

HOW DOES PLACE ATTACHMENT MATTER GOVERNMENT SCHOOL TEACHERS' DECISIONS ON THEIR PLACE OF RESIDENCE? A CASE STUDY OF RATHNAPURA EDUCATION DIVISION

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ABSTRACT

Theory of 'place attachment' can be considered a cardinal aspect of human geography and its epistemological evolution. People have a long revolutionary history that has been developing emotional connections with their parents, relatives, neighbors, friends, and the surrounding environment. Regarding the Sri Lankan context, these attachments have further been interwoven with cultural traditions and native ethos. However, this intertwined nature of emotional and cultural attachment has not been examined detailed in particular, within the Sri Lankan context. Based upon this backdrop, the current study sheds some lights on investigating how emotional attachment influences government school teachers' residential decisions, in the Rathnapura Education Division-1, Sri Lanka. Specifically, the study examines the roles of family ties, community connections, and cultural bonds in shaping residential preferences. Based upon a mixed-methods approach, empirical data were collected from 80 teachers across eight schools through structured questionnaires and unstructured interviews. The findings revealed that emotional attachment significantly influences teachers' residential choices, with 57.5% of participants demonstrating high or very high emotional ties, particularly toward family. More importantly, place related metaphors are the key sources for emotional needs, according to the findings. Overall, the future policy establishment on government school teachers' residential decisions and housing strategies, should integrate with the key aspects of place attachment in advance. This will affect not only the well-being of teachers, but also towards the improvement of the efficacy of teaching and education productivity of Sri Lanka, and also, can be considered for the educational development in rest of Asian countries.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

“The concept of Place” is one of the key concepts in Human Geography. Many researchers have examined the interrelation between human activities and place. In other words, human activities are often shaped by the place. More importantly, the cognitive dimension has come to the fore, when people think about their residential location selection, which immensely shapes of course their spatial behaviors. Basically, this cognitive notion exemplifies the way in which on how people develop their emotional attachments to variegated geographical settings. In this context, place attachment has been recognised as a key concept in understanding the human emotional behavior with the diversified geographical settings.

The place attachment consists of peoples’ functional bonds, emotional attachments, and cognitive aspects that human beings develop with their suitable places. Many studies have shown that the ways of peoples’ psychological networks that people develop shaped by individual or communities with their surrounding environment by shaping their identity, well-being, and also their behavior (Yang et al., 2025; Jayakody, Adams, Pecl, & Lester, 2024; Irani, Aghdam, & Ghasemzadeh, 2023; Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Altman & Low, 1992). Altman and Low (1992) outlined place attachment as affectively reflect, cognitively binding, and socially bonding metaphor among individuals and their impactful environments. According to Scannell and Gifford (2010) attachment to the place is a power and multidimensional concept that involve with three main aspects including

person, process, and place. Scannell and Gifford (year) further propose a three-dimensional framework of place attachment, which reflects basically the personal dimension (individuals), the psychological dimension (e.g., cognitive and behavioral notions), and the place dimension (characteristics of the physical setting/ecological settings). However, emotional driven place attachments is widely recognised as a central factor contributing to the psychological well-being, identity, and community networking (Scannell & Gifford, 2017; Lewicka, 2011). Despite, due to rapidly increasing global population (in both northern and southern hemispheres), the key notions of place attachment have dramatically been reshaped.

In addition, peoples’ attachments to places are determined by the socioeconomic factors including the cultural landscapes in regions and traditional knowledge practices of peoples inheriting to particular geographical settings. The relationship between individuals and the environment especially in a network of family and social ties has developed based the modern needs (Trąbka, 2019; Smith, 2011). Individual’s attachment to place may change over time depending on the factors such as new employment opportunities at specific places, infrastructure facilities, and new social dynamics etc. (Jayakody et al., 2024; Von Wirth et al., 2016). These newly emerged changes, can be particularly observed in urbanised and suburbs areas shaping the ‘nature of place attachments’ and peoples’ place bonds (Von Wirth et al., 2016). On the other hand, the nature of place attachments has significantly changed by the ongoing

global warming scenarios, climate change, and reaching global climate tipping points/CTPs (Karunarathne, 2023). Government school teachers generally face different impediments when they select the places for residing due to many reasons including their salary status. Nevertheless, emotional attachments and social fabrics play cardinal roles when they select their residential places (Hawthorne et al., 2022; Massey, 1993). Specifically, changes among the discipline can be observed regarding the concept of 'sense of place' from geography through socio-cultural studies to psychology. The conception of 'sense of place' has broadly been concerned as the core of understanding complex relationship between human and environment (Hawthorne et al., 2022; Merschdorf & Blaschke, 2018). That relationship reflects through the place attachments, place dependence, and place identity (Anton & Lawrence, 2014). More importantly, 'sense of place' is closely associated with historical, cultural, and experiential aspects of specific locations. In such a context, the concept of 'home' plays also a crucial role in deep cultural, emotional, and cognitive attachments extending beyond its function as a physical shelter (Sakurai, Ota, Uehara, & Nakagami, 2016; Fieberg, 2007). This is because home can not be understood as 'attachment of the sole' which is totally a personal thought. According to the extant body of literature, researching place attachment related notions such as 'sense of place', and emotional attachment in sense of geographical perspective regarding the Sri Lankan context is quite new with limited prior research available.. This is because, analysing government school teachers' residential decisions through the lenses of 'sense of place' and 'place attachment' is

new. In this context, this study demonstrates new insights by bridging the above-mentioned gaps especially by considering government school teachers' residential decision and the intertwined nature with place attachment notions, in the existing body of literature. In this context, the present study seeks to answer the following research questions: (i). How do family, community, and cultural networks/ties influence teachers' decisions on their place of residence?; (ii). How significant is emotional attachment, as a metaphor of 'sense of place,' in shaping government school teachers' residential choices?; and (iii). How does the spatial distribution of teachers' residences exemplify their emotional and social attachments to a place?. In this context, this research will showcase and bridge significant gaps in the extant literature on place attachment mainly and also environmental psychology, particularly regarding to the Sri Lankan soil.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CRITIQUES

This section mainly concerns, the cardinal theoretical arguments of place attachment scholarship covering the nexus between people and place (environment) based upon the existing body of literature. It also discusses how man's behavior have been evolved via their functions, emotions, dynamics, and variegated needs.

