

Education and Female Labour Force Participation in Sri Lanka

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Female labour force participation is an indication of the economically active female population of a country. Recently, interest of researchers to study female labour force participation has been widening and most of these studies in the literature have focused on female participation and factors contributing towards it. Cultural aspects and the limited access for the female education have been found in many countries as explaining the low labour force participation of females. Among South Asian countries, Sri Lanka has shown remarkable achievements in female education, during past four decades. As per the human capital theory, education is one of the most important human capital variables that empowers and encourages the people to enter into the labour market. This view has been confirmed by empirical studies too. However, there is hardly any study that focuses on education and female labour force participation in the Sri Lankan context. Hence the present study aims to fill this literature gap by examining the effect of the education on female labour force participation and exploring key factors that affect female labour force participation in Sri Lanka. The study analyses both primary and secondary data to achieve the objective. Descriptive statistics together with the quantitative tools are used to analyze data.

Results of the study show that the female education and labour force participation are not consistent with the human capital theory in the context of Sri Lanka. During past decades, females in Sri Lanka have achieved a remarkable level in terms of education. Their performance at primary, secondary and tertiary level education is at a higher level in Sri Lanka. This has resulted in narrowing the gender gap in literacy rate, access for education as well as the performance in the general education. However, the stagnation and slow shrinking trend in the female labour force participation confirms that the education of the females has not encouraged them to participate in the labour market. Narrow choices of females in the education and labor market; labour market structure including structural rigidities and wage discriminations; multiple roles of females in Sri Lankan context and availability of child caring facilities are the other key factors that affect the female labour force participation in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Female labor force participation, Female education, Sri Lanka