB. However, 64% of respondents did not use social media platforms to make the communities aware of FORB.

Table 4.19: Cross tabulation of age and the frequency of the reaction to the statement of “I practice my religion or belief as an individual”

		I practice my religion or belief as an individual.				Total
		Always	Often	Rarely	Not at all	
Age - Group	15 - 19	10	6	0	3	19
	20-24	142	60	8	5	215
	25-29	87	30	15	8	140
	30-35	20	6	1	2	29
Total		259	102	24	18	403
Total %		64%	25%	6%	4%	

The table shows that a considerable number of respondents (64%) of the respondents practiced religion or belief as an individual. Only 4% of the respondents indicated that they do not practice their religion or belief in an individual capacity.

Table 4.20: Cross tabulation of age and the frequency of the reaction to the statement of “I practice my religion with my community”

		“I practice my religion with my community”				Total
		Always	Often	Rarely	Not at all	
Age - Group	15 - 19	7	6	6	0	19
	20-24	84	95	32	4	215
	25-29	48	54	27	11	140
	30-35	14	6	6	3	29
Total		153	161	71	18	403
Total %		38%	40%	18%	4%	

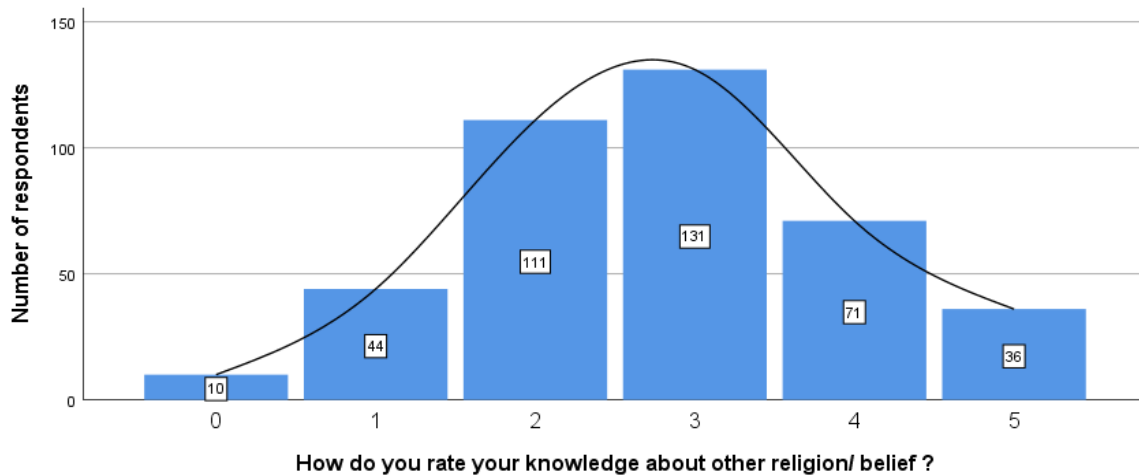
It was noticed that there was a significant difference relating to the practice of religion or belief on a personal level and community level. However, only 38% of the respondents indicated that they practiced the religion or belief at the community level.

Table 4.21: Cross Tabulation between Age - Group and how the respondents have indicated their knowledge about other religions/ belief

		How do you rate your knowledge about other religions/beliefs?							
		0	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Total %
Age - Group	15 - 19	1	3	4	6	2	3	19	5%
	20-24	5	27	62	70	36	15	215	53%
	25-29	4	13	39	44	30	10	140	35%
	30-35	0	1	6	11	3	8	29	7%
Total		10	44	111	131	71	36	403	
Total %		2%	11%	28%	33%	18%	9%		

For the question of their opinion on the knowledge about other religions, 33% of the respondents indicated that they have a middle range of knowledge on other religions/beliefs. Only 09% of respondents agreed that they have higher knowledge of other religions/beliefs.

Figure 4.7: Distribution of overall knowledge of the respondents on the other religion/ belief



Respondents have rated their knowledge of other religions/ beliefs from 0 (minimum value) to 5 (maximum value). The rating was skewed towards the center.

Table 4.22: Cross tabulation of the age and the willingness of the respondents to engage in interreligious activities or dialogue

		Age - Group				Total	Total %
		15 - 19	20-24	25-29	30-35		
How willing are you to engage in interreligious activities or dialogue?	Very much	7	52	35	7	101	25%
	A lot	3	52	39	9	103	26%
	No idea	6	49	29	3	87	22%
	A little	2	25	20	4	51	13%
	Not at all	1	37	17	6	61	15%
Total		19	215	140	29	403	

The table demonstrates that 52% of the respondents belonging to the age group 20-24 indicated that they are willing (very much or a lot) to engage in interreligious activities or dialogue. Only 28% of them were not interested in engaging in interreligious activities or dialogue. The table below showcases which ethnic groups were interested in engaging in interreligious activities or dialogue.

Table 4.23: Cross tabulation of the Ethnic Identity and the willingness of the respondents to engage in interreligious activities or dialogue

		Ethnic Identity					Total	Total %
		Sinhala	Sri Lanka Moor	Sri Lankan Tamil	Indian Tamil	Other		
How willing are you to engage in interreligious activities or dialogue?	Very much	60	37	2	0	2	101	25%
	A lot	83	8	10	1	1	103	26%
	A little	35	8	7	1	0	51	13%
	No idea	74	4	4	2	3	87	22%
	Not at all	54	0	3	1	3	61	15%
Total		306	57	26	5	9	403	
Total %		76%	14%	6%	1%	2%		

The above table illustrates the relationship between the Ethnic Identity of the respondents and their willingness to engage in interreligious activities or dialogue. The results show that 60% of the Sinhala respondents were very much interested in having interreligious activities or dialogue and 37% of the respondents belonging to Muslim communities also acknowledged that they are prepared to engage in interreligious activities.

Cross Tabulations of age groups and the communication tools used by the respondents

Table 4.24: Use of WhatsApp, Viber chats/calls

		WhatsApp, Viber chats/calls			Not at all	Total
		Always	Often	Rarely		
Age - Group	15 - 20	10	4	5	0	19
	20-25	156	54	2	3	215
	25-30	97	37	3	3	140
	30-35	14	13	2	0	29
Total		277	108	12	6	403
Total %		69%	27%	3%	1%	

The above table expresses the relationship between the age group of respondents and the communication tools used by them. The results show that a total of 156 Sinhala respondents belonging to the 20-25 age group expressed that they always use social media such as WhatsApp, Viber for communication. And, another 97 respondents belonging to the 25-30 age group also agreed that they always use the social media mentioned above.

Table 4.25: Use of zoom/Google Meet/Skype

		Zoom/Google Meet/Skype				Total
		Always	Often	Rarely	Not at all	
Age - Group	15 - 20	5	11	2	1	19
	20-25	84	106	19	6	215
	25-30	43	65	25	7	140
	30-35	1	22	6	0	29
Total		133	204	52	14	403
Total %		33%	51%	13%	3%	

The above table indicates the respondents' utility of zoom/Google/Skype. The results show that a total of 84 respondents belonging to the 20-25 age group expressed that they always use social media such as zoom/Google/Skype for various purposes. And, other 43 respondents belonging to the 25-30 age group also agreed that they always use the social media mentioned above.

