



The impact of familial influence on dancing: A study among undergraduates who have selected dance as a subject in public universities in Sri Lanka

Ranaweera W.V.P.H.^{1*} and Manel D.P.K.²

¹Department of Languages, Cultural Studies and Performing Arts,
University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

²Department of Social Statistics, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka is rich in highly stylized traditional dance forms. During the early days, traditional dance forms of Sri Lanka had been sustained and preserved by special groups of families. Sri Lankan traditional dance forms were mostly transmitted from one generation to the other by their descendants. There were many well-known lineages related to the field of dance. The objective of this study was designed based on this cultural background and this paper examines the impact of familial influence on learning dancing. It is difficult to find researches or studies carried out to reveal the relationship between family influence and dance in the Sri Lankan context. Since the field of dance is spread broadly in present days, this research focused only on finding the impact of familial influence for selecting dance as a subject among the students who have selected dance for their higher studies. A total of 400 undergraduates have been engaged as the sample from three different state universities. In order to collect data in achieving the objectives of the study the mixed methodology was used: both quantitative and qualitative data have been collected to understand the familial influences on selecting dance. Interviewer administered questionnaire surveys were done. The findings indicate that family background is not very influential on learning dancing among the undergraduates and only 20.75 percent of the sample inherited dance from their families. Among them, the highest numbers of undergraduates belong to the first generation of their lineage. 95.75 percent of the sample believes that familial influence is not so important in learning dancing at different levels and the most demanding need of familial influence is only to gain recognition in the field of dance.

KEYWORDS: *Dance education, Lineage, Inherent, Familial influence*

1 INTRODUCTION

Dance has been practiced by all societies around the world from the beginning of human civilization. Dances are the embodied physical and visible habits of movements of a culturally unified group or groups, projected into public space and demarcating one group from the other (Rajapakse, 2004). Artists use paint and brushes to create works of art, whereas dancers use the body to create moving works of art. The body of a dancer is the instrument through which art is created. The quality of the dance necessarily depends on the physical qualities and skills that the dancer possesses (Meckrell, 2019). Dance is considered as a universal form of art, which needs special talent. This special talent can be defined as either ‘inherent talent’ or ‘learned talent’. Some people are born with greater potential in dance and some earn this potential through hard work and dedication. Some are descendants from dance families and some are not. The latter build their own identity without any support from the family background related to the field of dance.

Sri Lankan dance can be identified in two main categories as dance related to religious rituals and dance performed to ease illness (Rajapakse, 2004). Lately, the purpose of dance changed and leads towards entertainment. There are three different dance traditions in Sri Lanka, namely ‘Up-Country dance’, ‘Low-Country’ dance and ‘Sabaragamu’ dance (Disanayake, 1993). The early Sri Lankan dance culture developed on purposes mentioned above and most such dance forms were transmitted from one generation to the other, mostly through family relationships. Since there was no formal dance education system regulated by the government before the 20th

century, most of the dancers emerge from particular families related to the field of dance. A large number of renowned artists can be found even now with traditional lineages. In early days indigenous traditions of dance and the traditional art of drumming were taught as “GURUKULA” education system (Rajapakse, 1997). In this ‘gurukula’ system of education, the student resides within the teacher’s residence to learn dance. Most of them had family relationships with such dance teachers. There were no commercial aims or other profits or benefits other than gifting their values and customs to the next generation. Some kind of competition had been created among various “gurukulas”. Hidden techniques and practices limited to their particular lineage were not given to outsiders. Generally, those who inherit precise dance traditions do not learn other dance traditions. For instance, if a person inherits the Kandyan dance style from his or her forefathers, he or she does not compel to learn other dance styles. At the same time, there were some individuals who had engaged in this art form just due to self-interest or for self-satisfaction. They do not have any relationships with dancers of any other similar professionals. But they also learned this art form through the traditional “gurukula” teaching system.

The commonly used perception of dance as an art form is that it is inherited rather than learned. In early Sri Lanka, some of the renowned dancers were hereditaries (Kariyawasam & Disanayake, 2018). The saying “dance is in the blood” created in our society was based on this reason. Because of this concept, most people believed that the ability to dance comes genetically.

But this has not been proved in Sri Lanka so far, and as mentioned above, some dancers who were at higher levels of popularity in the past and are in at present did not inherit dance from their families. They have emerged as renowned personalities in this field as individuals; without any relationships with dancers or similar professionals.