2.1 Human Geography, Environment and Place Attachment

The epistemology of place attachment deals with in terms of analyzing the diversified dimensions and knowledge about the human-ecological nexus. In particular, we can understand a range of reciprocal ties and

fabrics exemplifying emotional, cognitive, and functional bonds to place between different geographical places/settings and individuals (Hawthorne et al., 2022; Merschdorf & Blaschke, 2018). Basically, the nature of emotional bonds between people and environment have been explored for decades mainly by the scholars who are coming from human geography and environmental psychology. More importantly, scholars such as Scannell and Gifford (2010) and Manzo and Devine-Wright (2020), have framed the place attachment into person, process and place dimensions. This is subjective in nature, this is because the patterns of place attachment are shaped by individual's experiences, cultural contexts, and social dynamics. This may happen because of the residential decisions of some professionals like government teachers are mainly driven by their attachments to different geographical settings (Lewicka, 2011; Jayakody et al. 2024). This highlights the nature of bonding to a special places basically driven by their sense of belonging and also identity. Place attachment often exemplifies the emotional bonds that people form with their specific places or variegated geographical settings. This nature of bonding shapes by their experiences, social relationships, and cultural meanings (Jayakody et al., 2024; Jia et al., 2024; Hawthorne et al., 2022; Davis et al., 2016; Anton & Lawrence, 2014; Smith, 2011; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006). This notion can be aligned with the broader concept of sense of place, which is often influencing peoples' residential choices (Anton & Lawrence, 2014). The place attachment scholarship emphasises the nature of enduring connections of people to their specific places over time, often shaped by their recalling memories, cultures,

personal and collective identities (Smith, 2011). These concepts have long been used to study relationships between people and places. (von Wirth et al., 2016).

In accordance with Smith's (year) words, 'Place attachment also involves the feelings of security associated with a specific geographical location or attribute. Attachment to a community is based on rootedness and bonding. Rootedness refers to living and working near one's family, ownership of property in the area, and the expectation to remain in the same residence' (Smith, 2011). This plays a cardinal role shaping the residential satisfaction based upon the ecological settings. More importantly, the place identity can be recognised as the key component of place attachment. It exemplifies their sense of who they are. In other words, that is the way of building personal identity via the different factors of environment (Anton & Lawrence, 2014; Smith, 2011). Basically the term was first introduced by Proshansky (1978), as a substructure of self-identity which represent a range of factors such as memories, ideas, feelings, attitudes, values, preferences, meanings, and conceptions of behaviors and experiences representing via peoples' biological, psychological, social, and cultural needs (Anton & Lawrence, 2014). In particular, memories, experiences, and cultural values rooted within specific locations, are the indicators of 'place identity', which are not representing the physical attachment. Hence, this notion can be identified as one of the key dimensions of place attachment. Literature exemplifies this aligned with individuals' personal needs and helps to achieve their goals (Anton & Lawrence, 2014; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006).

Especially, 'place dependence' reflects how effectively a specific location satisfies functional or goal-oriented requirements. Often place deference exemplifies place identity which significantly deliver/mobilize individuals' needs, this is because, those places are chosen by them (Vitman- Schorr et al., 2025; Anton & Lawrence, 2014; Smith, 2011). The provision of facilities in order to enrich some individuals' resiliency aspects such as distinctiveness, continuity, self-worth, and personal efficacy etc. immensely help their prolonged attachments to specific places which is demonstrating the dependence on the environment/ecology (Anton & Lawrence, 2014). This aspect is very crucial in terms of understanding the influencing factors (e.g. both emotional and functional needs) that affect government school teachers' decisions on finding/determining their residential places. , In addition to individual experiences, place attachment also plays a crucial role in the stewardship of ecological/environmental systems. Researchers such as Raymond, Stedman, and Frantzeskaki (2023) have argued that individuals' emotional connections to places can motivate some pro-environmental behaviors, such as environmental conservation efforts and sustainable land use practices. More importantly, when assessing the sense of place in social-ecological systems, the concept such as 'meaningful places' proposed by Knaps and colleagues (2022) is worthwhile. Such behaviors are more important especially in case of managing and preserving of social-ecological systems, where human and environmental health have long been intertwined. In other words, this exemplifies the nature of incorporating local knowledge and emotional connections into decision-making processes. Studies in

the extant body of literature highlight that the integration of human and ecological epistemologies through place attachment offers a complete understanding about human-environment interactions (see, Hao, Yan, & Yang, 2025; Gibbeson, 2020; Lewicka, 2011; Ruiz & Hernández, 2014). This nexus can be recognized as more influential aspect of place-human bond. On the other hand, in order to bridge the gaps in the existing body of literature, such interdisciplinary approaches that deeply concern the notions of ecological and human psychological aspects are influential (Boley et al., 2021; Lewicka, 2011). This is because, that integration allows us for a more comprehensive understanding to how place attachment is influenced by ecological systems, , leading to more effective and sustainable environmental psychological outlook.

2.2 'Sense of Place' on Variegated Geographical Settings (how does 'Emotional Attachment' matter?)

The core theoretical argument of this study is the place attachment which mainly concerns the 'sense of place' and demonstrating how emotional attachment shapes teachers' residential decisions. The meaning of the notion of 'sense of place' is multifaceted in accordance with the interpretations of different disciplines such as human geography, sociology, cultural studies, and environmental psychology (Hawthorne et al., 2022; Hashemnezhad et al., 2013; Smith, 2011). According to the extant literature, applied geographers, environmental scientists, community stakeholders, and policymakers have been examined this concept in terms of understanding human-place relationships

(Hawthorne et al., 2022). Due to its interdisciplinary nature, there is no single universally accepted definition for the notion of 'sense of place.' Instead, it has been conceptualised in diverse ways depending upon the context and objectives of individual studies, reflecting a wide range of theoretical and empirical perspectives. In accordance with previous studies, emotional attachment has been defined as a fundamental dimension of the sense of place, representing the dynamic and continuous interaction between individuals and their physical environment (Hashemnezhad et al., 2013).

