

## Women's Economic Participation in Rural Development

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### **Abstract**

*This study focused to analysis of women's economic participation, with special focus on women's changing gender roles in the context of rural development. Due to women's labor force participation, their reproductive role have changed, and giving the productive role a significant place. Hence, their participation in rural development has increased and has taken a significant place in development programs and policy discourses all over the world. Women's labor force participation has created dynamics in the rural sector. The objectives of this study are to examine effects of women's changing role on rural development, to identify women's changing roles in the households and in the economic sphere, to study the socio-economic and cultural hindrance to female participation in economic affairs, to identify how far women's paid and unpaid labor is important to the rural community and to recognize how women have responded to poverty conditions in the rural sector. The study found that, the changing positions of women from reproductive to productive activities have offered significant changes in rural areas. Hence, women are seen to perform a significant role in their family economy. It is possible to state that the economic well-being of the family is founded by women. They were employed in wage work, enterprises, government and private sectors and in agriculture, and had received good status and power due to economic strength. The majority of such women were found in the private sector, while others workers in the government sector or worked as self-employees and wage earners. Although they were engaged in different types of jobs, many limitations existed. Despite these limitations, those who were economically active had reached a good level of satisfaction in their lives. Although the women had received economic strength, men still continued to receive household leadership and ownership of assets. However, women played an important role in rural development, though employed or not. Yet, there is a need to develop technological and educational opportunities as well as infrastructure in order to uplift their economic contribution.*

**Key words:** Gender, Women's Role, Women's Participation, Rural Development, Family Economy, Social Status

## 1.1 Introduction

The literature on gender and economy was influenced by contributions of several disciplines within past few decades. During the past century women's role has been changed in the labour market and the family interest has decreased in important (Swedbery 2004: 281). Women in developing countries, especially, constitute a large part of the total workforce, particularly in the agricultural sector. Because of this important role, they constitute a substantial economic resource (Jayawardhana 1992: 243). Despite the fact that domestic duties are vitally associated with women in all societies, they are increasingly getting involved in non-domestic and wage earning activities. Although a significant number of wives have supported their husbands as breadwinners, there seems to be less support from husbands in sharing domestic chores. In such circumstances, working women are pressurized with the dual burden of wage work and domestic work. The major focus of this investigation is to determine the changing role of women in the rural sector, by especially showing the way they combine the two functions effectively, and to determine how far their economic contribution is important in economic activities (Wicramagama 1992).

The role of women in economic enhancement is necessarily important especially in low income families. Since women and men have different positions in households and also have differences with regard to their right to resources, their particular roles in income generation may also vary. It was believed that Third World countries mainly had economic difficulties. It is clear then that an organized and planned women's contribution in the economic sphere is a need. In order to make women's participation in to the economic activities proper gender planning strategies are required subordination. According to Caroline,

“The goal of gender planning is the emancipation of women from their and their achievement of equality, equity and empowerment” (Caroline 1993: 1).

It is possible to discuss women's entry into the labor market in two phases: The pre-industrial phase and post-industrial phase. When the economy is predominantly agricultural and depends on collective family effort, women's participation is intensive. Protecting the family and engaging in economically productive work were thought to be a woman's responsibility. In addition, intensive farming and animal husbandry were carried out in houses with the participation of women. Such characteristics of rural life can still be observed in rural agricultural communities (Wicramagama 1992: 78).

The industrial revolution with its introduction of factories and large scale production divorced economic activities from everyday domestic routines. This limited certain women's economic engagement and confined them to the household. Yet, the separation of income generating activities from domestic chores increased the burden of many women who had to go out to work to supply family income. Employment conditions for women in the early industrial phases remains to be an important hallmark in history. Thus, when wages increased for men in the industrial sector in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, some working class women left the labor market (Wicramagama 1992).

According to Jayaweera (1990), more women are taking up the role of income earner and in its capacity face dual functions both in the home front and at the work place. In fact, the number of women in such a position is much larger than official figures. Official statistics on working women have to be treated with caution, as women engaged in the informal sector tend to get left out from census calculations i.e. women who are simply categorized as “housewives” engage in economically productive work (Kiribamune 1992: 26).

However women have become major role players in the economy of a country today. Their participation in economic activities differs in each socio-cultural situation. Specially, under a patriarchal dominant planning, managing and socio-economic condition, women have become second citizens in the country. In terms of the world context, this nature is mainly visible in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Yet, as a whole around the globe each nation experiences women's subordination, although women actively participate in income generating activities.

The growth of modern economy during the colonial period in Sri Lanka laid foundations for female employment, thereby challenging the value system of early elites. Educational opportunities for women, a changing socio-economic context and economic reforms are required for women's participation in the labor market. However, today, women's participation in the Sri Lankan economy is unique. There are several types of studies on women's labor force participation. Gunawardhana's research on "Women in the Professions" carried out with the objective of investigating how married women in professions combine their work role with domestic roles handles a sample of fifty respondents from Kandy. The study revealed that a small percentage of husbands have negative attitudes towards their wives who work outside the home, and that the sharing of domestic roles was limited to merely marketing and washing clothes (Gunawardhana 1992: 218). Bandaranayaka's study on female factory workers' level of education revealed that the women are over qualified yet due to their lack of financial resources go out in search of factory work. Women's income was the major source that fulfilled the family's basic needs. It indicates the importance of women's economic strength in the society (Bandaranayaka 1992). Goonasekara's study on school teachers in the Central Province found that women, as teachers, are satisfied and culturally respected. Although they earn a relatively less salary, it was not a matter for them (Gunasekara 1992). According to Wicramagamage's study on nurses, the women's need for self-fulfillment was an obvious fact that motivated them towards income generating activities (Wicramagamage 1992).