After the early nineteenth century, the traditional practices of dance education have been changed due to the effect of educational reforms. In the 1940s, aesthetic subjects were introduced into the school curricular as an optional subject. In 1943 the first government dance teacher was appointed. From 1953, dance was taught in the government-controlled institution named as “Rajaye Lalitha Kalayathanaya” (formerly called as Heywood) and several teacher training schools also started teaching dance from the 1940s (Jaathika Adyapana Ayathanaya, 2009). These new reforms in dance education in Sri Lanka expanded massively within a few decades, and in 1975 dance was included as a subject in the GCE A/L (General Certificate of Education Advanced Level) examination (Jaathika Adyapana Ayathanaya, 2009). At present, this subject has been developed up to the postgraduate level in Sri Lanka.

With these new reforms, the art of dance was opened to everyone and the traditional education system known as the “gurukula” tradition was changed gradually. As a result of these new educational trends in dance education, dance is selected as a subject by the students, those who inherited dance from their lineage as well as those who do not inherit it. The latter are not influenced or motivated by their families to engage in

dance but are interested in dancing and have talents in dancing.

At the time of introducing dance as a subject to the school curricular, dance teachers were recruited from well-known traditional dance families and from among those who learned traditional “gurukula” system (Jaathika Adyapana Ayathanaya, 2009). Gradually, the number of students who had been studying dance for their secondary education increased and later extended up to university education. As a result of this, a large number of graduates emerged into society annually. Various types of dance professionals emerged from among the above-mentioned family groups, those who had inherited this art form and those who had not inherited it. However, this new trend could not erase the saying “dance is in their blood” from Sri Lankan society until now.

In the Sri Lankan context, no researches have been conducted to identify the biological specialities or any other familial influences along with the traditional art of dance. This was identified as the knowledge gap in this field. Therefore, this research aimed at identifying the impact of familial influence on learning dancing among undergraduates who have selected dance as a subject in public universities in Sri Lanka.

Identifying the quantitative representation of dance undergraduates who possess and do not possess the family background with dance, their perception of the importance of familial influence on learning dancing, and the level of involvement of family members in the field of dancing of dance undergraduates are the specific objectives.

1.2 Background of the study

This research was designed based on general attitudes, perceptions, observations and practices of Sri Lankan dance traditions. In the Sri Lankan context, the saying that “dance is in their blood” has not been scientifically proved and remains as just another perception among the people. It emerged based on the basic observations prevailing from the early ages. It is difficult to find a scientific study on the impact of familial influence on dance in Sri Lanka. But some studies can be found in several countries on the inborn ability or talent of dance (Bachner-Melman, et al., 2005; Freeman, 1998). They have proven that certain abilities which a dancer needs are acquired genetically. According to a study published by Bachner-Melman R and a group of Israeli and French researchers, a DNA examination of dancers has revealed consistent differences from the rest of the population in two key genes. Both genes perform an important role in neurotransmission (Bachner-Melman, et al., 2005). They hypothesized that there are differences among individuals in aptitude, propensity, and the need for dancing that may partially be based on differences in common genetic polymorphisms. Identifying such differences may lead to an understanding of the neurobiological basis of one of mankind's most universal and appealing behavioral traits - dancing.

According to Freeman's study “an outstanding talent is more than the product of determined effort by people of much the same inborn ability. Indications of inborn individual differences come from very early studies of childhood. No randomly selected child has ever reached world-class achievement by practice

alone, which, though essential, cannot itself produce greatness” (Freeman,1998,p415). But it is very difficult to define the term “outstanding” since there is no specific criterion to measure the quality of excellence in dancing.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study population of this research is the undergraduate dancing students who study in public universities in Sri Lanka. The University of Visual and Performing Arts, University of Sri Jayewardenepura and the University of Kelaniya are the main universities in Sri Lanka which offer dance degrees. All academic years (First, second, third and fourth-year students) were taken as the population, but the first-year students of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura were excluded from the sample. Because they commence their honors degree from the second year.

The sample was selected according to the number of students who registered for the honors degree programme. Respondents were selected for the sample and the survey consists of 400 undergraduate students. The population of the dancing students of these universities is known. Therefore 400 undergraduate students were selected for the study sample to obtain more precise and valid results from the analysis. The sample size was decided according to the Cochran's formula as follows (Cochran, 2012). Since there is no previous determined proportion of the population, it will take $p = 0.5$.

$$n = \frac{z^2 * p(1 - p)}{ME^2}$$

P = the proportion of the population which has the attribute in question.