Table 4.26: Use of Facebook

		Facebook				
		Always	Often	Rarely	Not at all	Total
Age - Group	15 - 20	3	0	10	6	19
	20-25	85	86	24	20	215
	25-30	73	47	10	10	140
	30-35	10	11	2	6	29
Total		171	144	46	42	403
Total %		42%	36%	11%	10%	

Table 4.27: Use of YouTube

		YouTube				
		Always	Often	Rarely	Not at all	Total
Age - Group	15 - 20	7	9	3	0	19
	20-25	84	98	28	5	215
	25-30	64	56	19	1	140
	30-35	8	13	8	0	29
Total		163	176	58	6	403
Total %		40%	44%	14%	1%	

Table 4.28: Use of Instagram

		Instagram				
		Always	Often	Rarely	Not at all	Total
Age - Group	15 - 20	6	6	2	5	19
	20-25	34	63	36	82	215
	25-30	29	37	28	46	140
	30-35	3	2	10	14	29
Total		72	108	76	147	403
Total %		18%	27%	19%	36%	

Table 4.29: Use of websites/Blogs

		Websites/Blogs				Total
		Always	Not at all	Often	Rarely	
Age - Group	15 - 20	3	4	8	4	19
	20-25	51	12	113	39	215
	25-30	31	6	67	36	140
	30-35	7	1	16	5	29
Total		92	23	204	84	403
Total %		23%	6%	51%	21%	

Table 4.30: Use of other social media (such as Twitter, and LinkedIn)

		Other social media (such as Twitter, and LinkedIn)				Total
		Always	Often	Rarely	Not at all	
Age - Group	15 - 20	0	3	3	13	19
	20-25	8	62	69	76	215
	25-30	15	48	39	38	140
	30-35	1	9	10	9	29
Total		24	122	121	136	403
Total %		6%	30%	30%	34%	

Table 4.31: Use of phone calls/SMS

		Phone calls/SMS				Total
		Always	Often	Rarely	Not at all	
Age - Group	15 - 20	7	5	5	2	19
	20-25	96	81	35	3	215
	25-30	64	58	16	2	140
	30-35	12	14	3	0	29
Total		179	158	59	7	403
Total %		44%	39%	15%	2%	

WhatsApp, Viber chats/calls (69%), Phone calls/SMS (44%) Facebook (42%) YouTube (40%) are the always used communication tools among the respondents. Other social media (such as Twitter, and LinkedIn) has the lowest (06%) usage among youth. Though the Use of Instagram was a trending communication channel among youth, a low number (18%) of respondents were using it always.

Part 2 – Qualitative Analysis

The youth were requested to answer a few open-ended questions in the survey. Those included what actions have they taken when they face any sort of violence relating to their FORB, what are the available opportunities for youth to engage more on FORB, what are the existing challenges for the engagement of youth for freedom of religion or belief, and suggestions to strengthen the engagement of youth in promoting freedom of religion or belief in Sri Lanka. A content analysis of the responses was done, and the key themes were identified and categorized mainly as personal level and social level. In all these levels, the concerns, challenges, and opportunities can be presented as below. It was identified that personal or social level challenges and opportunities are being directed to find out new pathways of strengthening Y_FORB. In the meanwhile, the policy level decisions have made avenues to take social actions against FORB violations and strengthen Y-FORB.

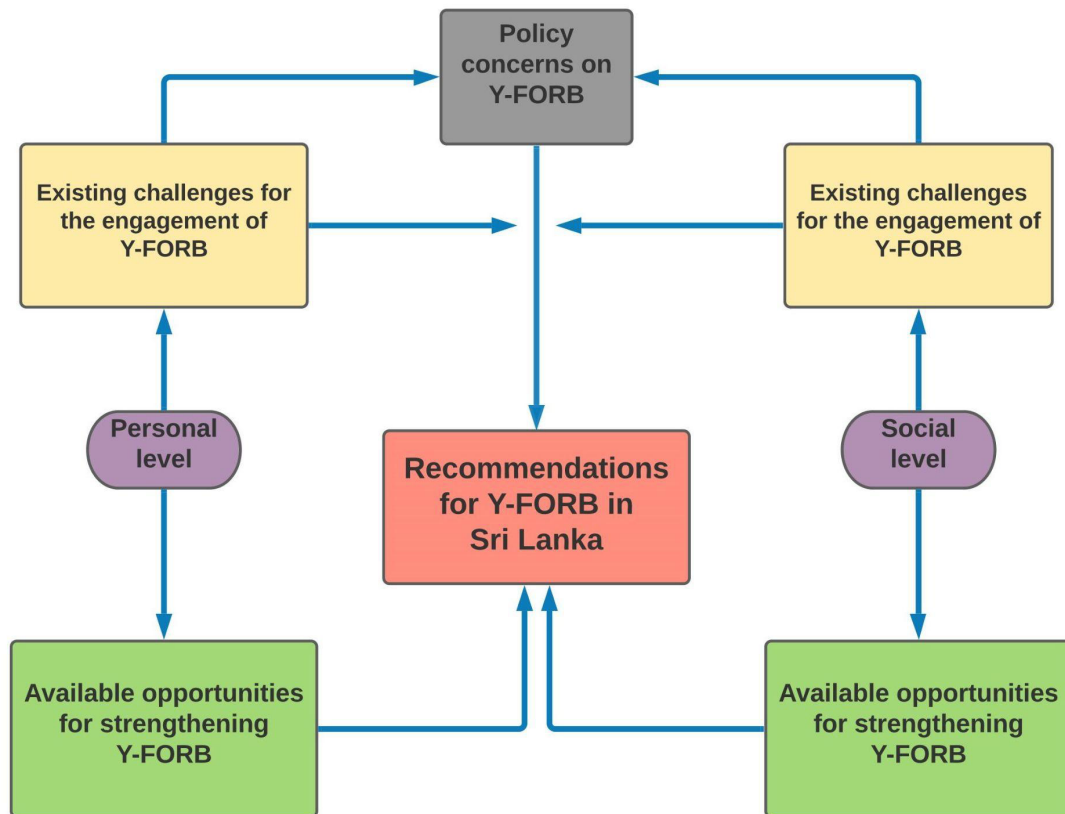


Figure 4.8: Conceptual framework on strengthening Y-FORB

1. 1. The existing challenges for the engagement of youth for freedom of religion or belief in the personal level

When looking at the personal level challenges for youth to involve actively in the area of FORB, most of the respondents have not been able to express their feelings and concerns directly. The majority of them have used few words to express their views on existing challenges. Fear of existence was one of the main challenges. These were expressed as *'Fear of discrimination'*, *'lack of time, fear among youth and insecurity'*, *'fear'* Youth insecurity is reflecting that the youth who are living today have no security in their lives. It can be career and economy, future or social status.