## 1.2 Research Issue

In the above context, the present study attempts to explore the research problem of how has the changing role of women affected rural development? In order to examine the above stated research problem, several research questions were formulated. Are there any significant changes in women's roles at present? If so what are they? Are there socio-economic and cultural barriers to the economic participation of women? How can rural women be economically empowered? What importance is there? And is women's unemployment recognized in the rural sector? If so what is its influence on rural economy? Those research questions were important to gather appropriate information. Several objectives underlined the present study. Among them, the overall objective was to study the effects of women's changing role on rural development. Apart from this, specific objectives of the study included to identify women's changing roles in the households and in the economic sphere, to study the socio-economic and cultural hindrance to female participation in economic affairs, to identify how far women's paid and unpaid labor is important to the rural community and to recognize how women have responded to poverty conditions in the rural sector.

## 1.3 Field Settings of the Research

*Thunkama Grama Niladhari* (GN) Division was selected as the field setting for study. It is situated in the *Embilipitiya* Divisional Secretariat (DS) in the *Rathnapura* District. The selected field setting has a rural, agricultural setting. Importantly, today there are significant changes seen due to women's labor force participation. Hence, women have become key role players in the area. In addition to agricultural work, they engage in different types of income generating activities. Due to this reason the area was selected for research on "women's contribution to rural economy" with the hope that the selected area offers greater possibility of successfully studying the research problem.

### 1.3.1 Data Collection Process

The selection of a research field and entering the selected area is important in fulfilling research objectives. *Thunkama* area was selected as it was most suitable for study. First, the researchers walked into the village and used simple observation as his first method of data collection. This helped him collect background information of the area. The researchers observed that many women in the area were engaged in different

types of work and was also able to communicate with several women. This helped researchers to simply understand the women's situation and economic condition of the village.

It is somewhat difficult to practically collect data from the entire population to fulfill the objectives of the study. Therefore sampling appropriately used. The most important part of sampling is to determine its size, so that the diversity of the population is represented. Seventy five (75) families were selected as the sample of this study under the stratified random sampling method, which was selected due to the need of presenting diverse economic strata in the population. The sample was drawn including strata such as unpaid workers - thirty five (35), wage workers - twenty (20), female entrepreneurs - ten (10) and employed workers - ten (10). After drawing the sample, seventy five questionnaires were administered to gather information. Amongst the seventy five respondents, ten were purposively selected for interviews. In addition to these primary data gathering methods, government census reports, statistical reports, books, magazines and the Internet were used as secondary data. The information collected was analyzed with Microsoft Excel and presented through figures, graphs and tables.

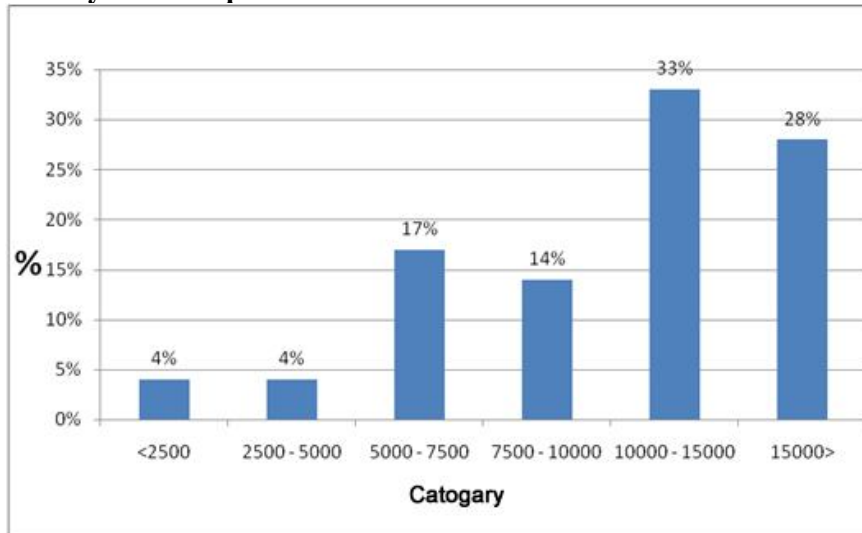
## **2. Results and Discussion**

### **2.1 Women's Contribution to the Family**

Throughout the past few decades, policies, programs and projects were designed to assist low income women in the third world, which focused on the importance of women's participation in the development process. Since 1950, many different interventions were made to change the macro level economic and social progress (Moser 1993: 55). The anti-poverty approach hopes to enhance women's productivity. It views women's poverty as a matter of under development. As the approach points out, the productive role of women is to meet practical gender needs. It particularly promotes small-scale income generating projects (Moser 1993: 67).

In terms of Sri Lankan history, the colonial period has greatly contributed to the creation of structural changes in society. Colonial policy frameworks helped transfer major socio-economic, political, cultural and intellectual changes that took place in western societies into the Sri Lankan context. This made an important influence on the status of women and their position too. Incensement of social mobility weakened the extended family and made a significant impact on women. Missionary education emphasized female education, while Kannangara introduced free education in post-Donoughmore period. This extended female participation in the formal education system. Women's increasing literacy and educational qualifications opened the doors for labor market accessibility (Gunawardana 1992: 194).