ME = the desired level of precision (the margin of error = 5 percent)

$q = 1 - p$

$$n = \frac{z^2 * p(1 - p)}{ME^2}$$

$$n = 1.96^2 * (0.5) * (0.5) / (0.05)^2$$

$$n = 385$$

But in this case, since the data analysis was done using multivariate analytical methods, it selected a more reliable and valid sample for the study to obtain more precise answers. Therefore, the sample size was increased up to 400 respondents. The qualitative part of the research explores the impact of family attitudes of dancing in relation to respondents' experiences in their career. Detailed information gathered from these is vital for understanding the multidimensional aspects and consequences of their academic life. It was argumentative with some case studies from the respondents from each of the three universities. Qualitative data was gathered along with the questionnaires and it directed this study broadly towards the attitudes and perceptions of respondents.

Descriptive data was analyzed using the coding system. There were three phases of the sampling method. In the first phase, the convenience sampling method was applied to select the universities and secondly the academic years were selected by applying the quota sampling method. Finally, the number of respondents was selected using the simple random sampling method from the student registration list of each academic year separately in the universities. The process of data collection comprised of primary data collection. In order to collect both in achieving the objectives of the study, the mixed methodology with both quantitative and qualitative data collected

during the research would provide wide information to understand the familial influences on their dancing ability and challenges.

The first quantitative data was collected through interviewer-administered questionnaire surveys and qualitative information was gathered. In order to analyze the collected data, both the quantitative and qualitative analytical methods were used. Factor analysis was applied to identify the hidden factors for selecting dancing as a subject for their degree programme. Content analysis was employed for the qualitative information, and this qualitative information helped to understand the family influences on their dancing in various phases such as theoretical and practical activities. Finally, the simple index was constructed to identify the levels of familial influences on their dancing performance.

3 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Data collection was started in May 2019. As per the sampling calculations, 75 percent of the population was covered from the University of Visual and Performing Arts. University of Sri Jayewardenepura and University of Kelaniya covered 12 percent and 13 percent respectively. Also, this sample covers 372 males (93 percent) and 28 females (7 percent). The highest number of respondents is from the Kurunegala district, which is 15.25 percent. Gampaha and Ratnapura districts represent the next correspondingly. Also, only one representative from the Trincomalee district reported for this study. Almost 20 districts were covered through data collection. As dance is a skill-based discipline, most people are compelled to learn this special art form during their

early childhood. To get the primary background of the respondents, this study examined the age limits from which they had started learning dancing. Accordingly, 35.75 percent started their dance education prior to their Grade 1 school admission. And 22 percent started their dance education between Grade 1-5. The highest percentage reporting as 42.25 percent is representing the number of students who had started their dance education after Grade 6 in school. In our present education curricular, aesthetic subjects can be selected as a subject from Grade 6. The above 42.25 percent implies that they started studying this subject as academic requirements. The sample was divided into two categories based on the data given as respondents who have family members related to the field of dance and those who do not. The involvement of their family members in the field of dance was tested at different levels.

3.1 Quantitative Representation of Dance Undergraduates who Possess Family Background with the Field of Dance

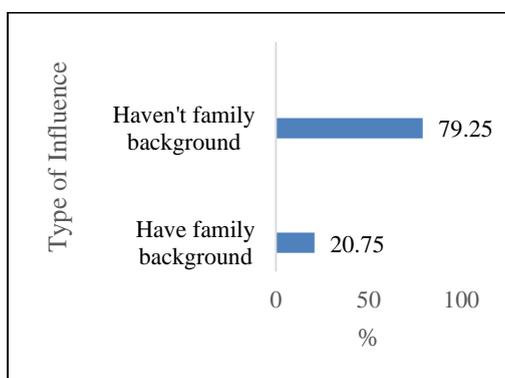


Figure 01: Representation of familial influence of the undergraduates in the field of dance

Source: Field Survey, 2019

As per the above chart, only 20.75 percent of the total possesses family members who have engaged in the field of dance. The majority of the sample which is 79.25 percent does not have any family background related to the field of dance. It is clear that nearly two-thirds of the tested dance undergraduates are not influenced by their families to learn dance as a subject. They have chosen this subject only due to their personal interest and talents. This result cannot be compared with the past since there is no scientific research conducted on this field. However, it seems that this result contrasts with the general perceptions in Sri Lankan traditional dance.