For Hawthorne and colleagues (2022), key aspects of space such as physical dimensions of height, depth, and width of such an object mainly contribute as influencing factors which draw the interactions of individuals to special places which are situated in difference places (Hawthorne et al., 2022). In other words, the notion of sense of place, dynamically can be changed over space temporally, which basically influences the emotional and psychological connections that strongly affect the residential choices of individuals (Yang et al., 2025). According to the existing body of literature, the geographic location, the physical attributes of that location, and the identity associated with attached place are the three core characteristics of an individual's sense of place (see, Hawthorne et al., 2022). For social scientists' perceptions, three interrelated dimensions are crucial, which are the physical location itself, the activities that occur within it, and the meanings, attachments, and psychological connections derived from human experiences in that location (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006). The extant literature suggests that the subsets of sense of place researches are the place

attachment, place identity, and place dependence (Hawthorne et al., 2022; Smith, 2011). Anton and Lawrence (2014) have argued that 'place identity' and 'place dependence' are influential dimensions of place attachment. Even though the above-examined aspects are overlapping, they depict the affective (attachment), cognitive (identity), and conative (dependence) dimensions (Smith, 2011; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006). The affective dimension reflects emotional bonds of individuals such as feelings of comfort, love, or belonging. The cognitive dimension emphasises knowledge, awareness, and the perception of a place, which has self-interests. The conative dimension refers to intentions, actions, and behavioral commitments associated with a place, including something like decisions to remain, care for, or actively engage with it. It is important to understand that individuals experience the same place differently based upon their cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, and social roles. As a result, sense of place is essentially subjective and can be varied from person to person (Xia, et al., 2025; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006; Smith, 2011).

Therefore, 'sense of place' plays a significant role in terms of shaping social behavior, identity formation, and decision-making processes, explaining why individuals choose to live in, remain in, or return to particular locations. In this context, the concept has widely been applied in fields, such as migration studies, residential satisfaction, and human-environment interactions, which help understanding of how people develop enduring bonds with specific places. In this context, sense of place provides a crucial framework in order to examine how emotional attachment

influences teachers' residential choices in the Rathnapura Education Division-1.

Often, emotional bonds of individuals can be formed with a person, object, or place. In accordance with authors' understanding, disciplines such as human geography, environmental psychology, psychology and sociology and their applications, which clearly exemplify how such connections develop with geographical spaces. In Broader sense, emotional attachment denotes to the strong emotional ties individuals form particularly with a person, object, or brand (Hang et al., 2020; Dutton & Painter, 1993). Paxton and Moody (2003) clearly noted that emotional attachment can be reflected in individuals' identity within a social group, highlighting its interpersonal and community dimensions. From a geographical perspective, emotional attachment to place refers to the affective bonds individuals establish with a particular location through experiences, memories, personal meanings, and social relationships.

Hashemnezhad and colleagues(2013) explain that emotional factors that help developing a sense of place are often intertwined with cognitive processes, basically they are constructed through individuals' lived experiences The cultural or historical significance associated with the place develops deep attachments with places. The above critical examinations based on the extant literature demonstrate that the research gap addressed by this study, which is particularly significant in the Sri Lankan context representing the global

south. In this context, this research work sheds some lights and insights on how government school teachers' residential decisions are influenced by their emotional and place attachment preferences.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

3.1 Study Area

The current study focuses on the Ratnapura Education Division-1, which is part of the Ratnapura Education Zone in the Sabaragamuwa Province, Sri Lanka. The study area comprises seven 1AB schools, eleven 1C schools, seven 1T2 schools, and three 1T3 schools. Furthermore, in terms of administrative meaning, the division includes five national schools and twenty-three provincial schools (Ministry of Education, Higher Education, and Vocational Education, 2025). The division is bounded by the Eheliyagoda Education Division to the north, Pelmadulla to the South, Balangoda to the east, and Kuruwita to the west. In accordance with the gender distribution by schools, the division has two boys' schools, two girls' schools, and twenty-four mixed schools. This school clarification provides a base for examining the emotional and physical factors that influence teachers' residential choices. In particular, by considering the administrative coordination and data access, the Ratnapura Zonal Education Office and the Ratnapura Divisional Education Office were selected for the current study (please see the Figure 1, below).