Language and knowledge have also been stated as a major challenge for the FORB in general. Respondents believed that the knowledge of the individual's needs to be updated according to the time. Language barrier plays a major role in FORB. When there is no way for communication that leads to misunderstanding and fear.

Meanwhile, the respondents have mentioned that lack of knowledge on each other's religion can be a challenge for FORB which showed a clear link to the misunderstanding and fear psychology. Some of the youth had mentioned, "*No knowledge about other religions, less social concern, no understanding among religions*". These respondents have claimed that there is no clear understanding among the religions which shows less concern about the society where they live.

Other limitations have been identified as personal-level challenges for FORB. Time limitation, busyness, and daily life routine have become challenges in the personal level.

Some respondents have faced challenges when they show their religious identity in public. The following statement is strong enough to communicate how people are facing challenges when they disclose their own religion. In addition to that family pressure, peer groups are some of the other factors preventing youth involvement in FORB.

1.2. Available opportunities for the engagement of youth for freedom of religion or belief in the personal level

The respondents have argued that there are potential opportunities for Y-FORB though there were limitations or challenges in the personal/ individual level for the FORB. Individuals can enjoy their FORB if they follow their own religion properly. Those who are practicing any religion will get this opportunity to serve as a FORB defender.

"My freedom is not restricted. If an individual is following or living according to his/her own religion, I don't think that there will be any obstruction for that". This statement clearly says that an individual's responsibility is to ensure other's FORB. In another way, it says that having a religion itself is a greater opportunity to protect or promote FORB.

Right based approach for FORB also has been highlighted among the responses. *“Everyone has the right to do whatever s/he wants, but it shouldn't be harmful to anyone.* This also conveys the message that the right to have a religion or belief as one’s own wish, which has been approved by the legal framework of the country. This right has a huge value and a power that enable people to act on their own belief rather than following something directed by the society. *“Ability and the right to follow any religion and the right to change your religion or beliefs at any time”* were the other statements by the respondents in relation to the same aspect on FORB.

These responses have claimed that the FORB inherently belongs to all individuals. Moreover, some respondents have mentioned that they enjoyed the FORB during prayer which is the basic starting point of FORB on a personal level. These opportunities are playing a major role in individual’s lives in order to protect the FORB. However, the majority of respondents only have indicated individual-level opportunities for FORB. Most of the respondents have recognized that the opportunities available for FORB prevails on the social level rather than the individual level.

2.1. The existing challenges for the engagement of youth for freedom of religion or belief in Social level

The youth have identified the challenges of FORB in different levels such as social, political, economic, and cultural aspects. Religion itself has become a challenge for the FORB in some cases.

“Pressures from the religious authorities, elders in the family and other religious members of the community to adhere to what they decide is the 'right' way of practicing religion.

The lack of confidence given to young people to think independently about religion and not be 'scared' to question and query and arrive at their own understanding of whatever spiritual path they choose to follow”.

The above statement reflects the challenges that the Sri Lankan youth face from the family and the religious institution itself. The respondent has argued that the young generation has lost their confidence in religions. Rather than questioning, they were scared in front of religion.

“Society does not allow us to think beyond our own religion”. This statement is appealing as these types of incidents prevent the youth from their fundamental right of freedom of thought and expression. As the youth, they are complaining that society is not allowing them to explore and come up with new ideas. This has become a challenge for youth concerning their FORB.

According to some respondents, some religions were promoting violence, which has become a challenge for FORB today. It was mentioned that *“some religions teach accept violence as something good”*.

This gives a negative image about the religion though the religion is promoting violence or not. However, these types of cults are in the society which can create conflicts. However, there are opposing viewpoints on this matter. Some respondents have explained that bad people and their behavior are the reasons to create such attitudes towards religions.

“Certain religions are considered bad due to the particular community. But it's not true. Every religion has people who use religion as a mere tool for their advantage. That's a problem for the followers of the particular religion. It's no fault of the religion. Due to this reason, people tend to believe only in their religions while discriminating against others. As I know, every religion has only told people to live righteously. But it's people who change religion for their advantage. Religion has nothing to do with it. People who are bad, they are just bad whatever their religion can be”.

The narrative *“my religion is the only truth”* can create problems and tensions against FORB. The other argument is that youth are busy as a society. Due to this busyness, youth are distant from their religion. Furthermore, it has reduced the formation of religious-based youth-led organizations or communities.

It was mentioned that *“there are no religious-based youth committees”*. This shows that youth are aware that youth-led religion-based organizations can contribute to FORB in a better way.

However, with a competitive lifestyle, people are so busy that they do not have time to think about religion. It is clear when there is a gap between youth and religion, their mutual engagement and understanding can be lost.

Education also plays a major role in FORB. The existing education is not supportive to capacitate students on religious values. Therefore, they tend to limit themselves only focusing on their own things as it is. One of the responses emphasized that *“competitive education keeps the youth away from religion, and they are trapped in a religious framework and are not tempted to look for anything outside of their mentor”*.

Education is the tool that helps critical thinking. When the youth are only driven towards educational development, they lose the spirit of religion. As a multi-religious country, Sri Lanka is facing many challenges relating to its diversity. Religious tension between religious groups is common in Sri Lanka. However, respondents argued that religious tension has not been addressed adequately. *“No meaningful engagement and religious tension and pressure from major religious groups towards minorities”*.

Humans as a social animal, they learn from society itself. Social learning is one of the most practical tools for learning. However, youth have clearly mentioned that they have no role models to follow in society. It has become a bigger challenge relating to the FORB. Role models are important when children and youth grow up. The complaint here was that the youth cannot find good role models or influential people to follow today. The following statement has convinced that there is no suitable leadership in religious institutions as well.

“They will have to face humiliations. Priests with no appropriate qualities to hold the positions have now become chief priests. New ideologies are being created from certain cultural trends based on myths - ‘රාවණ දරුවන්, හෙල යක්ඛ පුතුන්, බුදුබණ්ඩු භීෂ්ම උනු දරුණු යකුන්’ and people have to face their barbarous activities”.

When the religious leaders are not following the religion, the followers also act according to the leadership. This challenge has been highlighted by respondents.

Some respondents have found difficulties in public places relating to FORB. The below statement shows how the respondents have experienced challenges in their lives. *“Religious freedom is denied in public places and exams”*.

Furthermore, the law and order seem to act differently relating to FORB. Educational environments or exams are meant to be more independent or impartial. However, in this scenario, it is shown that the respondent’s FORB has been denied in public places.

The social media platform has also been listed as one of the challenges for Y-FORB even though there are positive aspects and opportunities. *“Social media is the biggest challenge as most of today’s youth is heavily addicted to it and it can be used to raise awareness about the religion as well”*.