3.2 Perception of the importance of familial influence on learning dancing

According to our cultural attitudes and practices from early days, those who have learned Sri Lankan traditional dance forms may repose their trust on inherited talents rather than on learned talents. But according to the data, it is revealed that present undergraduates who were tested under this research are not in a position to believe the importance of family background in learning dancing. Out of 400 respondents, 383 stated that family background is not necessary to study dance as a subject. This is 95.75 percent of the total. Only 4.25 percent believes it is an essential factor. The percentage of those who believe in the necessity of family background in learning dancing is not so significant.

Table 01: Perception of Necessity of Familial Influence for Learning Dancing

University	No. of Participants	Important	Not Important
University of Visual & Performing Arts	301	15	286
University of Kelaniya	51	1	50
University of Sri Jayewardenepura	48	1	47
Total	400	17	383

Source: Field Survey, 2019

When it was analyzed through the undergraduates of the three different universities, Sri Jayewardenepura and Kelaniya undergraduates do not believe that they need a family background to study dance, as indicated by 97.9 percent and 98 percent from their sample respectively. However, 5 percent of the

Visual and Performing Arts University undergraduates believe the importance of family background to study dance as a subject, which is higher than the other two universities. The total distribution of this fact comes as follows:

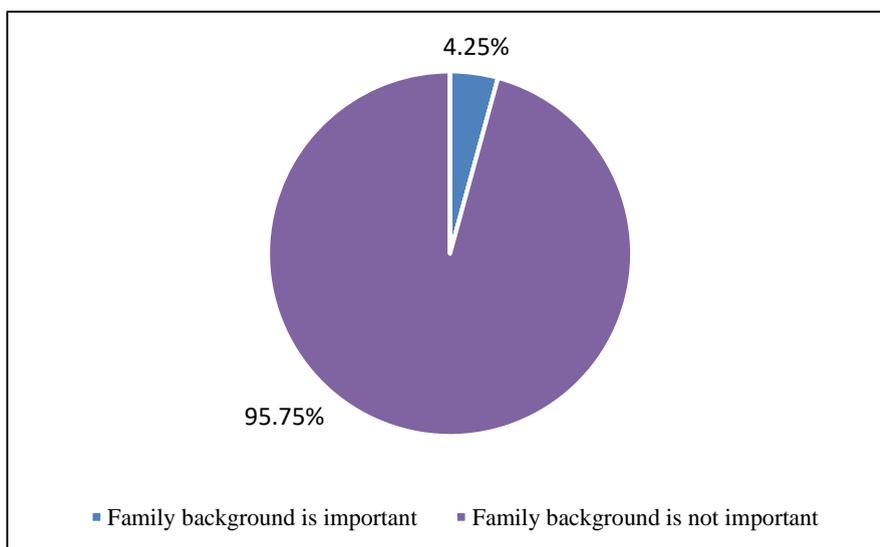


Figure 02: Importance of Family Background for studying dance as a Subject

Source: Field Survey, 2019

This study focused on to analyze the perceptions of respondents who possess family background with the field of dance. As mentioned above, only 20.75 percent of the sample has family members (figure 01) who have engaged with this art form. But 87.95 (73 out of 83) percent of them believe that family background is not important in learning dancing. Only 10 respondents, which indicates 12.04 percent, are in the position of believing the importance of having such member/s in their families. This is a very small representation from the total.

That indicates those who have such kinds of relationships with their lineage also are not in the position of believing that they need such kind of support from their families.

According to the descriptive data gathered from them, it reveals that they feel this kind of relationships eclipse their own identities as a dancer. When analyzing the different aspects of the perceptions of familial influence, only 4.25 percent from the total sample (Figure 02) was found as respondents who stated that family background is important. Among them, 58.82 percent already possess family members who have engaged in the field of dance. Nearly 50 percent of the respondents who have stated that family background is important have not inherited dance from their families. But they believe that it will be a good opportunity for them if they have attached to such lineage.