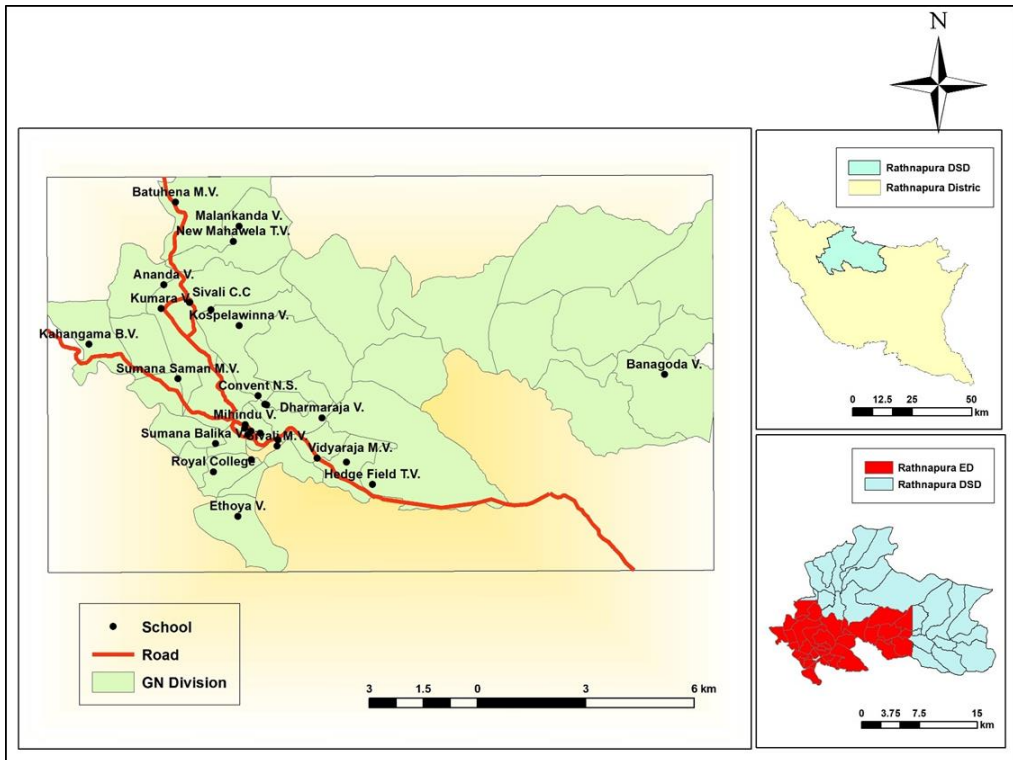


Figure 1: Relative Location of Study Area

Source: Compiled by authors, 2025

3.2 Data collection

This study is based on e both primary and secondary data to fulfill the study objectives. Mainly, the primary data is gathered through a structured questionnaire survey in order to collect government school teachers' information related to their place as well as emotional attachments. Structured questionnaires method can be considered as one of the effective empirical data collection tools that allows researchers to collect a maximum amount of data securing reliability and improving comparability of responses (Bryman, 2015). Moreover, this mechanism helps in feeding, analyzing, and interpreting the responses. By considering the ethical aspect, we obtained the consents all the

respondents prior to the empirical data collection (vis Google forms). The questionnaire of this work consisted of 24 Likert scale items, in particular, 12 statements on measuring emotional attachment (such as family ties, community connections, and cultural ties) and 12 statements on assessing practical or physical factors like employment, accessibility, and infrastructure. Responses were rated according to a five-point Likert scale, from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) (see, Dong et al., 2024; Kelly et al., 2024). Each scale item produces a score between 12 and 60 exemplifying a stronger influence. In addition, the questionnaire survey gathered socio-demographic information of participants, such as age, gender, school

type, current residential status, length of residence in the current location, and expected future length of residence.

Unstructured interviews also were conducted in order to have the qualitative insights of teachers by using convenience sampling mechanism. Via these unstructured interviews, the research gathered more detailed information, in particular, about teachers' emotional attachments to their own places and other practical actors. The empirical data were collected in February, 2025. Secondary data were gathered from Ratnapura Zonal Education Office and the Ratnapura Education Division-1. The collected data was on background information on the selected schools, teacher distribution, and relevant administrative records. Household locations (coordinates) of respondents also were collected. Permission was granted to collect empirical data from eight selected schools within the division. Schools were selected reflecting the teachers' population and types of schools of the education division. Basically the sample frame of this scholarship consists of all the relevant teachers belonging to the selected 28 schools as explained in section 3.1 above. The sample size of respondents (teachers) is 80 (5%), which was selected according to the simple random sampling mechanism. This sampling mechanism gives the teacher population, an equal chance to be selected, reducing selection bias considerably (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.3 Methodological Approach

This work is based upon the mixed research methods approach (Bryman, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which consists of both qualitative and quantitative analyses

mechanisms. MS Excel and ArcGIS 10.8 were used for analyzing data of the study. More importantly, the information gathered from unstructured interviews also helped to interpret findings of study. As mentioned earlier, the responses based on the structured Likert-scale, were also coded in a database. Regarding the first and second objectives of the study, the descriptive statistics were used. The questionnaire included 24 statements which are rated based on a five-point weighting scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), with 12 respective items regarding emotional attachment and practical causative factors. In particular, regarding each and every statement, their mean scores and standard deviations (SD) were calculated in order to understand the level of agreement/disagreement of responses (Anton & Lawrence, 2014). In that sense, the level/s of agreement/disagreement for each statement were classified based upon the following criteria (Boone & Boone, 2012) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Classification of Agreement Levels Based on Mean Values

Agreement Level	Value Interval
Strongly Disagree	1.00 – 1.79
Disagree	1.80 – 2.59
Neutral	2.60 – 3.39
Agree	3.40 – 4.19
Strongly Agree	4.20 – 5.00

Source: Compiled by Authors, 2025

- Min – 1
- Max – 5
- Range = $5 - 1 = 4$
- Number of classes - 5
- Width of interval = $4/5 = 0.80$

The twelve statements which are representing mainly emotional attachment

and other factors were given to respondents. Their average responses were grouped into five levels (Boone & Boone, 2012) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Classification of Agreement Levels Based on Attachment Score

Attachment Level	Score Range
Very Low Attachment	12.0 – 21.6
Low Attachment	21.7 – 31.3
Moderate Attachment	31.4 – 41.0
High Attachment	41.1 – 50.7
Very High Attachment	50.8 – 60.0

Source: Compiled by Authors, 2025

- Min – 12
- Max – 60
- Range = 60 – 12 = 48
- Number of classes - 5
- Width of interval = $48/5 = 9.6$

In order to understand the responses levels regarding each statement, the standard deviation was calculated (Boone & Boone, 2012). Especially, the qualitative responses recorded from the unstructured interviews were used in order to justify the quantitative results (Bryman, 2015). This mechanism helped to improve the overall accuracy of the analysis.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regarding the gender balance of respondents (sample), 81% was female, amid the majority of participants (90%, n=73) were married. In addition, five respondents were single and two were divorced. Widowed respondents were not recorded. The age distribution of the respondents is shown in Figure 2.