Labour force participation in Sri Lanka is characterized by high population of males where women constitute only half the number of males in the workforce. However women's participation in the labour force has seen a gradual and continuous increase in the past two decades (Jayasundare 2005: 320). This nature has directly and indirectly influenced the economic well being of the family. This is quite evident in the *Thunkama* village. Families which have women engaged in economic activities have considerably contributed to the growth of family income. The situation can be presented as follows:

**Figure 01****Family income per month in *Thunkama***

(Source: Field Survey 2010)

According to the Figure above, it is clear that the majority of the sample belongs to the income category of Rs10000-15000 per month, which accounts for about 33%. Most women in this category have small-scale entrepreneurial activities, while others are tea and garment factory workers. Those who have an income of more than Rs.15000 per month are about 28% of the sample, and have considerably good positions in government and private institutions. This category includes teachers, nurses, clerks, doctors and medium scale entrepreneurs. On the whole, 61% of the sample has received more than Rs.10000 per month, and the financial contribution to the families of those women is high. The women have received better decision making power, status and privileges in society. In addition, they enjoy more freedom, recognition and social recognition than the women who are not engaged in economically productive work. Women engaged in wage labor, small scale craft, brick making and running boutiques belong to the category of income earners of Rs 2500-7500 per month. They are in a moderate position in terms of consumption matters, but most importantly, their position is better than those housewives who totally depend on their husbands in the village.

Such economic strength of women has challenged traditional explanations on gender and gender roles. In general, women have also become the family's economic providers, which was traditionally the role performed by males. This tendency influences power relations in family to change and also effaces gender subordination. According to Garrette, "It claims that children learn gender identity and gender roles in same way they learn other things. Giving rewards and sanctions, parents encourage children to adopt appropriate gender roles. Kessler and Mckenna (1992) stated that social learning theory is a useful way of describing the development of gender identities" (1987: 25).

According to the situation of the village in the study, the economic strength of women has led to the creation of new gender identities for them. The rewards they received by engaging in economic activities causes cultural development in terms of female economic participation, and this passes down to the next generation by socialization. This fact is clearly evident in *Thunkama*. Because of their high status, mothers have focused on their children, especially female children, to have better educational performance and personal development. According to liberal feminists, they prefer women's legal, political, educational and employment rights as most important in obtaining women's autonomy (Bryson 1992). However from the 1960s and 1970s, the rising cost of living in Sri Lanka increased difficulty for families to survive, and

required female participation in labor market in addition to that of males. This allowed females to engage in different types of occupations, which were quite different from traditional forms (Munasingha 2004; Uluwaduge 2013).

## 2.2 Nature of Employment

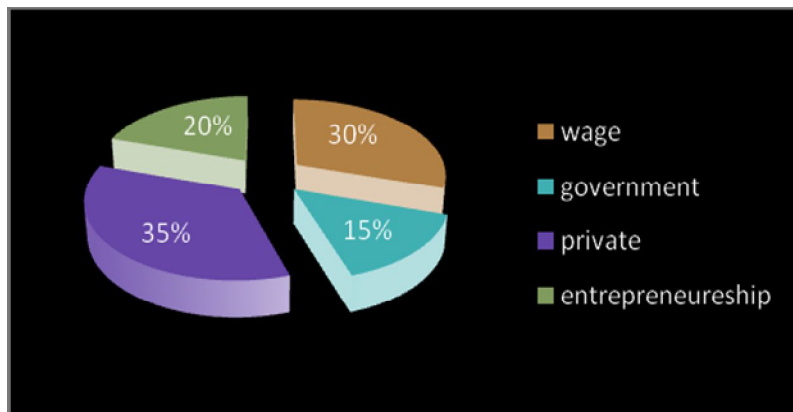
The nature of economic activities, especially employment activities of any group in a given historical period, is determined by several factors. Among these, values in the particular society, pattern of labor demand, nature of assets and social position of the group are highly considered. Since Sri Lankan culture is shaped by tradition, it has prescribed ways of labor requirement. However, over time and space, this demand has been changing according to the global context (Munasingha 2004: 85).

It is evident that the country's labor market demand was influenced by liberal ideologies, cultural diffusion, the effect of globalization and the changing socio- economic context. This is obvious if one carefully examines social changes in Sri Lanka after the introduction of open economic policies in 1978.

However, any society has its own pattern of sex-based division of labor. Each task is predominantly allocated for women, while there are other tasks for men. As society undergoes economic change, the nature of work performed by both men and women also changed. Similarly, their sexual division of labor also takes a quite different nature. But as a whole, the existence of sexual division of labor is popularly seen in human society (Garrette 1987). In general, it appears that the discrimination of sexual division of labor is directly related to the devaluation of women in society, which is universal in nature (Swedbery 2004: 281). Having understood this background, the task of analyzing the nature of employment in *Thunkama* becomes easy. This is explained as follows:

**Figure 02**

### Nature of female employment in *Thunkama*



(Source: Field Survey 2010)

As the above Figure revealed, the largest portion of women is engaged in private sector employment, and the majority of them are factory workers. Others include clerks, accountants, supervisors and sales girls. The women are engaged in such private sector professions due to lack of access to the government sector. Although there are evidence that the salary gap between male and female workers of private sector is widened comparing to the government sector (Banda et al 2008: 196), many women in *Tunkama* area have engaged with privet sector employments giving less priority to the gender differentiation in the salary prospects.