3.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of having Familial Influence on Learning Dancing

Furthermore, descriptive findings of the study identified the respondents' past and present experiences and attitudes upon the familial influence. According to the given information, the advantages of having and

not having any familial influence can be categorized as follows:

Advantages of having familial influence:

- Easy to get latent practices and knowledge of traditional dance forms.
- No need to follow additional support to learn from outsiders.
- Easy to gain recognition in the field of dancing.

Disadvantages of having familial influence:

- Difficult to establish their own identity through their own talents.
- Difficult to transfer to other dance traditions other than their inherited tradition.

Advantages of not having familial influence:

- They can establish their own personality as an individual.
- They can explore the knowledge in different dance traditions other than limited to their inherited dance tradition.

Generally, dance families or lineages are restricted to one dance form and they are characterized to one dance tradition within the field. For example, most renowned artists in this field are mostly familiar with one dance tradition (Disanayake,1997; Bentharage,2004). They rarely engage in other dance styles, but they have become popular through their inherited tradition of dance. The results show that current dance undergraduates of these universities may not like this particular situation.

As per the descriptive data, respondents do not experience major disadvantages in not having any familial influence. Their main concern is the lack of recognition they gain from the field of dance. As per the case studies, they have experienced

some incidents of being rejected from certain opportunities due to not having any links to renowned dance families. But according to the data gathered, apart from such rare cases, this particular fact has not greatly influenced them in their dance career since dance education is massively explored these days throughout the country and also outside the country. At present, there are many opportunities to gain knowledge rather than to inherit it.

Apart from school education and higher education there are many governments as well as private institutions active throughout the country, and those who have succeeded their higher education can follow their Master's degree or PhD, and they will be able to achieve higher positions and popularity in the field of dance.

Table 02: Generational Level of Family Members Involve in Field of Dance

Generational Level	Number of Involvements	% of Involvement With Field of Dance
Mother Involved	22	11.78
Father Involved	11	5.89
Brothers And Sisters Involved	40	21.42
Grandmother Involved (The Mother Of The Mother)	5	2.68
Grandfather Involved (The Father Of Mother)	4	2.14
Grandmother Involved (The Mother Of Father)	4	2.14
Grandmother Involved (The Father Of Father)	11	5.89
Mother's Relatives	23	12.32
Father's Relatives	21	11.25
Another Relative Of The Family	14	7.5.
Total	155	83.0

Source: Field Survey, 2019

3.4 Generational levels of familial influence on undergraduates and the level of involvement

When identifying the generational levels of familial influence, the results found different generation levels of family members' involvement in dance. (Table 02) Out of 83 respondents, which is 20.75 percent from the total sample, brothers and sisters emerge as the mostly involved generation in the field of dance among

current undergraduates. Out of 83 respondents, 40 have siblings who have engaged in the field of dance. Mother's involvement in dance comes as second. This table depicts that among those tested as the sample have mostly the first generation's influence and that they will be the creators of a new generation in the future if their children engage in this field as their parents did. Further, this study reveals the levels of involvement of those family members with the field of dance.

Some of their relations involve with dance only at the school level. Some people engage with dancing as their hobby but some continue dancing as their profession. Also, several family relations were identified as professionals who have engaged with different fields related to dance such as music, drama, drumming, costume designing, etc. Among these, the higher percentage of involvement, which is 97 percent identified under the last category.

3.5 The need of familial influence in different levels

This study analyzed the perception for the need of familial influence along with five levels in their dancing career. Both respondents who have family members involved in dance and those who do not have family members involved in dance answered the same questions in order to test which level needs familial influence the most. (Table 03) School-level education, higher studies, achieving excellence in dance, involving in dance as a profession and to gain recognition in the field of dance are the five levels tested.

Table 03: Perception of Respondents on the need of Familial Influence in Different Levels

Categories	With Familial Influence (%)			Total	Without Familial Influence (%)			Total
	Disagree	Moderate	Agree		Disagree	Moderate	Agree	
At school level	19.80	79.70	0.50	100.00	60.50	26.50	13.00	100.00
At higher education	20.00	79.50	0.50	100.00	58.30	27.50	14.20	100.00
To achieve mastery in dance	16.25	82.50	1.25	100.00	55.50	30.75	13.75	100.00
To involve in dance as a profession	16.80	82.00	1.30	100.00	59.00	28.80	12.20	100.00
To achieve recognition as a dancer	13.50	84.50	2.00	100.00	28.00	45.00	27.00	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2019