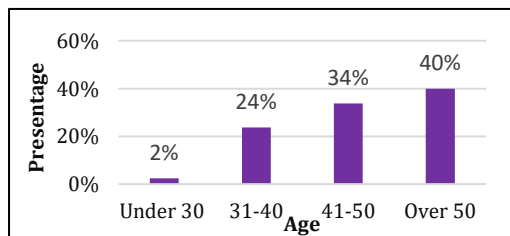


Figure 2: Age Distribution of Participants

Source: Compiled by authors based upon empirical data, 2025

The analysis of the findings revealed that the majority of teachers (76%) have been living in their current homes for more than six years (see, figure 3). 84% respondents have noted that they are willing to stay at the current residential places in the future without going for an alternative place. These patterns helped much in terms of understanding teachers' emotional attachment patterns to their loved places.

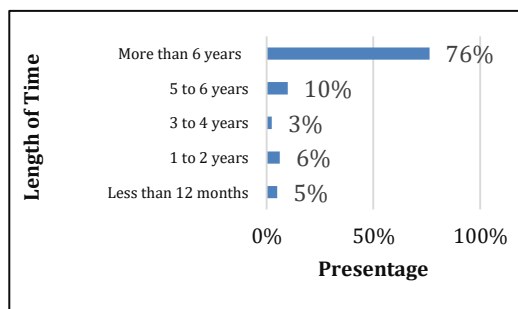


Figure 3: Length of Time Lived in Current Residence

Source: Compiled by authors, 2025

4.1 How do Family Ties influence on Teachers' Residential Choices?

The nature of family ties is very important to understand the emotional attachment to a special place. In order to understand how family ties (e.g. emotional attachment) influence for teachers' residential decisions, four statements (e.g. Q8 - Q11) were analyzed based on the Likert scale. The

average values of statements were calculated in order to represent the overall levels of choices/agreements (see, figure 4). The responses exemplified worthwhile aspects of emotional attachment (especially to families), including closeness to parents, spouse, children, and other family members. The average scores regarding considered four statements were 3.6, 4.3, 4.0, and 4.0, respectively. According to the results, three of calculated average scores fall into the 'Agree' range/level, while one statement (Q9) falls into the 'Strongly Agree' range. More importantly, this demonstrates that the teachers' family ties play an important role in their residential choices.

Some factors like emotional family bonds of teachers, help make their places very meaningful spaces which warrants individuals to stay, return, or invest in their homes (Han, 2025; Guo, Wang, Li, and Xu, 2024). Teachers have been attached to their homes (places of residents), emotionally for years which emphasizes their personal identity and sense of belonging to special geographical settings (Maguire and Klinkenberg, 2018).

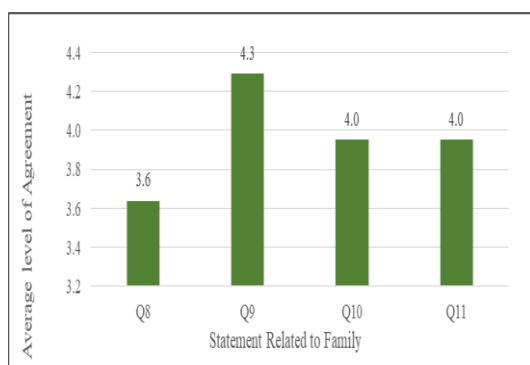


Figure 4: Teachers' agreement levels on how family influence for their emotional attachment

Note: (Q8). My hometown feels like a part of me because of my family roots; (Q9). Living close to my

family makes me feel safe and loved;(Q10). My bond with the family makes the thought of leaving really tough; (Q11). The primary factor influencing my decision on permanent residence is the strong bond which I have with my family and parents.

Source: Compiled by authors, 2025

The statement titled 'Living close to my family makes me feel safe and loved' (Q9) received the highest mean score of 4.3, with a standard deviation of 1.0. This exemplifies that the majority of teachers strongly agree with the given statement. The distribution of responses to Q9 is shown in figure 5, which is emphasized that how teachers attached emotionally to their families and how that notion influences their residential choices.

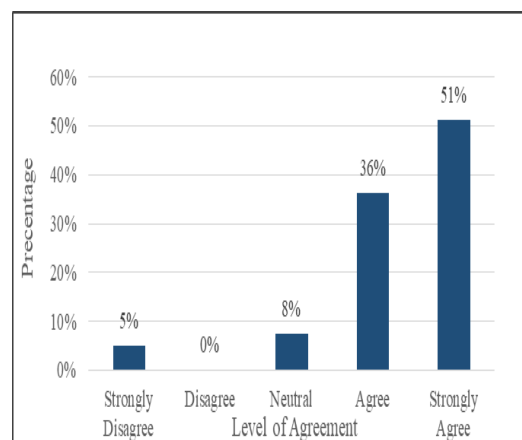


Figure 5: Responses to the Statement: "Living close to my family makes me feel safe and loved"

Source: Compiled by authors, 2025

The abovementioned findings also highlight how family members and relatives behaved on bonding social capital (see Karunarathne, 2021; Paul et al., 2020; Lewicka, 2011; Halpern, 2005). The developed countries like Australia, show quite similar patterns of place attachments (Kelly et al., 2024). More importantly the psychological factors are also important in shaping residential choices

of people (Yang et al., 2025; Oleksy, Lassota, Wnuk, and Wcześniak, 2024; Scannell and Gifford, 2017). In other words, these patterns represent the mobilization of bonding social capital. In particular, 51% of respondents (41 out of 80) strongly agreed with this statement, which emphasizes how teachers value living with or near their families.

4.2 How do community connections shape teachers' residential choices?

In accordance with following the same mechanism, four statements (e.g. Q13 to Q16) were analyzed (based on Likert-scale), in order to examine how community ties impact on teachers' residential decisions, as depicted in Figure 6.