As many respondents pointed out, females largely prefer to serve in the government sector. They do not like to take large risks; many of them wish to have permanent, secure and safe occupations. In addition, they also hope to gain leisure, less work load and respect through government jobs. What is important here is that they are not highly interested in salary prospects.

The women engaged in private sector occupations have been directly influenced by their own educational qualifications. They belong to the category of A/L passed, degree holders, those who have vocational training and diploma. Some females have better computer skills and considerable English literacy. It is evident that those engaged in private sector jobs belonged to the age range of 23-35 and were mainly unmarried.

With regard to government sector occupations, those engaged in the said sector constitute about 15%, and include doctors, teachers, nurses and clerks. The main factors behind their appointments are educational qualifications and political support. However, it is noteworthy that there is no woman administrator or engineer in the area. Although women had equal access to education, there was no equal access to employment. Some of the common factors in their jobs included low wages, low status and vulnerability. The majority of women employees are engaged in fields of education and health care, which are traditionally identified as areas suitable for women. There is less female participation at higher administration and executive levels due to gender discrimination (Amerendra 1998).

In addition to the above, wage earners are also an important income generating portion of the sample, constituting about 30%. Among them, daily wage earners and contract-based wage earners can be identified. The common picture of their income is the lack of job stability. These wage laborers are highly absorbed in agricultural settings and road construction. Since their day to day expenditure is higher than earnings, it drags them into depths of poverty. But wage earning is important for them, since it facilitates their consumption needs.

According to the female entrepreneurs of the area, the extent to which women have potential to be engaged in economic activities is identified. They have received considerable status. Craftwork, sewing and running boutiques are among some of the common forms of such income generation. In terms of the female entrepreneurs' personal characteristics, they have an enthusiastic vision, risk taking ability and financial management capacity. Yet, during interpersonal relationships, they mostly depend on male support, which may be provided by the husband or an elderly, male family member.

According to feminists, female economic strength changes females' social position. Feminists are also interested in female subordination of wage workers. Women workers tend to be restricted into certain industrial-sector and particular occupations, which are typically less paid under conditions of being less skilled, low in hierarchy and having poor working ability. This situation prevails in both industrial and developing countries, and denotes female subordination. According to Munasingha, (2004) the transitions of agricultural society to advanced industrial society has both directly and indirectly influenced women and shape the productive role of women (2004: 84).

### **2.3 Career Development**

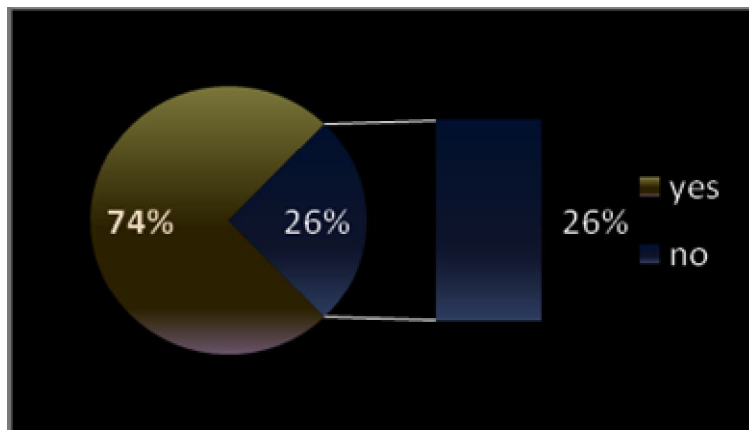
In most industrial countries, the economy has allowed women's participation in the labor market, giving them opportunities for career development through programs and projects. They are aware of both skill development and personal growth (Munasingha 2004). Responding to the women's decade, the Sri Lankan constitution articulated gender equality in 1978 with distinctive fundamental rights. This facilitated women's development programs and established the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Although social institutions were set up, they had no clear vision for implementing programs, especially due to the inaccessibility of financial and administrative support. Therefore activities run by these social institutions were mostly limited to

carrying out self-employment programs for poor women. These projects are thus reinforced by socio-economic disparities, perpetuating gender subordination.

Given this situation, the chance for career development in Sri Lanka has no wide application. Socio-economic factors influence women in both their private and public life. In the US, women's penetration into the workforce is not a recent trend. It has been dramatically growing since the 1970s. Married women, mothers and daughters have engaged in income generating activities especially in the public and private sector, challenging conventional ideas on family life. This is the working culture of the US supported by the open economy. Women's employment in the US challenges male domination and subordination in marriage. Working offers women more economic power and more accessibility to public life (Marecek 1992: 265). The cultural background of a country identifies the level of career development for both men and women. In *Thunkama*, women's ability of career development can be pictured as follows:

**Figure 03**

**Career development ability of women in *Thunkama***



(Source: Field Survey 2010)

According to the Figure above, there are 74% of women who wish for career development. It is a trend that can be positively elaborated. Although the village has a traditional way of life, through education and especially media, innovative and competitive global ideas and attitudes have reached grass root level. Women are gradually becoming consumers of global culture.