As per the above Table, more than 75 percent of the total respondents among those who have familial influences are being neutral. They did not mention whether the family background is important or not to achieve different levels of their career. More than 50

percent from the other category (who do not possess family background) did not accept the need for the above facts, except the last fact (to achieve recognition as a dancer), which is 28 percent. Respondents who do not have any family background believe in the essentiality of

familial influence in different levels, and they are higher than those who possess the background. When comparing all the levels, more than 10 percent believe on the importance of familial background; while the others who believe the same facts are below 2 percent. It is significant that the latter group (those who already possess family background) is almost in a moderate position and they do not believe much on the importance of the family background that they have already experienced. There is 19.8 percent of the

undergraduates who have familial influence but still do not agree that they need a family background to study dance at the school level while 60.5 percent of the undergraduates who do not have familial influence also think that they do not need a family background to study dance at the school level. But here the moderate count of the first category is high. While 13 percent from the second category agreed with this need, only 0.5 percent agreed from the first category.

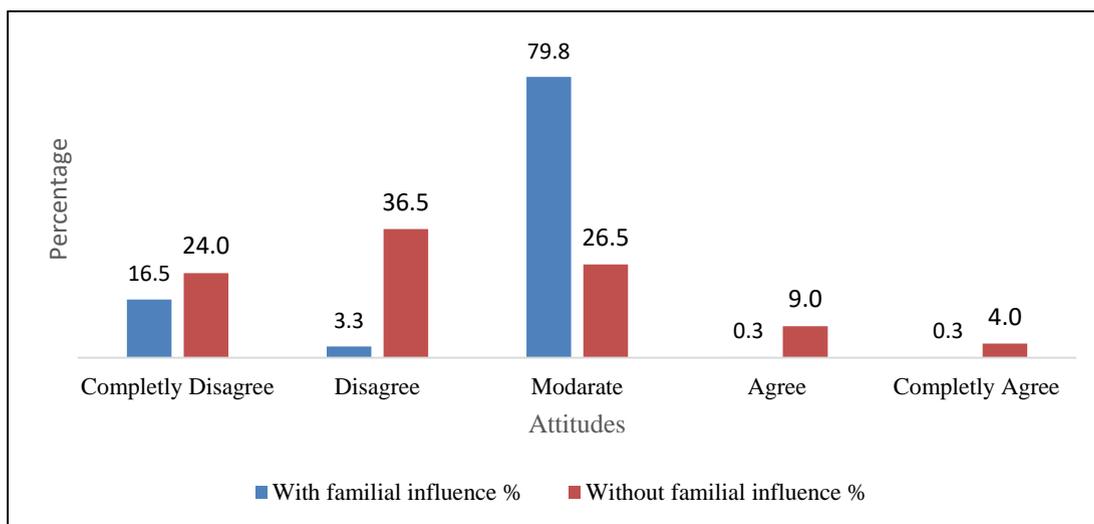


Figure 03: Perception of Family Background as a Necessity in Studying Dancing at School

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Also, 20 percent of the undergraduates who have familial influence is not believing that they need a family background to study dance for their higher studies and 58.3 percent of the undergraduates who do not have familial influence are also not believing that they need a family background to study dance for their higher studies. The necessity of family background is not accepted by 16.25 percent of the undergraduates who have familial influence for achieving mastery in dancing, whereas 55.5 percent

of the undergraduates who do not have familial influence is also of the same opinion. But here, the moderate count of the first category is high and as same as the other facts. Only 1.3 percent of the undergraduates who have familial influence agree that they need familial influence to involve dance as a profession. When compared to the above, a higher number of students, ranking 27 percent who do not possess familial influences, agreed that they need familial influence to gain recognition as dancers in

society. The need to have familial influence to gain recognition as a dancer among undergraduates who have familial influence also reported low as 2 percent. But it is little bit higher than to the other factors. But undergraduates who do not have familial influence, having a high reported value as 27 percent, are in agreement that they need familial

influence to gain recognition from society. It is very clear that most of them do not believe in familial influence along with the different levels of life, except the need of gain recognition from the society. That means both sides agreed on the importance of familial influence to gain recognition in the field of dance other than the above mentioned four facts.