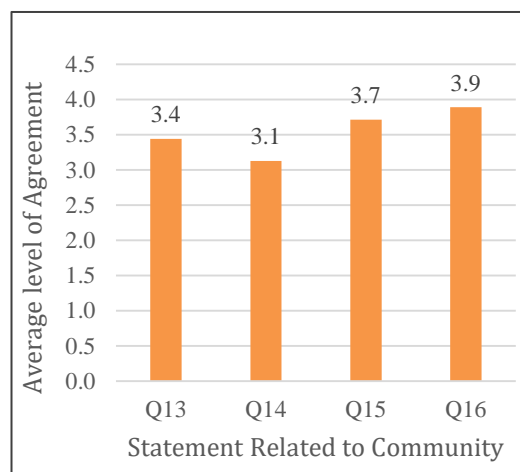


Figure 6: Teachers' response levels on community connections

Note: (Q13). I love taking part in local events and being involved in the community; (Q14). My bond with the neighbors makes the thought of leaving really tough; (Q15). I feel that I can really be myself in this place; (Q16). I am confident that my neighbors will help me in any emergency situation.

Source: Compiled by authors, 2025

In particular, abovementioned statements represent emotional and social aspects of community life, such as involving community events, relationships/networking with neighbors, contributing labor to others, and supporting others during emergencies. Those notions are closely linked to ideas of social networks and the use of social capital (Karunarathne and Gress, 2023; Karunarathne, 2021).

Paying attention to community connections is important in order to understand emotional attachment to a place of residence (Shum, Adams, and Gurney, 2025; Lewicka, 2011). This is exemplifying the different shapes of the emotional vis-à-vis social aspects of community life, such as taking part in community events, relationships with neighbor and other outsiders, opportunities for self-expression, and the sense of reciprocal support during emergencies. The average scores regarding these statements were 3.4, 3.1, 3.7, and 3.9, respectively (see, Figure 6). Based on the agreement/disagreement level classification of teachers' responses to three statements fall into the 'Agree' range, while one statement falls into the 'Neutral' range (mean = 3.1).

These results generally show that teachers like to community connections which are influencing in shaping their residential decisions, Figure 7 shows how teachers have responded to statement Q16.

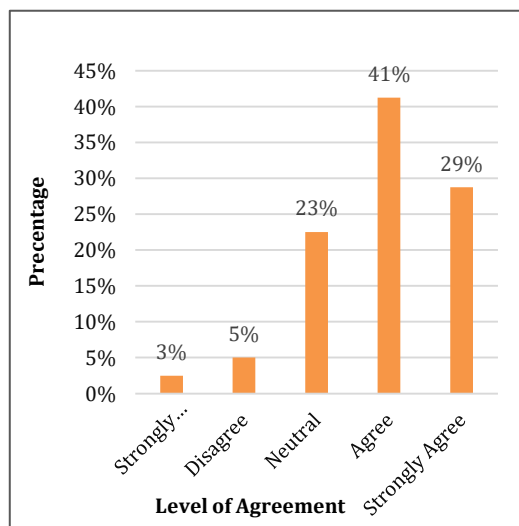


Figure 7: Responses to the Statement: "I am confident that my neighbors will help me in any emergency"

Source: Compiled by authors, 2025

Figure 7 shows that the response rates on the statement of 'I am confident that my neighbors will help me in any emergency' indicated the highest mean response score which is 3.9, exemplifying a strong sense of trust and mutual/reciprocal support among neighbors. Factors such as social security and reciprocal help within the community are important and considerable factors influencing teachers' residential choices. In particular, emotional support among neighbors are important when peoples feel need it. The results also show that 41% of teachers agreed and 29% strongly agreed with this statement, highlighting the important role of community connections in residential decisions. On the other hand, the revealed response pattern reflects how people often develop emotional ties to their parents' and relatives' homes, with mobilizing bonding social capital which is helping to explain this connection

(Karunarathne, 2025; Brown, Raymond, & Corcoran, 2015).

4.3 How do cultural ties matter on teachers' residential choices?

Especially, the cultural ties of individuals is an important aspect to understand the nature of emotional attachments to a place where they are living (Shum, Adams, and Gurney, 2025; Lewicka, 2011). In order to examine how cultural ties matter for teachers' residential choices/decision, four statements which are representing culture-based emotional attachments (e.g. Q18–Q21) were analysed. Basically the given statements cover culture-based emotional attachment aspects such as 'place-based identity', 'emotional rootedness', and the 'aspiration to maintain cultural continuity across generations' etc. More importantly, the mean scores recorded on these statements were 3.6, 4.0, 3.1, and 3.2, respectively (see, Figure 8).

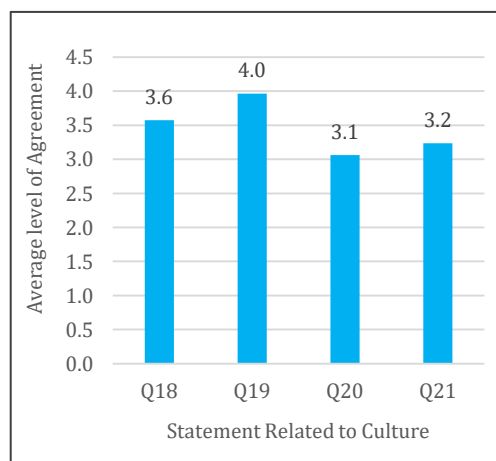


Figure 8: Teachers' Agreement Levels on Cultural Influence

Note: (Q18). This place isn't just where I live—it's a big part of who I am; (Q19). I feel relaxed when I'm

at my hometown; (Q20). My cultural connection to this area makes it hard to imagine living anywhere else; (Q21). I want my children to grow up experiencing the culture of this place

Source: Compiled by authors, 2025

Based on the respondents' ratings on Likert scale, Q18 and Q19 statements rated at 'Agree' range, while Q20 and Q21 statements rated at 'Neutral' range. Based upon the respondents' ratings on Likert scale, Q18 and Q19 statements rated at 'Agree' range, while Q20 and Q21 statements rated at 'Neutral' range. Their average responses clearly exemplify that they agree on the notion of the cultural ties influence their residential decisions quite different ways of cultural attachments. Figure 9 depicts the variations observed in response to statement Q19. In particular, the statement 'I feel relaxed when I'm at my hometown' rated the highest mean score of 4.0 (the standard deviation is 0.9), which indicates that the majority of teachers agreed with the given idea and their responses were properly consistent throughout the sample.

