

## **Issues in women employment participation in the informal sector**

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The main objective of this paper is to examine the issues facing women employed in the informal sector in developing countries. The employment participation of women in the informal sector has been increasing in developing countries in recent years. The contribution of this gendered informal employment to the total employment in Sri Lanka is also significantly different from the experiences of other developing countries. The evidence shows that in Sri Lanka, men dominate the proportion of the employed in the informal sector (71%), whereas women dominate the proportion in other contexts. The general notion of the positive relationship between the level of education and female labour force participation is, however, questionable in the context of Sri Lanka, where the female labour force participation rate has remained stagnant at 33 to 35 percent of working age women in recent decades. Still, currently more than half of total employed women (54%) engage in the informal sector. Therefore, it is vital to examine the issues of women who work in the informal sector. This study is based on existing literature with respect to women's informal sector economic activities in different contexts. Women's issues are identified and analyzed under three main areas such as job-related issues, demographic and socioeconomic-related issues and health and morbidity-related issues. The findings reveal that women have faced several job-related issues such as job loss, job related injury, sickness and death, and trade union-related issues. Low level of education, marital status and fertility behavior, number of school-age children, looking-after elderly parents, low income and poverty were found as other demographic and socioeconomic-related issues of these women. The findings further revealed that informal sector women have faced health and morbidity related-issues which were related to their occupations. The majority of them have engaged in occupations such as selling goods, street vending, craft working, domestic aid and unpaid family activities and they have suffered with communicable diseases. It is also found that social welfare programs for these women need to be strengthened to improve the quality of their lives.

Key words: Women employment participation, Informal sector, Employment issues

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