Those who have different ideologies also have been recognized as the challenges for FORB by the respondents. Respondents have put their thoughts in a violent way which shows extreme dislike.

“Stupid feminist ladies, pretentious Atheists, religious extremists” Feminists, Atheists as well as religious extremists have taken as one bunch of people who had become a challenge for FORB in Sri Lanka. However, Atheists have been targeted as a group of people who criticize other religions. *“Condemning religion by atheist ideas, condemning those who present religious ideologies, Slandering religious sermons”*.

Some respondents have pointed out that extremism has become a social-level challenge for FORB. Religion-wise grouping and violent activities are common scenarios in Sri Lanka in the last few years.

“Religious violence and splitting according to religions”.

“Everyone splits into groups like I’m Islam, I’m Buddhist, and I’m Hindu. That’s not the way. I agree with religious philosophies. But, I’m against the labeling based on religions”.

The following statement confirms that there is pressure on minority religions. Lack of meaningful engagement has become a cause of this issue.

“No meaningful engagement and religious tension and pressure from major religious groups towards minorities”.

Meanwhile, some respondents have mentioned that political will and agenda also has become one of the major challenges for FORB. It was noted that *“politicians are using many religions for their benefits. That means, it deteriorates the value of the religion”*. Here, the respondent has tried to emphasize that when religion becomes a commodity of politicians that can affect the engagement of youth in FORB.

2.2. Available opportunities for the engagement of youth for freedom of religion or belief in social level

The youth have identified limited opportunities that are available for the engagement of FORB at the social level. However, some of the respondents had not identified any opportunity for Y-FORB. As an average, respondents are not well aware of potentials or opportunities for Y-FORB.

Even those who recognized some of the opportunities for Y- FORB were hesitant to mention that there is an optimal level of opportunities. For instance, it was noted *“limited opportunities are available in our countries. They must be further expanded”*. Very few respondents have mentioned religious rituals create a space or opportunities for FORB. However, it does not clearly convey the exact opportunity offered by the religious rituals for FORB. Some respondents have identified that the teachings or the essence of all the religions can be taken as opportunities for RORB. It was noted that *“Young people should always take the core of each religion and decide what is right, rather than being restricted to one religion”*.

The respondents have mentioned only a few of the opportunities which are available for FORB, at the social level. However, the role of the development sector was highlighted with an example of how *“few nonprofit organizations collaborate with university lecturers to discuss the issues and challenges of religious beliefs and freedom”*.

Moreover, the inclusion of religious awareness in formal education, engaging with unions and various societies, and other organizations which conduct religious work and religious discussions were listed out by the respondents as opportunities for youth to engage in FORB. The rest of the respondents did not have any specific answers for FORB and the related opportunities.

3.1. Suggestions to strengthen the engagement of youth in promoting FORB at the personal or individual level

Personal level interventions responsibilities are one of the most important elements of the transformative journey of promoting Y-FORB. By accepting the right to believe, some respondents have mentioned that the youth have to have an independent choice even for religion. The statement *“it is better to allow youth their own way about getting to know every religion without force by an adult”* indicates that no intervention also is a positive intervention for promoting Y-FORB.

Respondents have argued that individuals should have the freedom of choice relating to religion. *“Anyone should be free to follow a spiritual path of their choice and not be pressured into conforming to one particular religion/faith”* Respondents have mentioned that practicing or engaging in their own religion actively, also can strengthen Y-FORB.

Some respondents have discussed attitudinal change which strengthens the capacity as well as the sustainability of Y-FORB. For instance, it was mentioned that *“making your own decisions based on own beliefs is important. The person should develop attitudes to choose the religion of their choice without being hindered by any issues raised by the society”*. There were comments including *“focusing on good attitudes and actions and deploying them for good deeds in general”*. As suggested by the respondents, changing attitude towards positives as well as taking actions indeed are very important steps to promote, protect and strengthen Y-FORB.

It was emphasized that when the youth have identified their respective religion or belief, the next step can be respecting others' FORB. Therefore, accepting other religions also becomes a major requirement in promoting Y-FORB. In addition to that, it has been argued that good

knowledge of other religions can lead to unity. One should be given the opportunity to gain an understanding of other religions, not just his own religious beliefs, inside and outside the school.

Some respondents have stated some indirect answers where they find a solution by a system change by the individual. For instance, one respondent has tried to give the message that voting to the right people, will enable the FORB in a country. The vote is a right of an individual which is very powerful. Apart from that, respondents have mentioned possible interventions for Y-FORB including social media. Moreover, they have come up with new ideas as well. *“It was mentioned that television can be used as a tool for promoting Y-FORB. Also, some of the respondents had given specific ideas which noted arranging dialogues with specific personalities like Dr. Zakir Naik”*.

3.2. Suggestions to strengthen the engagement of youth in promoting FORB in the Social Level

There were suggestions on the social level or above in order to promote Y-FORB. Those suggestions can be divided into a few categories based on thematic areas such as day-to-day social life, religious and inter-religious actions, religion in formal and informal education, awareness-raising activities. Some of the respondents did not answer this mentioning that they are unaware of any suggestions.

a. Promoting Y-FORB in the daily social life

According to the respondents, people should always be mindful. *“One should view each religion in an open-minded manner”* which is important while living in a diverse society. Another respondent stated *“my suggestion is to look at the world in an open-minded manner rather than in a traditional point of view. Learn about different customs of different religions, to allow one's mind to be free, to change the social culture to show that we are all children of the same religion, as children of the same mother”*.

Religion is a given or inherent attribute of life. But the respondents have argued that the person needs to have the freedom to decide after growing as an adult. *“Preparing them to choose a religion when they grow up without deciding their religion at birth”*. The respondents have argued that religion is a personal matter, and it should not affect anyone in any form. This culture should be established in society.

According to the respondents, religious festivals are important for promoting and strengthen Y-FORB. Moreover, the following statement has shown that youth have kept trust in common celebrations and the value of unity. *“We can have one festival as a national festival despite the beliefs where all citizens can participate, strengthening our bonds”*. Some of the respondents have suggested holding these religious festivals with other religious groups as well.

As a suggestion to promote Y-FORB, the respondents have pointed out that religion and politics should be separated from each other. Moreover, the language barrier has been identified as one of the challenges for communication and understanding. Hence, the respondents have suggested focusing on language proficiency is vital when promoting Y-FORB in Sri Lanka.

Children are the most important pillar of society looking at the future. Including children while organizing events is one of the suggestions given by the respondents in order to promote FORB. *“We need to organize events for the children who are from different religions to eradicate racist thoughts and promote unity”*. In order to motivate youth towards religious activities or to promote religious harmony, they should be directed towards the experiential learning process from a young age.

Intergenerational opinion conflicts are common in Sri Lanka. It affects FORB. The respondents have suggested having an intergenerational dialogue. *“Getting ideas, discussion, etc. from people of different ages can create a good conversation”*.