Many families are involved in some kind of economic competition for survival. In this case, the greater economic contribution of women has led to both economic and social uplift and also upward mobility of the family in general and especially of women's status.

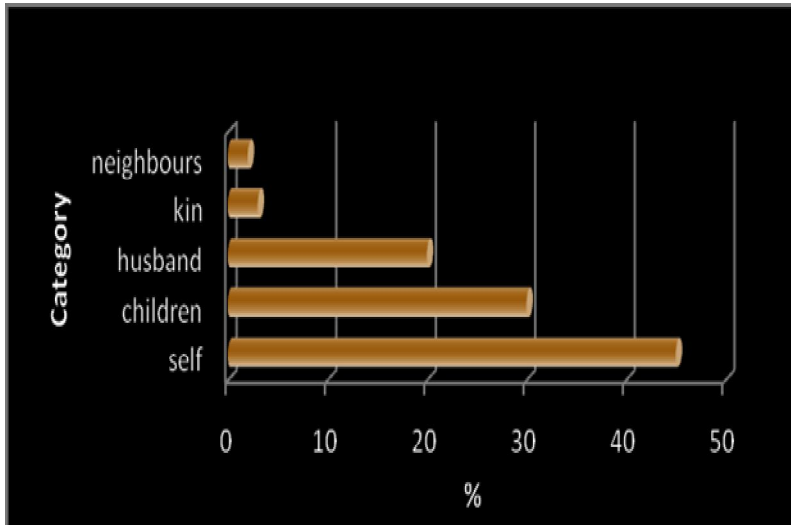
Vitality, the family support for career development of women should also be noticed. Family members contribute to women's career development by providing educational facilities and chances for skills development, fulfilling emotional and material necessities and supporting their employment, especially for those who are engaged in entrepreneurial activities. Significantly, women who belong to the age range of 25-35 years receive career development mostly through educational and vocational qualifications, while others are directed towards economic enhancement in career through self-dedication, strong motivation, greater risk taking and application of new techniques.



In terms of the women who do not like career development, it is mainly because of the burden of their dual role. Both family and employment responsibilities have generated a large work load for them. If one takes into account the women's supportive system in household, this can be clearly understood:

**Figure 04**

**Support for household affairs**



(Source: Field Survey 2010)

As the Figure reveals, the majority of women do their own household affairs. This has additional stress on them and gives them no leisure time. Without leisure, career development is impossible. Although 19% of the women have received support from husbands, it is not continuous because males do not consider household affairs as their duty. Married women especially do not wish for career development, due to the impossibility of maintaining a balance between their productive and reproductive roles. In addition to these reasons, some older women and the majority of teachers in the study do not have a positive attitude with regard to career development. They are satisfied with what they receive, and lag behind in cultural attitudes by stating that a woman's main responsibility is at home, not in the workplace. Such an attitude also limits their participation in career advancement.

## 2.4 Productive Role

The productive role belongs to both women and men, it may be cash or kind. It includes both market productions and substance home productions. For women, it includes independent farmers, peasant wives and wage workers (Moser 1998: 85). Throughout the third world, most low income women have engaged in productive work. There is an asymmetrical gender relation in productive work, whether it is the formal or informal sector, rural or urban production (Moser 1993). Many feminists argue that the reproductive role of women is also a productive role. However, new forms of "women's work" also generate parallel to the rise of new employment opportunities, thereby perpetuating women's subordination. This is mostly visible in the free trade zones. In the field of self-employment the situation is also the same.

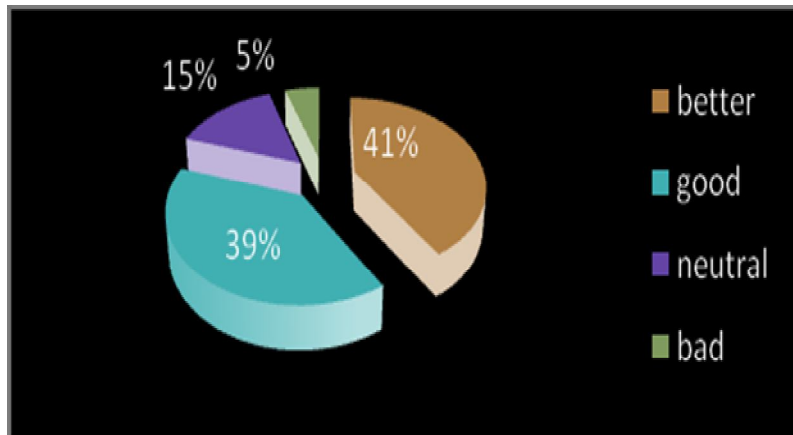
## 2.5 Advantages of Economic Activities

Advantages of women's economic activities can be discussed with special reference to their contribution to the family including children, other family members and to the society at large. According to Marecex,

women are mostly engaged in occupations which belong to gender characteristics. For example, nurturing children (as teachers), caring for the sick (as nurses) or cooks and domestic servants. Whether it is a developed or developing country, women have large responsibility regarding family although they engage in a career. Women who have upper ranks in salary or income can reduce their burden through extra-household help, fast food and through labor saving devices (1992: 276). The advantages for children of having economically active women can be shown as follows:

**Figure 05**

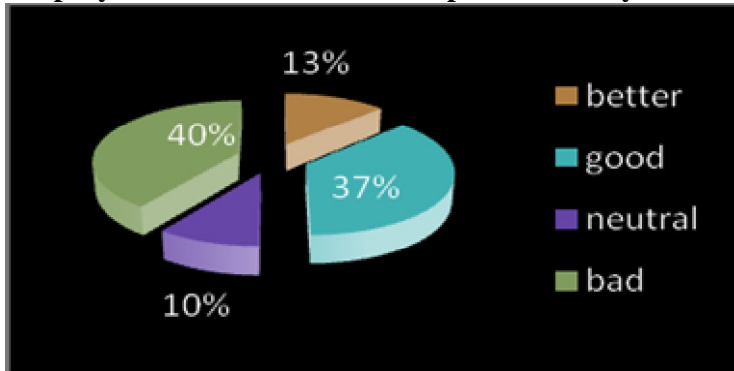
**Economically active women's relationships with their children**



(Source: Field Survey 2010)

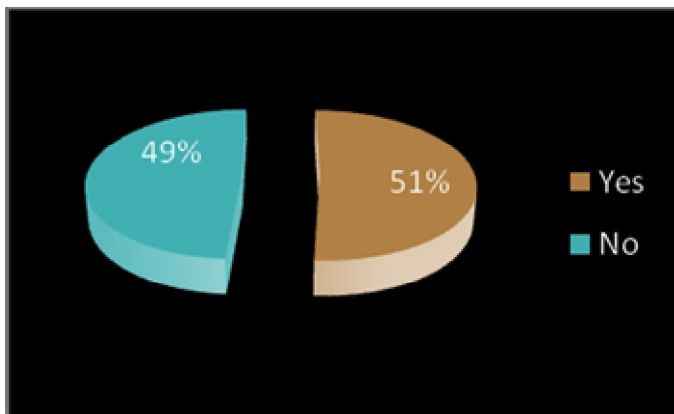
According to Charles (2000) argued that women who are economically active have supplied needs of children and other dependents (Charles 2000: 100). As the Figure shows, the most intimate relationship between mother and child (or children) prevails among about 41%. These women provide both material and emotional needs to their children. Most women provide a spirit of love, care, emotional satisfaction and self enhancement within family life. The psychological demand of women's involvement in family affairs has increased. In many cultures, mothers are held responsible for guiding and forming their children's character, stimulating their intellectual development and ensuring children's success, adequate personality and happiness (Morecek 1992: 276). Therefore, economically productive women have more opportunity of providing material development to their children. On the other hand, as was visible, children also enjoy their mother's privileges, since it positively labeled the children as those belonging to good and decent parents. This is most important in the development of self-esteem, and motivation towards children's positive growth. But, there are a considerable number of families who have no intimate, interpersonal relationship, because they do not have time to mix up with each other and have common decision making through discussions. This nature is most visible in families in which mothers are entrepreneurs and wage workers.

Women's relationship with family members is another important point. It suggests how far they are concerned of elderly persons in their families. Unlike housewives who do not engage in an occupation, economically active women have less time to spend on elders. This has a negative effect on protecting elders and those who are in old-age. Such persons then become more vulnerable and the number of disadvantages increases due to women's productive role. The negative effect it has on elders may generate elderly isolation, stereotyping, reduced esteem and disgust. Such outcomes may create an emerging social problem in relation to the elderly population. Social aging is growing in the world, and needs to be positively evaluated.

**Figure 06****Employed women's relationship with family members in *Thunkama***

(Source: Field Survey 2010)

When talking about the social contribution of economically productive women, it seems to agree with women's role in community management. The community management role comprises activities undertaken primarily by women at the community level. This is to ensure the provision and maintenance of scarce resource on collective consumption such as water, health care and education" (Moser 1993: 34). It is important to note that gender relations play an important role in community level work. For women, the neighborhood is essential for the domestic arena. In *Thunkama*, economically active women participate more in social affairs than others, because they have experience on interpersonal relationships and management. Economically active women's good social position, economic power, recognition and privileged status allow them to carry out community level work in dominant positions. In addition, they participate in village and outside weddings, funerals and celebrations and play an active role in social efforts as well. This nature has challenged traditional thoughts of women being limited to home.

**Figure 07****Women's participation in social affairs in *Thunkama***

(Source: Primary Information 2010)

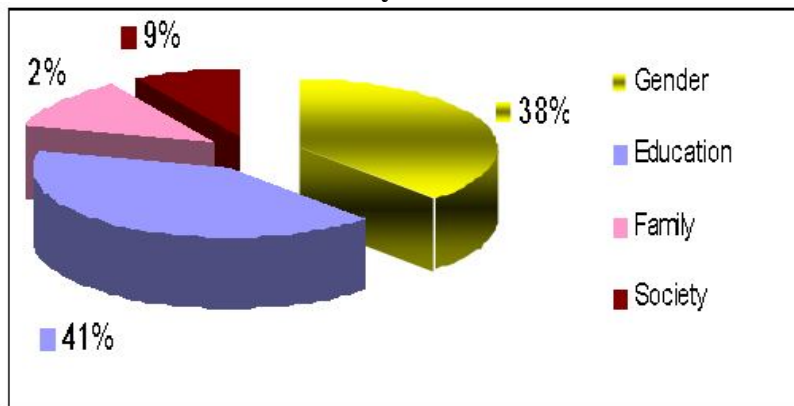
The percentage of women who take part in social affairs is 51% and teachers are prominent among them. The 49% of women who do not participate are mainly wage earners and entrepreneurs. They do not have enough time to manage community affairs and also lack knowledge on the importance of the matter. Although the women do not necessarily participate in "societies" such as "female society" and rural development committees, they take part whenever there is a funeral.