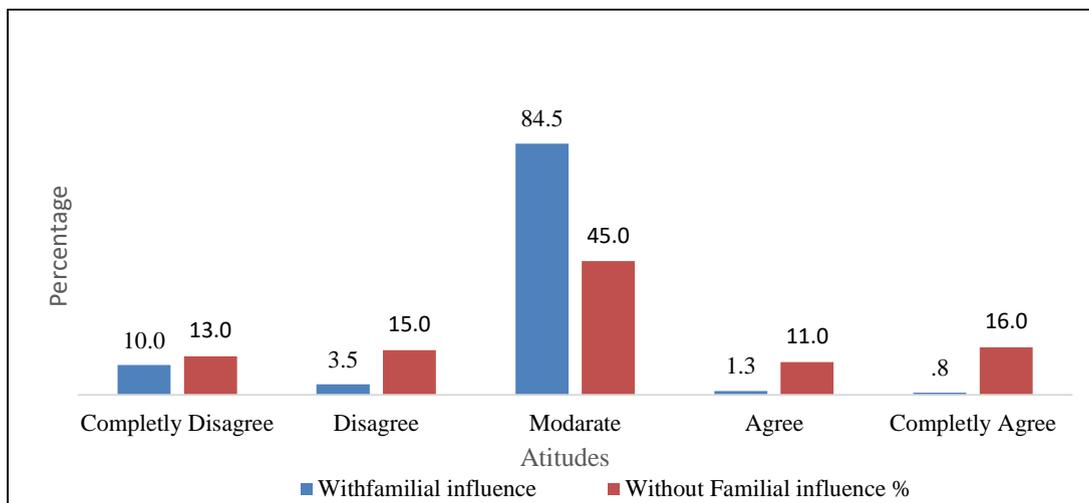


Figure 04: Perception of Family Background in Necessity of Achieving Recognition as a Dancer in Society

Source: Field Survey, 2019

But the acceptance rate of the need of familial influence on all five facts (above mentioned) is significantly low. (Table 03) It rates as below 15 percent except for the requirement of gaining recognition in the field of dance.

4 CONCLUSION

Dance is one of the most valuable cultural heritage in Sri Lanka. Traditions of dance education have changed gradually from the early days and now it has entered the modern world. In the traditional system of dance education, family background is one among the considerable facts to learn

dancing because dance was transmitted from one generation to the other mostly through family relationships. This research was conducted to find out the impact of familial influence on learning dancing among the current undergraduates.

However, the results found that present dance undergraduates are not heavily influenced by their families. Among the sample representing the undergraduates who learn dancing from three state universities in Sri Lanka in 2019, only 20.75 percent have familial backgrounds.

The rest do not possess any family background and are not influenced by their families to choose dance as a subject.

The research findings reveal that the selected sample of dance undergraduates do not consider familial influence as a considerable fact in learning dancing. As per the early “gurukula” education system, many renowned dancers were known through the name of their dance lineage. They had considered it as a prestige and people used to honor them as traditional artists and considered them as exhibitors of the cultural heritage of Sri Lanka. But as per sample, the majority which indicates as 95.25 percent, are not believing that familial influence is important and only 4.25 percent said it is an important fact in learning dancing. They do not experience much importance of family background because they have experienced some advantages as well as disadvantages of having familial influences. Present-day knowledge of this traditional art form and other related qualifications can be earned through different stages and different ways from school level. They do not need to depend only on the family background as in the past.

When analyzing the generation levels and the levels of involvement of the family members among the tested undergraduates, the results found that most of them have brothers or sisters (siblings) who have engaged in dance forms. They are identified as the most influential generation of current

undergraduates among those who have familial backgrounds. Mothers’ and fathers’ involvement in the field of dance comes to almost 17 percent.

Although most of these undergraduates, or 95.25 percent, do not accept the importance of familial influence on learning dancing as a subject, they believe that certain conditions do require familial influence. Results revealed that gaining recognition in the field of dance is the key requirement among their other needs.

While using these research findings as the basics, more research can be developed in this field. Since this research covers only the undergraduates who are between the age groups of 20-25, it is recommended to develop the same study while focusing on the graduates who are between the ages of 50 to 60. The gaps of their perceptions and practices can be understood through the comparative analysis between these two findings. Tested sample is in the position of believing that familial influence is not very important. Since there are no past researches on this field, these findings cannot be generalized as the whole. But based on these findings and also future researches, it may be possible to find answers to the general concept of “dance is inherited, rather than learned.”

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