Some respondents have collated several suggestions to strengthen Y-FORB. Those responders have identified Y-FORB cannot be sustained without a set of activities that link each other. *“Give opportunity to all religious people on public occasions, fulfill minority community's*

request, solve language-based shortcomings, and maintain unity from the school days". Additionally, *"creating a youth group and training them and conducting awareness at school level"* have been suggested. The respondents have argued that maintaining unity from the school level is also one of the ways of strengthening Y-FORB in Sri Lanka.

Respondents have raised the need of empowering youth. Having intercultural friendships will enable youth engagement for the FORB. Respondents are urged to have a good relationship for the sake of FORB. They have stated that all religions should maintain a good mutual relationship.

b. Religious and inter-religious actions to strengthen Y-FORB.

The respondents have stated different types of suggestions as the interventions to strengthen and promote Y-FORB. As they have identified, religion itself can be utilized as a tool to promote FORB in different ways. Respondents have suggested the following actions relating to religious or interreligious activities as their suggestions.

Dhamma sermons are one of the most common suggestions which have been stated by the respondents. *"Organizing meaningful Dhamma sermons for the youth community"*. It is important to mention that instead of the dhamma sermon, the respondents have mentioned it as meaning full Dhamma sermon which the youth are looking for. There were many suggestions that are related to Buddhist practices. Most of them were linked with Full moon Poya day activities which were central to Buddhist temples. These include, *"organizing Sil campaigns for the Youth Community, encouraging their contribution to special rituals (poojas) / programs on Poya days"* etc.

Respondents have pointed out that religious teachings can be explained in a way that can be easily understood by youth to have a clear insight. *"People of all religions need to redefine the teachings of their masters to suit the youth"*. Understanding the mindsets of the youth is one of the important facts while promoting Y-FORB.

Also, some of the respondents have mentioned the necessity to have a meaningful discussion with others who are following different religions or beliefs. *“Implementation of discussion forums to share the teachings of all religions not only with their audience but also with people of other religions”*. As suggested by the respondents, the religious discussion forums should include people who are from diverse religious or belief backgrounds. Moreover, some respondents have pointed out that in order to be aware of other religions, people need to be engaged in inter-religious programs. It was noticed that most of the respondents have stated that inter-religious dialogue is the best solution to promote Y-FORB. They have come up with many suggestions as follows.

C. Religion in formal and informal education for promoting Y-FORB

The respondents have stated various suggestions in line with formal and informal education relating to the promotion of Y-FORB in Sri Lanka. *“Improving religious education”* can be identified as one of the most common and repeated answers for this section. Some respondents have defined religious education as *“religious integrity education”*. As mentioned by the respondents, the main purpose of the learning is *“learning to respect all religions”*. The respondents have stated that religious education can be given from School to university level students in a formal way.

According to the respondents, there must be sufficient infrastructure to deliver religious education. *“Developing educational centers”* has been identified as one of the most important actions to be taken to promote Y-FORB. It was mentioned that *“Increasing opportunities for other religious studies”* as a suggestion for promoting Y-FORB. It was highlighted that *“in schools, students need to get the exposure for different cultural activities”*.

Most of the respondents have tried to point out the target audience who needs to get religious education. It was mentioned that the children and youth must get a religious education. Some of the statements included *“educating the youth, teaching properly what is freedom of religion to kids, teaching the importance of religions from a young age”*. Moreover, these respondents have suggested giving religious education without harming their freedom. For instance,

“schools should let the children experience all religions and allow them to make their choice when they are old enough”. The respondent has argued that the children *“should be given the opportunity to gain an understanding of other religions, not just his own religious beliefs, inside and outside the school”*. The respondents have suggested to *“give the youth a clear or accurate understanding of all religions at least up to a certain extent”*. According to the respondents, the students should be guided in a proper manner where they get motivated. For example, *“explain the benefits of practicing a religion”*.

Some respondents have discussed the quality of religious education. *“Educate them the core wisdom in religions rather than rituals and cultural add on”*. This shows that the respondents have given more priority to wisdom rather than rituals. The student needs to be guided on how to respect other religions by learning them. Moreover, it was mentioned that they *“should be taught about living in religious harmony”*. Some respondents had also suggested that strengthening Y-FORB can be done by both educating and taking action. *“Respecting all religions, educating, advocating for oppressed religions, avoiding narrow-minded old-fashioned ideas”* were some of these suggestions.

D. Raising awareness for promoting Y-FORB

The respondents have suggested strengthening youth engagement in promoting FORB. *“Awareness”* was one of the most used words relating to the suggestions given for strengthening Y-FORB. It was noted, *“focusing on broadening the social awareness of each other's religions can be considered as a basic need”*. Respondents have stated that *“awareness programs are needed. Some respondents have suggested to “spread awareness and promote interfaith activities” while others were suggesting to “conduct awareness programs on all religions”*.

As stated by a respondent *“programs should be implemented to increase the interest of the youth for different religious philosophies”*. This respondent has argued that the idea or the acceptance of religious freedom must be deeply rooted in the society itself. The respondents have given several suggestions on how to work on it and what tools can be utilized. The

following statement is reflecting a collection of suggestions to create or strengthen Y-FORB. *“Widespread awareness campaigns, community events such as charity, sharamadana, sports clubs, involving youth in social services, creation of youth club, or if possible, creating a camp where youth receive compulsory training in social well-being, interreligious awareness and the necessary authority to act against and report those who cause discord and hate, or violence”.*

Respondents have suggested having training programs in different ways to promote Y-FORB. They have spoken about how to conduct those programs to raise awareness. *“Further educating the youth, deploying them in group activities”* was highlighted. The objectives of those programs should be to enhance the knowledge of the youth. It was suggested that discussing certain topics with youth is essential. For instance, human rights is one of the common topics that most of the respondents have suggested. While discussing human rights they have put their thoughts on the harms of myths as well.

The respondents have identified social media platforms as one of the best modes of communication to youth. *“Collective programs, online programs, discussion and activation of new ideas through memes can give them a chance and an opportunity to discuss their problems”.* Discussing the problem on different platforms can resolve the doubt which is having in the mindsets of the youth. Some of the respondents have suggested allowing them to engage in online discussions can make a huge impact. The webinar was one of the tools suggested by the respondents to enhance social awareness of FORB among the communities.

Moreover, it has been suggested having youth engaged in activities such as camping, and some innovative actions can promote FORB. Also, open dialogues, dramas, artwork to build cultural cohesion were noted. The respondents have suggested having a more inclusive technique when someone designs a program for youth. It was emphasized to *“ask the youth for their ideas as they may have better ideas than most adults because they engage with other youth. Also, give them the opportunity to be representatives of this initiative”.*

3.3. Policy related suggestions on Y-FORB

Respondents have raised national policy-related concerns as the requirement for Y-FORB under the question of what the existing challenges for the engagement of youth for freedom of religion or belief are. Some respondents have appealed that there should be social activities relating to the national policies. *“Constitutional Establishment of FORB and implementation”* was noted by the respondents. It was also noted that *“to act on a vision at all times, one must be accustomed to a proper policy. For that state policies must be formulated”*.