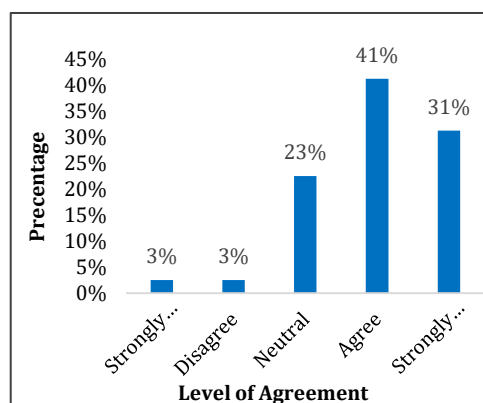


Figure 9: Responses to the Statement: 'I feel relaxed when I'm at my hometown'

Source: Compiled by authors, 2025

By contrast, 31% of respondents (e.g. 29 out of 80), were 'strongly agreed', while 41% (33 out of 80) 'agreed' with the given statement. These results clearly note that teachers' emotional comfort and culturally intertwined nature aligned to their places of residence (e.g. Hometowns). In other words, the lesson could be learned here is some cultural ties such as feelings of relaxation, belonging, and identity shape the teachers' residential preferences. This is because cultural attachment is one of staple aspects which influences to determine the place of residence.

4.4 Overall assessment of teachers' place of residence vis-à-vis emotional attachment

The given statements (Q8-Q21), which were considered to examine teachers' different emotional attachment aspects (such as family ties, community ties, and cultural ties), exemplified clear understanding about how they have been intertwined emotionally with their place of residence. According to the analysis, the highest individual mean rating score (4.3) was on a family-related statement (Q9), while the lowest mean rating score (3.1) were on the statements of Q14 and Q20, which are showcasing interlacing to cultural and community bonding, respectively (see, figure 10). More importantly, average mean rating scores which were calculated for each attachment category, exemplified that the family fabrics (e.g. Q8-Q11) had the highest overall average score which is at 3.96, secondly the community connections (e.g. Q13-Q16) which is at 3.54, and cultural ties (e.g. Q18-Q21) which is at 3.46 (see, figure 11). These findings are more intertwined with their cognitive attachments such as sense of

places. Previous studies also have highlighted that the cardinal role which have been played by cognitive factors in terms of

shaping individuals' residential decisions (Shum, Adams, and Gurney, 2025; Kelly et al., 2024).

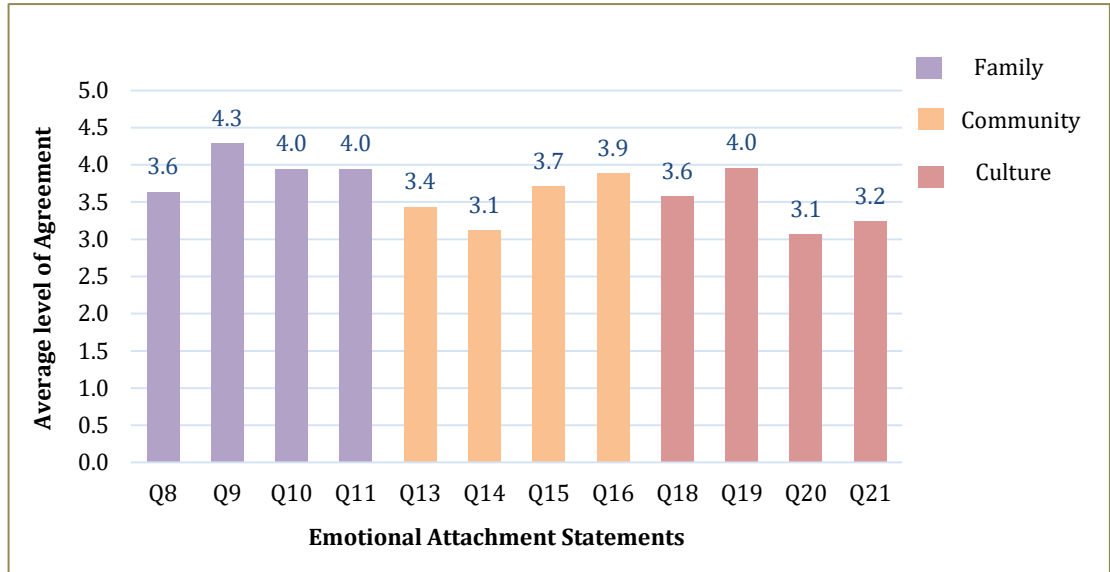


Figure 10: Average agreement levels across emotional attachment statements

Source: Compiled by authors, 2025

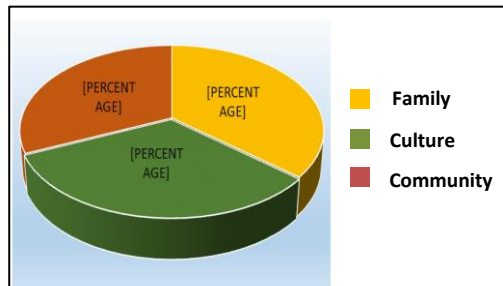


Figure 11: Relative influence of family, community, and cultural ties on teachers' residential decisions

Source: Compiled by authors, 2025

The slight higher rating scores on the community ties were observed compared to the rating scores on cultural ties. Especially, the social networking and their reciprocal ties mattered to mobilize social capital effectively (see, Karunarathne, 2021), which

also highlights the nature of place attachment of individuals. Moreover, the cumulative average rating score on all emotional attachment related statements was 3.7, which is categorized into the 'Agree' rate, based on the Likert scale. In contrast, the results demonstrate that the respondents' emotional connection to their place of residence is significant. In particular, family ties are indicated as the most influential factor representing the mean rating score 3.96 which is higher compared to the overall emotional attachment average 3.7. This pattern demonstrates that more close family relationships such as more proximity and attachment with parents, children, or spouses have a clear influence on their specific residential locations.

