

Gender Based Occupational Segregation and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Women's economic empowerment is the capacity of women to participate and benefit in growth process of an economy. The economic empowerment recognizes the women's contributions in employment and value of respects and their dignity.

Sri Lankan women have achieved a relatively higher status in terms of civil rights, education, employment etc., when compared with women in other developing countries. However, the Sri Lankan women have not fully achieved equal rights and gender equality according to international norms in all aspects including employment (Centre for Women's Research, 2011). Although, Sri Lankan government had the commitment to ensure gender equality and recognizes women's right since ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1981, women experienced discrimination in their career lives. While the state provides equal employment opportunities in the public sector employment, there is a wide discrepancy in the law and the reality.

Alam (2014) indicates that educated female can perform a significant role in their family economy by having an employment. They also receive better status and power in the family as well as in the society

due to financial gains. According to West (2006), working status is important to empower women economically and the employed women also have greater likelihood for higher empowerment in other aspects than those women do not employed.

Despite the equal access to women at all levels of education, women in Sri Lanka are still facing discrimination in the employment sector (Moore et al. 2009). Majority of Sri Lankan women are employed in plantation, free trade zones, stereotype jobs, foreign employment etc., however previous studies have not examined sufficiently the ability of women for access to jobs pay higher remuneration and existing barriers which limit to entering them in such job market. Therefore, it is essential to identify current situation of women's participation in different type of employment and its role in economically empowering the Women in Sri Lanka. It is also necessary to identify sustainable remedies to overcome discriminations against women entering to highly paid employment sector.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are to examine gender based occupational segregation and its impact on economic empowerment of Women and to identify the challenges faced by women in economic empowerment in Sri Lanka.

Methodology

The study utilizes secondary data from Annual Report of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka in 2013, Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey Annual Report- 2012, Sri Lanka Labour Force survey Annual Bulletin- 2013 and the World Bank data base. The study mainly based of descriptive techniques which uses indices and percentage to analyses the data.

Results and Discussion

Sri Lanka's Human Development Index (HDI) was 0.715 in 2013 and the country is ranked at the 92nd position among 187 countries, first among South Asian countries (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2013). In terms of life expectancy and literacy rate women are in par with that of men (See Table 1 in Annexure A). But Sri Lanka is still poor in Gender Empowerment. Although female population (51.61%) is higher than male population (48.39%), female labour force participation rate (35.6%) is two times less than male (74.9%), (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2014).

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Employed Population by Employment Status and Gender - 2013

Employment Status	Total	Gender	
		Male	Female
Total	100	65.3	34.7
Employee	100	66.4	33.6
Employer	100	89.7	10.3
Own account worker	100	73.5	26.5
Contributing Family worker	100	21.5	78.5

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, (2013)

Observing employment data, the study identifies that most of Sri Lankan women serve as employees while men serve as employers. According to the Table 2, only 10.3% of female workers serve as employers, while 89.7% of male workers serve as employers. The employment rate among females who are contributing family workers is 78.5% while the corresponding rate for male is considerably lower at 21.5%.

The occupational profiles of women and men indicate that women are heavily concentrated in certain occupations i.e. only 11.7% of females worker are "Professionals" compared with 3.8% of females. The

contribution of females to the total employment by occupational groups reveals that 59.9% professionals, 46.8% clerks and 34% skilled agricultural and fishery workers are females (See Table 2 in Annexure A). Among the profession based occupational categories, women highly constitute in occupations that are culturally perceived to be feminine, such as midwives (100%), nurses (90.2%), teachers (71.2%), draughts persons (60.6%), clerks (57.9), dentists (53.2%), lawyers (50.1%) and doctors (42.7%). On the other hand women representation in excellence field such are senior administrators and managers (27.8%), technicians (27%), surveyors (24.2%), principals of schools (21.2%), and engineers (15.5%) are very low (Centre for Women's Research, 2011).

Sri Lanka's migrant labor force statistics shows that most of women go abroad especially to Middle East for low paid jobs. One third of total departures and 82.1% of female departures are housemaids (Central Bank Annual Report, 2013). Some fundamental issues exist regarding women in society leads to poor economic empowerment of Sri Lankan women. Such are: poor economic participation, less economic opportunities, Lack of the political empowerment and participation, poor educational attainment, limitation in wage policies and labour laws, women attitudes about their career lives, traditional norms and responsibilities of marriage and child care, perception of employers about women's abilities, sexual harassments etc.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The study conclude that most of the Sri Lankan female labour force is found to be at bottom level of employment pyramid and stereotype jobs. The study also concludes that the women are poor in economic empowerment which is resulted by poor achievement in labour force participation and higher participation in low paid jobs. The challenges face by Sri Lankan women for employment based poor economic empowerment are poor economic participation, less economic

opportunities, lack of the political empowerment and participation, poor educational attainment, limitation in wage policies, attitudes of women and employers, traditional norms and responsibilities, sexual harassments etc. Therefore, it is very important to eliminate employment disparities against women existing in the system as well as empowering them economically to promote gender equality and empower women. So the study suggest that the Government should formulated rules and regulations which are necessary to ensure women's economic rights and existing labour laws need to be revised focusing gender responsive.

References

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Annexure A

Table 1: Literacy Rate and Life Expectancy by Gender

	Literacy rate in 2013	Life expectancy in 2012
Total	95.6%	74 years
Male	96.8%	71 years
Female	94.6%	77 years

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2014; and The World Bank data base

Table 2: Labour Force Participation by Gender and Occupation- 2012

Occupation	Total	Gender		% Contribution of Females to the Total Employment
		Male	Female	
Total	100	100	100	32.6
Senior Officials & Managers	1.8	1.9	1.5	28.4
Professionals	6.4	3.8	11.7	59.9
Technical & Associate Professionals	5.7	5.6	5.8	33.5
Clerks	4.4	3.5	6.3	46.8
Proprietors & Managers of Enterprises	3.8	4.2	3.0	25.4
Sales and Service Workers	10.8	11.1	10.1	30.6
Skilled agri. & Fishery Workers	21.5	21.0	22.4	34.0
Craft & Related Workers	17.0	17.3	16.2	31.2
Elementary Occupations	19.6	19.4	19.9	33.2

Source: Sri Lanka Labour Force survey Annual Report- 2012