## 2.6 Limitations of the Occupation

Most women's occupations are not well paid and offer few opportunities for advancement. There are obvious obstacles for women when they seek training or education to improve the skills, and the experience of earning for women as employees is different from that of men. Further, the employed women's workload is also different from that of unemployed women. Yet the employed women's domestic responsibilities are similar to that of the unemployed. Thus, employed women spend less time on leisure and on personal activities. Sexual harassment on the job also takes place. Demand for sexual favors and threat of sexual or physical violence can harm their mental and physical health. The anticipation of sexual harassment keeps women out of certain work settings and even out of certain occupations. This factor suggests the control and subordination of women, which perpetuates gender stratification at the work place. According to Gutek in 1985, over 20% of women in the US reported that they had to transfer their job due to sexual harassment (Marecek 1992: 278). According to Marxists, women's work whether it is wage work, small scale farming or domestic is beneficial for the owners of capital. Thus, women have long formed cheap labour and have received less payment than men and have as a flexible supply of work depended on what they received. Thus women become the most vulnerable part of labour force and are subjected to a high degree of exploitation (Bryson 1992). The limitations of women's occupations in *Thunkama* can be mainly discussed under gender, education, family and social influence.

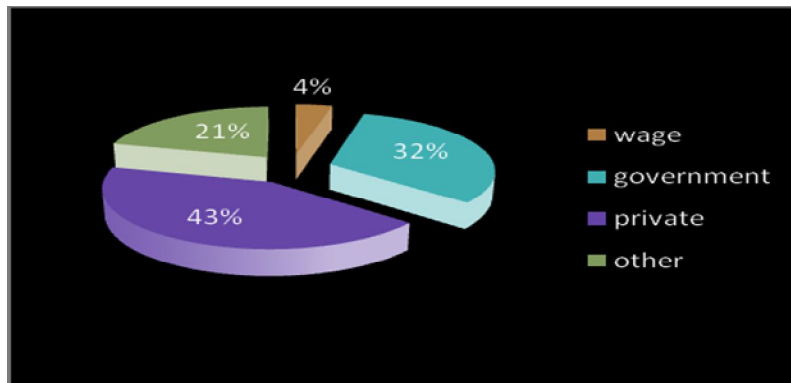
**Figure 08**

### Limitations of economically active women in *Thunkama*



(Source: Primary Information 2010)

As the above Figure reveals, the most influential limitation of economically active women is education, which is about 42% of the sample. As explained before, 74% of the economically active women wish for career development, and mainly see education as the most important tool in climbing up the career path. Unfortunately, their full time service, household responsibilities and lack of time has mainly deprived them of getting an education relevant to the job. On the other hand, in some cases, although they wish for further education, due to the increasing cost of living, there is insufficient financial support to pursue education. Those who engage in entrepreneurial activities such as sewing and craftwork, cannot pursue relevant education, including skills development, due to lack of related teachers in the area. *Thunkama* is mainly a traditional area, where there is no developed culture that enables them to go out for further education. People depend on what they know and what they can do. This has severely harmed their occupational development and ways off earning extra money through easy techniques, and this is clearly visible through their lower savings, despite being engaged in economically productive work. The situation can be shown as follows:

**Figure 09****The level of saving among economically active women in *Thunkama***

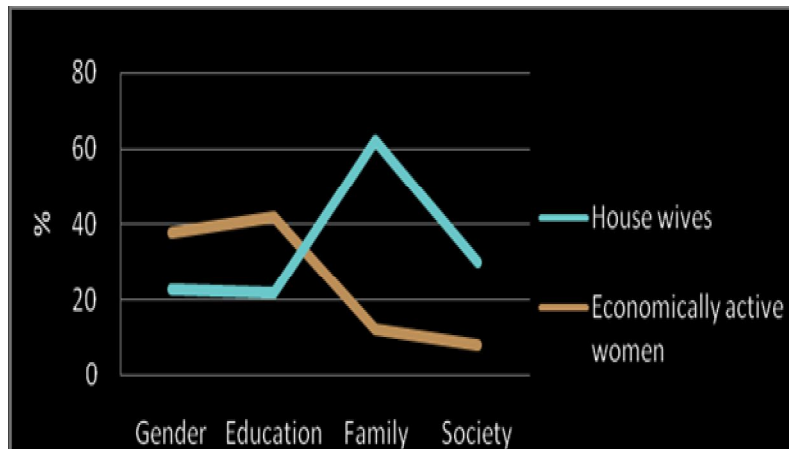
(Source: Primary Information 2010)

The above Figure clearly shows that the habit of saving among entrepreneurs and wage workers is considerably low. This is because these economic activities still cling on to traditional ways, even though the women may be engaged in the said economic activities. They have not bought labor saving equipment and do not know of new techniques that would improve production and effectively reach the market. This means that they do not have sufficient education with regard to their income generating activities.

