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Determinants of the female labour force participation among educated women in Sri Lanka: A study conducted in the Gampaha district

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The Sri Lankan female population has achieved an excellent level of education compared to other developing countries. According to the Ministry of Education, among new admissions in government schools in 2014, 130,633 students were males and 126,656 students were females as a total. Further, approximately 60% of the university students are represented by females as per the information provided by the University Grant Commission in Sri Lanka. Despite equal opportunities for education for both men and women in Sri Lanka, research reveals that females leave the labour force significantly. As per the World Bank projections, the demographic transition that Sri Lanka experiences will diminish by 2017. With the country's transition from demographic bonus era to ageing population era, dependency ratios are expected to increase in the future; one out of every four is expected to be above 60 years of age. Also, the labour force of Sri Lanka is expected to start shrinking after 2026. But, the Sri Lankan female labour force participation has been only around 35% of the labour force. Hence, it is important to increase the female labour force participation. With this background, the study was conducted to identify the determinants of the labour force participation among educated women in Sri Lanka. The study used the qualitative approach and was restricted to the Gampaha district. 130 respondents were used, and they were selected by using a convenience sampling technique. A standardised questionnaire and unstructured interviews were used with a direct focus on the personal background, socio-economic profile, employment status and opinions of the respondents. The study carried out a descriptive analysis based on the primary data, and found out that the age, educational level of parents, financial soundness of the family, employability of the mother and mother in law, social status and the lower level of labour force participation among single women had a high correlation. The number of members in the family, occupation and the occupation sector of the husband, the educational level of the husband, and the family encouragement towards unemployment had a high correlation with the unemployment level of married or divorced educated women. The findings of this study highlight the importance of a better education and awareness about the importance of the female labour force participation. According to policy implications, the study mainly suggests to invest in skilltraining beyond secondary education, and encouraging women to have job oriented technical and vocational skills through the vocational education system.

Keywords: *Female labour force participation, Educated women*