While some respondents were proposing plural actions, some of the respondents have proposed having one law equal to all religions. *“Removing the laws of religions and establishing common laws for a country”* was mentioned. Though minorities-related laws are important, some of the respondents have claimed that there should be common law in the country. Some respondents urged that every religion should be equal. One of the respondents noted that *“religion depends on where we are born. The religion that parents follow becomes our religion. Everyone should have the right to follow a religion of their preference. I prefer if laws are formed to make sure that no one can force another to follow a certain religion. I dislike rules that restrict people inside religions”*. Youth are not willing to accept enforcement to follow a religion. It reflects the need for freedom of the youth.

Moreover, youth have proposed to eliminate the negative effects of religious propaganda. For instance, *“establish a legal framework to identify and eliminate the harmful effects of religious propaganda, ban extremists”* etc. These statements have indicated that the youth have identified that religious propaganda and extremism have made negative effects on Y-FORB.

Respondents have also identified that there is a strong connection between politics and religion, and they have mentioned that the relationship between religion and politics must be eliminated.

National and policy level facilitation for religious education has been identified as one of the suggestions for promoting Y-FORB. It was suggested to facilitate everyone to learn about every religion that exists in the country. Learning and practicing religion is equally important. Some respondents have appealed to have a network of societies from village to provincial level which capacitates the process of strengthening Y-FORB.

There are schools based on religion, gender, and language in Sri Lanka. The respondents have pointed out that the “*removal of schools from religious and linguistic categorization*” is a policy-level intervention to protect and promote Y-FORB. Youth have also proposed a national-level peace education process to promote Y-FORB.

Chapter 05 – Discussion

The majority of the respondents completed the survey in Sinhala (265, - 60.6%), while 112 (25.6%) completed the survey in English. Only 60 respondents have completed the survey in Tamil, 13.7%. Since the majority of the population is using Sinhala as the mother tongue it has reflected the general language practice of the county via this result. A total number of 215 (49.2%) were female respondents while 210 (48.1%) were male. Compared to males, females have been attracted to share their thoughts, or opinions on FORB.

This survey was opened without an age limit but by mentioning that this is for youth. However, there were 403 (92.2%) respondents who represented age cartoony 15 to 35. An age distribution skewed towards younger ages, with the largest group of respondents being from the 20-24 age (215, 53%). It reflected that the youth who are at the age around 25 are defining them as the youth. Only one respondent from less than 14 years of age has responded to the survey and it might indicate the topic of the survey did not interest them much. 7.6% of respondents were aged above 36. People who are living in the Northern part of Sri Lanka have spent their early period of life facing social and political issues. Therefore, those who have lost their young age to these conflicts can still be awaiting to enjoy what they have lost in past years.

The respondents who represented all the religions have given their thoughts on Y-FORB. 269 (66.7%) were Buddhists and the second-largest portion of respondents was from an Islam background and it was 62 (15.4%). All the religious groups have given their inputs for this survey. Roman Catholics were the third-highest number of respondents who have contributed to this survey. Hindus were only 4.5% of the total respondents. Also, there were 13 (3.2%) Atheists. As Buddhists are being the majority country, Buddhists were the highest number to respond.

Survey results can always be linked with the educational background of the respondents. These respondents were educated. 51.86% of them were undergraduates, while 20.35% of them were graduates. Therefore more than 70% of respondents were undergraduates,

graduates of post-graduate qualifications. The reason for getting more responses could be these educated youth are interested in the discussion of Y-FORB. The second reason could be they are being open-minded with their opinions and wills. They tend to get a lot of information daily. To capacitate or strengthen their communication, there are social media groups such as WhatsApp and Facebook. When considering the geographic areas, equally 53 (13.15%) respondents have responded from Colombo and Gampaha districts. The distribution of the respondents was more centered in the western province. There was a low number of respondents have responded from Northern and Eastern provinces. However, the survey questionnaire was shared across the country regardless of the geographic area via social media. However, there can be few reasons for this distribution pattern. Communication facilities, as well as the interest, can be different from Colombo-centric youth and other youth in Sri Lanka.

We inquired about the awareness of FORB by asking “What is protected by FORB?” 81% of respondents have selected the answer as the freedom to observe and practice religion publicly and/or privately. As well, 61% of respondents have selected the answer as Freedom to embrace another religion/ belief of an element that has been protected by FORB. Moreover, 54% of respondents have identified the freedom to teach and/or propagate a religion, Freedom to have or to adopt a religion, and the freedom to have a religion/ belief of own choice have been protected by FORB. Moreover, it shows that 3% of respondents have an idea about what is protected by FORB. These results indicate that the youth have an average knowledge of what has been protected by FORB. However, nearly half of the respondents do not recognize the above-mentioned freedom as the significant element of FORB and they are protected by FORB.

This highlights awareness of youth on FORB related essential elements was not at the optimal level. They are in the progress stage where half of the respondents only can recognize the important and protected elements by FORB. However, it indicated that youth need to gain much knowledge on FORB and its importance.

Buddhism has been given the foremost place in the country by the constitution. But it has not been mentioned that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country. However, the majority (75.2%) of the

respondents believe that Buddhism is the state religion of Sri Lanka. Only 13% of total respondents have given the right answer while 11.2% do not know exactly what the answer is. When considering the legal provisions for religious freedom, most of the respondents have no exact idea. 363 respondents have given the wrong answer and only 40 respondents have given the correct answer to the knowledge question asked which article in the Sri Lankan constitution provides for the freedom of religion (N=403). This shows a contradiction between the knowledge and beliefs of the respondents. While they are thinking that the state religion is Buddhism, they do not know when people have been given the freedom of religion in the constitution. This shows that the youth have no clear knowledge of the legal background of FORB in Sri Lanka. They tend to make decisions by analyzing social knowledge rather than accurate facts.

Religious groups are not required to register with the government and there is not a requirement to register places of worship. However, over 57% of youth have mentioned that as a requirement. Though this information is not very common in society, they have answered as “yes” when they had the option to say “*I don't know*” as the answer. This reflects the perception of the youth on the legal requirements or the provisions of FORB.