On the other hand, overall cultural ties also exemplified quite similar narratives. Especially, as mentioned earlier, previous researchers also have confirmed that family ties are one of the most influential emotional factors, which had impacted on individuals' residential decisions, compared to community and cultural ties (Kelly et al., 2024; Lewicka, 2011; Brown & Raymond, 2007). This may be because, the results showed that a vast majority of teachers (e.g. 57.5%) had strong emotional bonds with their place of residence. In particular, 35% of participants indicated that in the 'high' emotional attachment category, meanwhile an additional 22.5% (e.g. 18 individuals)

were observed in the 'very high' attachment category, which is demonstrating a deeper connection to their residential location (see, figure 12). In accordance with the extant literature, previous researches have investigated that the various emotional bonds and attachments which are representing variegated geographical settings (Shum, Adams, and Gurney, 2025; Bukvic, Whittemore, Gonzales, & Wilhelmi, 2022). Especially, researching the nature of place attachment and the influencing causative factors among government employees, would bridge the crucial gaps in the existing body of literature.

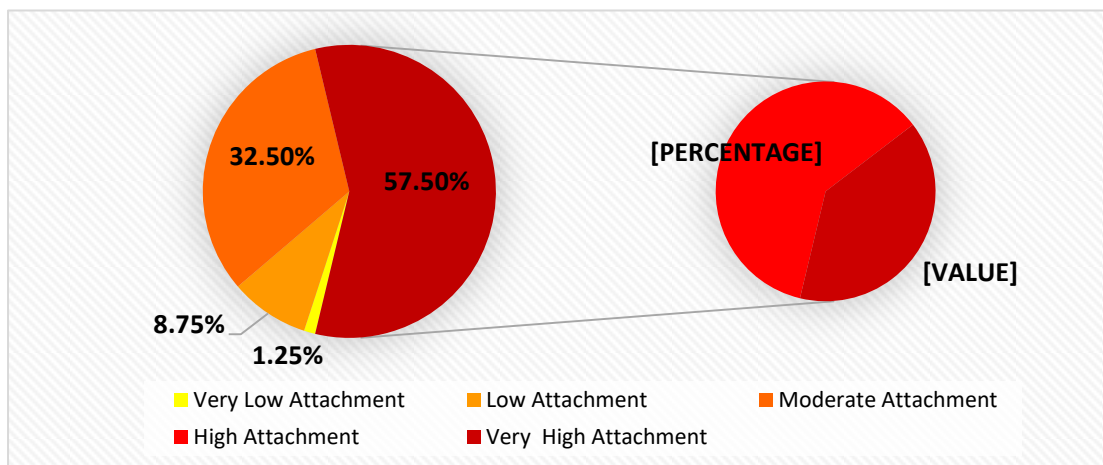


Figure 12: Emotional attachment levels to residence among teachers

Source: Compiled by authors, 2025

And also, responses of 26 participants (e.g. 32.5%) showed 'moderate' emotional attachment influence to their respective places of residence. On the other hand, only 10% of responses (7 participants) indicated their emotional attachment to respective residential places as 'low or very low' ratings, which indicate that some other factors may have influenced them on their residential decisions. The findings show that

90% of teachers have selected 'moderate' to 'very high' emotional attachment options to their places of residence. In particular, the results also showed that a vast majority of teachers (57.5%) had strong emotional connections to their places of residence. Moreover, 35% of participants' responses were categorized into 'high' emotional attachment category, while an additional 22.5% (18 individuals) was rated into the 'very high' category, which is indicating

stronger bonds to their home environment (see Figure 12).

These narratives imply that strong emotional attachments (highlighting the notion of sense of place) and various ties to places of residence are key indicator of residential decisions among the government school teachers in the Ratnapura Education Division-1. The lights shedding by the current study are aligning with the findings of recent studies (Lassota, Oleksy, Gambin, & Wnuk, 2025; Shum, Adams, and Gurney, 2025; Bukvic, Whittemore, Gonzales, & Wilhelmi, 2022). In this context, the current study's findings will have significant implications on the epistemology of 'place attachment' implying that the different emotional ties and networks immensely influence the residential decisions of employees despite the situation where they have been fighting selecting appropriate places to live with a range of economic hardships.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The scholarships of how 'place attachment', 'emotional attachment', and 'sense of place' affect the residential choices of government employees is a relatively new area in the broader discussion (e.g. epistemology) on place attachment. The cardinal focus of the current study was on how emotional attachment, as a sign of sense of place, shapes the residential decisions of government school teachers in the Ratnapura Education Division-1, Sri Lanka. This research mainly investigated the roles of family ties, community connections, and cultural ties/bonds in influencing their residential decisions. Using the mixed research method approach, the empirical

data were collected from 80 teachers from eight schools by considering structured questionnaires and unstructured interviews. The findings revealed that family ties are the most influential emotional factor, depicting the statement 'Living close to my family makes me feel safe and loved' having the highest mean rating score (e.g. 4.3). This highlights the strong emotional attachments to their families indicating living close-proximity to parents or relatives for affection, security, and daily support. Regarding the community dimension, the statement 'I am confident that my neighbors will help me in any emergency' (mean rating score is 3.9), showed teachers' trust in social safety networks and mutual/reciprocal supports, which are important for their residential satisfaction. In the sense of cultural attachment, the statement 'I feel relaxed when I'm at my hometown' (mean rating score is 4.0) emphasized the advantages/values of emotional comfort, cultural familiarity, and a sense of identity attached to one's place of origin. The key limitation of this work is the size of the sample, despite the current study demonstrates impactful findings to the existing body of literature. For the future research, place attachment among employees has potential to be further researched by considering larger and more diverse samples. Moreover, deeper understanding of the emotional and spatial/place specific aspects of attachment could help improve workplace satisfaction, well-being, and overall productivity among government employees.

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