

## Social Research as a Means for Peace Education

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### Abstract

Timor-Leste is a small island country in Southeast Asia, recovering from the brutal war which resulted in its achieving a full national independence in 2002. For Timorese people, building their own national identity plays an important role in ensuring peace and social stability. The newly opened Catholic University, focusing on holistic approach to education, has a leading function in this process. How can a University help young people to grow not only academically, but also socially and culturally? Specifically, how to use various stages of research work (from developing questionnaires to conducting interviews, field observations and data analysis) to assist students in growing as responsible members of their society? In this paper, we will discuss social research not only a means of academic excellence, but rather as a reservoir of values, skills and attitudes that enable young people to overcome the tragic memories of the violent past and to develop a deep sense of social solidarity and fraternity towards all members of society. We will reflect on specific research topics / research methods that we used to promote critical thinking and intercultural skills, ability for self-criticism, and living in harmony with oneself, others and with the nature. Examples will be taken from our studies of religious beliefs, values and fears among the Timorese youth; from our discussions about local traditional practices, such as cults of ancestors and animism, from our observations of Catholic activities in local parishes, and modern popular traditions, such as Martial Arts.

**Keywords:** identity, values, religions, solidarity, critical thinking