Youth have faced violence or discrimination against their FORB. 88 (21%) respondents have indicated that they have faced these violent incidents in their lives. Fortunately, 73% of the respondents have not faced any sort of violence or discrimination against their FORB. 21% of victims are not a smaller number and the consequences of these incidents can be supported for violence circle. Those respondents have expressed how they have reacted once they faced violence or discrimination against FORB. Some of the respondents have taken legal actions such as informing the police, or respective authorities while some of the respondents have not been able to find any opportunity to take action. However, nobody has mentioned that they have filed a case in court against the FORB violation. Some respondents have taken nonviolent direct actions or actions to prevent when they faced violence or discrimination against their FORB. Awareness-raising on social media platforms, reporting fake news, protest and confrontation are some of the actions that the respondents have taken against their FORB violation. While some respondents have been using nonviolent ways of combatting violence or discrimination, some of the respondents have used violent actions against FORB

violations. “*Damage religious places*’ was one of the significant answers given by respondents. Frequent incidents of damaging religious places were reported all around Sri Lanka in the past few years. This finding indicates that some people tend to damage religious places as retaliation or a solution when their own FORB is violated. Some of the respondents have stated that though they have the power, they have not used it. This finding also was an indication that when people faced violence they tend to use their own power to protect themselves. Meanwhile, some respondents have used these negative experiences for internal transformation and reflection. . Some of them have used popular methods such as forgiveness, peace to develop inner peace. Especially, those who have faced identity-based violence have taken time to be more aware of self-status and space. Some of the respondents have avoided or walked away when they face any sort of violence or discrimination against their FORB. Even some of the respondents have mentioned that they do not want to mention what they have faced. It indicates that FORB violations can traumatize people. Some of them have mentioned why they walked away because they knew that there is no proper system in the country to follow when such an incident occurred. Especially the Atheists have stated that they can’t do anything when their rights are violated. The majority of the respondents have mentioned that they did nothing when they face violence or discrimination against their FORB. Some of them haven’t had a proper environment or the age was too young to take action. One respondent has mentioned that “*I was 9 when it happened*”. Moreover, most of the FORB violence is happening not only to adults but also to children. Children are also have been victimized in society relating to FORB violence or discrimination.

Next, moving to the awareness of the respondents on consequences of deprivation/violation of freedom of religion or belief can lead to violent conflicts in Sri Lanka. More than 72% of respondents have agreed or strongly agreed on that. It shows that youth is aware of the consequences of violating FORB. However, they did not agree on “worship in public places”. 43% of respondents have agreed or strongly agreed with this action. The majority of 185 (45%) respondents have responded as they are neutral on this matter. This finding shows that the freedom to observe and practice religion publicly or privately is not well accepted among the youth though they are aware and agreed that deprivation/violation of freedom of religion or belief can lead to violent conflicts. When discussing the value of religious rituals in life 300 (74%) of respondents have mentioned that religious rituals play an important role in their

lives. Only 6% have indicated that rituals are not important while 20% of respondents were neutral. The problem is when only 43% of respondents are happy with worship in public, how 74% of respondents can be involved in religious rituals with freedom. Then they have to do it mostly in private places if they have to consider popular expectations.

It was evaluated the willingness to disclose the religious identity while accessing the public services. 233 (58%) were ready to disclose their religious identity and 170 (42%) were not willing to disclose. People have to disclose their identity when receiving public services in Sri Lanka for instance, in some hospital services. Though the majority of the respondents were fine with that 42% of respondents are not willing to do so. This can be considered as a challenge for FORB which originated from the government from state law itself. 349 (86%) respondents have strongly agreed or agreed that religious freedom helps to build social cohesion among diverse communities and religious groups.

Collective actions including practicing one's own religion can lead to peaceful coexistence. It was indicated that the majority (64%) of the respondents have mentioned that they always engage in their religious practices or belief as an individual. However, the willingness of youth to practice religion as a team or community is low. Only 38% of respondents have mentioned that they always practice religion or belief with the community. This reflects how youth are ready to practice their religion in personal and social spaces. Moreover, this shows how it is possible to take youth in public activities relating to religious practices or beliefs.

It is important to have a fair knowledge of other religions as well. The youth have rated their knowledge about other religions. 33% (131) of youth have indicated that they have a middle range of knowledge on other religions/beliefs. 27% of respondents have indicated that they have upper-medium or higher knowledge of other religions/beliefs. The rest of the respondents (41%) had no or lower knowledge of other religions. It indicates that the youth need more knowledge of other religions which increases mutual understanding and strengthens FORB.

It evaluated the willingness of the respondents to engage in interreligious activities or dialogue. The majority (51%) of youth have indicated they are willing to engage in interreligious activities or dialogue. It was found that youth are not willing to practice religion

in the community, but youth are willing to join interreligious activities or dialogue. It indicates that artificial platforms can cater to the demand of youth rather than expecting them to come into a common platform naturally. Furthermore, it urges that a third party should facilitate and support youth to come together to involve in interreligious activities or dialogues.

It was confirmed that the youth are actively involved in social media platforms in today's world. 78% of youth have indicated that they use Facebook always or more often. Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn users are around or less than 50% of the total respondents. It is important to evaluate their involvement in social media relating to FORB. (N=403) 304 (75.4%) have come across posts and materials which violate FORB. But, (N=403) only 165 (40.9%) have reported the post relating to violation of FORB. 59.1% have not taken any action though they have the facility to report or take action against posts which are challenging or violating FORB. This indicated that the youth are not aware of what and how they can take action against such posts while exploring social media. The other reason might be they do not know how to take action when they see such posts.

Social media is an impactful tool to spread messages or make awareness. It was found that the age group 20 to 24 youth are using social media platforms to make public awareness. However, according to the findings, the use of social media as a platform to make public awareness of FORB is not at a satisfactory level. Because, while 36% of respondents were using social media to raise awareness of FORB 64% of respondents are not using social media for that purpose. The reason can be they do not know how to use social media for promoting FORB or else they are not interested in doing awareness-raising activities on social media on FORB.

Most of the respondents are using Facebook and WhatsApp as their communication tools in social media. Hate speech and posts related to religious extremism are being posted on Facebook. However, it indicated that the respondents are not using websites or blogs very much. Websites are the platform for data validation or fact check. It confirms that very few respondents are using fact-checking tools when they use Facebook and other social media to combat hate speech or fake news against FORB. YouTube can be defined as the most used social media platform among youth. 84% of respondents have mentioned that they are using

YouTube always or more often. Therefore, YouTube media can be recognized as the most effective tool when addressing youth-related issues.

The respondents have come up with the personal level challenges they face relating to the youth engagement in FORB in Sri Lanka. Fear has become a major challenge among the youth on a personal scale. Insecurity prevails in the career, economy, and future of youth today. Moreover, there is a language barrier and knowledge gap according to the time. Lack of skill has become a major challenge for Sinhala and Tamil speakers to understand each other even in closer circles. As well as it was mentioned that up-to-date knowledge of individuals is not adequate to confront social pressure on youth. Especially knowledge of other religions was not satisfactory among youth. Time limitation, busy lifestyle are some of the other challenges faced by youth that discourage them from involving in FORB-related actions. However, the youth have recognized that there are a handful of opportunities as well to contribute or engage in FORB. Except for a few numbers of Atheists, the majority of the youth are following a religion. Having a religion itself is an advantage that the religious values will help youth to act on the betterment of others such as protecting the rights of others.

Youth are facing different types of challenges in their engagement for freedom of religion or belief in Social level. Religion itself has become a challenge for FORB as mentioned by the respondents. Youth are not free to have their own choice of religion or belief. *“Society does not allow us to think beyond our own religion”*. This statement is appealing that youth are limited by religious institutions. Moreover, the youth believes that some religions are spreading violence via their own religious texts. However, these beliefs are not well addressed or youth are doubtful about some religions within the community which can lead to some disputes in the future. Moreover, it was highlighted that there is a lack of youth lead religious committees in the society which can be very true because the youth are not very much attached to some religions in Sri Lanka. This has become a challenge for Y-FORB. The competitive education system has been identified as one of the reasons for youth to be detached from religion nowadays. The next most important challenge for Y- FORB was the lack of role models to follow. AS the youth proclaimed that there was no proper leadership within the religious institutes.

There is frequent religious tension going on in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, social media has facilitated the spread of some hate speech to encourage religious tensions. However, youth are complaining that the authority has not taken serious actions against extremist groups and to protect other or minority religions. *“Religious violence and splitting according to religions”*. This statement emphasizes that youth has identified that the religions are not having a peaceful existence which gives wrong guidance to the youth. Finally, youth are aware that most of the religious violence is happening as politically driven incidents rather than religious or ideological conflict between religions. However, all these facts are discouraging or challenging youth engagement of FORB in Sri Lanka.

While discussing the opportunities for Y-FORB at the social level was very less or youth have not been able to identify them. *“Limited opportunities are available in our countries. They must be further expanded”*. Most of the respondents were not so positive or hopeful about the opportunities at the social level for Y-FORB. Education and the development sector’s involvement in Y-FORB were cited as available opportunities by several youth.

Youth has suggested different types of solutions or changes to promote Y-FORB in the personal level and social fabric. Youth has proposed individual-level interventions for FORB as follows. Allowing youth to decide what they want to follow or believe is one of the suggestions made by youth. It showed that personal liberation is one of the most important needs of today’s youth. Moreover, knowledge and attitude change can lead to having an optimal level of FORB in personal life. It helps to protect own freedom as well as others FORB. Moreover, youth have emphasized that the individual person has the capacity to change the system by the vote. Some of the youth believed in social change via the change of an individual. Youth is more radical and they tend to change the system and this is one of the reflections of it. Moreover, the majority of the respondents of the survey were undergraduates. Their ideology and political views can be reflected via these findings.

It has found several interventions which are strengthening Y-FORB at the social level. Promoting FORB in daily social life is one of the suggestions made by youth. Mindfulness and the freedom of choice allow to see things differently from childhood. Children and youth can see and learn from the plural society where they live. Sri Lanka is a colorful country with

different cultural and religious groups where there are frequent religious festivals. It has been suggested to use these religious festivals as the platform for youth to be participated. Reduction of the language barrier and making children's involvement in those activities was one of the frequent suggestions made by the respondents. It has emphasized that the children have more potential to learn and practice FORB when they grow up. Empowering and encouraging youth to work on FORB was highlighted as one of the suggestions made by youth. Youth are expecting there must be motivation or guidance from the adults to encourage youth.

Religious or Interreligious actions were proposed as one of the common strategies to strengthen Y-FORB. Religious institutions need to organize youth-focused religious sermons which have the ability to get more youth involved. Organizing activities related to Poya day such as Sill campaigns can be utilized as smaller events with a huge impact to bring youth together. It has suggested the *“Implementation of discussion forums to share the teachings of all religions not only with their audience but also with people of other religions”*. Moreover, interreligious dialogue, discussions, and activities were the most popular suggestions that have come up from youth as suggestions to promote and strengthen Y-FORB. Education is one of the major tools that can be utilized to strengthen Y-FORB. Religious education should plan for developing mutual respect. However, people are facing problems without sufficient infrastructure to promote religious education, for instance, religious education centers. However, it has been convinced that the priority should be given to wisdom rather than rituals in religious education. Raising awareness on Y-FORB is one of the most important ways of getting youth involvement in FORB. Collective programs, online programs, discussions can be taken as some of the ways of doing it. Moreover, knowledge and awareness of human rights are very important in order to promote and protect FORB. However, these awareness programs must be attractive, for instance, street dramas and open forums such as webinars.

The effectiveness of the social and personal level interventions to strengthen Y-FORB is depending on policy-level decisions available. *“Constitutional Establishment of FORB and implementation”* was highlighted in the findings. Stronger policy-level decisions will keep the system stable and strong. Most of the respondents have urged that there must be policy-level decisions to strengthen Y-FORB in Sri Lanka. While protecting the plural qualities of the

society, it is needed to bring a common-law and order to all the religious groups. Equality must be protected by the constitution which will make all religious groups feel safe. Moreover, it has urged to eliminate the negative effects of religious propaganda. The strategic relationship between political power and religion is not a hidden element anymore. Though the youth are much aware of that power relationship they are not resilient enough.

Chapter 06 - Recommendations

Survey findings, the following recommendations are made to strengthen Y-FORB in Sri Lanka.

1. Knowledge of youth on FORB must be improved especially with the law and constitutional provisions.
2. Youth must be aware of the common law and values of the country. Therefore well-organized awareness-raising programs can help youth to get a proper idea about the value of FORB.
3. There should be a proper mechanism on Facebook to combat violence or discrimination against FORB.
4. Government should make platforms for the youth to engage in experiential learning processes. For instance, develop mixed schools which are teaching all the religions to enhance the religious knowledge of the students.
5. Human rights education and making awareness of others' freedom will be very important.
6. It should eliminate the judgment/ conclusions which are based on assumptions or wrong information among youth.
7. Values such as acceptance and respect must be taught and shown by practicing to the children and youth.
8. Youth should be aware of how to protect themselves and others from the violence against FORB on different platforms such as, at the university, in public places, or even on Facebook.
9. Youth must be educated on what action they can take when they face violence or discrimination against their FORB.
10. Youth need more role models to follow. Therefore, adults, religious leaders, and social leaders should maintain a personality that youth can learn from.
11. Religious institutions must come up with a necessary performance to cater to the youth by evaluating the mindset of the youth.
12. Society should not get the authority to decide someone's religion or beliefs, or should not force a person to stick to one religion and everyone needs to respect the FORB of others.

13. Youth should allocate sufficient time and space for them to reflect and engage in religious activities rather than only attaching to education, occupation, or social relationships.
14. Youths are willing to engage in inter-religious activities and they need to be provided with the necessary platforms to come and have dialogues to understand each other.
15. There should be a national policy to protect children and youth from violation of FORB.
16. Youth must be taught to make use of news websites and fact-checking tools in order to protect them from fake news and extremist ideas.
17. Youth are using social media to promote FORB and they need more support, guidance, and encouragement to do that more effectively
18. Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube are the most effective social media which can be utilized in a proper way to get youth's attention on FORB.

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