In addition to education, gender also plays an important role in limiting the service of economically active women. The gender barrier is severe among factory workers, wage earners and female entrepreneurs. Wage earners are only invited for female dominant opportunities, i.e. in the harvest season for agricultural demands. In contrast, in construction and heavy work, mainly male wage workers are required. When female entrepreneurs keep interpersonal relationships, the help of a male member in the family is seen as essential. In addition, in other duties such as transportation and selling, there are limitations for female entrepreneurs, especially due to their gender.

Family and society also become limitations for economically active women in *Thunkama*, but are not great limitations as education or gender. Many families support female labor force participation because it provides a range of advantages to the family. Husbands, children and kin have supported women to manage household affairs. There is social recognition that women's economic power offers them freedom and status. This high social recognition and respect encourages them to engage in economic activities. However, there are limitations in a smaller degree with regard to family and social norms on women. Unfortunately, women's higher position, prestige and autonomy has sometimes led to the incensement of conflicts between men and women, resulting in a higher level of wife abuse when men sense less control over women.

Gender subordination is embedded through sexual division of labor. As cash economy stabilized, sexual division of labor was organized. For feminists, these roles are unnatural. Women have multiple roles such as bearing children, caring for children, caring for adults and carrying out economic activities (Bryson 1992). The limitations of those who are employed can be clearly understood when compared with those who do not have economic engagements i.e. housewives. The results can be shown as follows:

**Figure 10****Comparison of limitations between housewives and economically active women**

(Source: Primary Information 2010)

According to Figure 10, education and gender are the most important limitations for economically active women. Among them, thirty-eight percent (38%) are reported to have gender barriers while forty-three percent (43%) have education as a key limitation. In contrast, gender and education are the least limitations for housewives, while family and societal influence is greater for them- family influence is about sixty three percent (63%), while thirty percent (30%) of the sample (housewives) have social influence as limitations. However, since the economy has failed to absorb all the job seekers, women who have entered the job market are generally pushed into sex-stereotyped and less paid jobs. However, policy makers have identified rural women's economic productivity in developing Third world countries (Kiribamune and Samarasingha 1999).

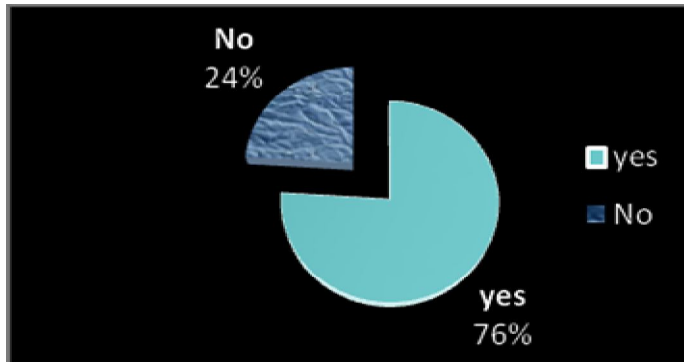
## 2.7 Job Satisfaction

Public discussion of women and family life in Sri Lanka is predominantly drawn through tradition. The ideal picture of "family" has notions of harmony, plenty, security, love and maturity. In the United States, public discussion on family life is coined around marital breakups, sexual abuse, wife beating, physical and sexual abuse of children (Marecek 1992). As the discussion highlights, women in a family do not always live happily. They devote their effort to family well being and economic activities. The burden of roles, abuses against women has led to greater psychological depression, anxiety and loneliness (Marecek 1992). However, this is not common to all those who are employed. According to Wicramasingha (1992), the need of self fulfillment for women is an obvious fact that motivates them towards income generating work. Therefore, the satisfaction of economically productive women of *Thunkama can* be shown as follows:



**Figure 11**

**Satisfaction of economically active women in *Thunkama***

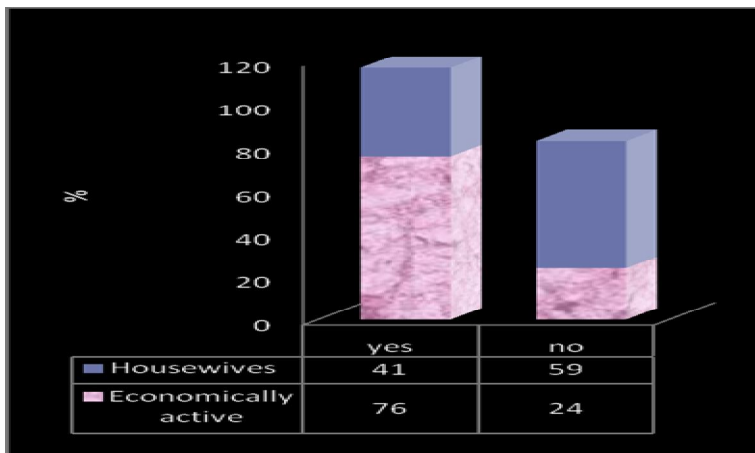


(Source: Primary Information 2010)

As the above Figure reveals, the majority of economically active women are satisfied with their occupation. The reason is that it allows them to have economic and decision making power, provides family needs and assists them personally to become self-confident. Economically active women provide basic needs to their families, support children’s education and spend money on providing a comfortable family life. This nature is very much evident among those who work in government and private sector jobs.

**Figure 12**

**Comparisons between housewives and economically active women in their level of satisfaction**



(Source: Primary Information 2010)

According to Figure 12, housewives’ satisfaction is lower than that of economically active women. Although employed women have to manage a dual role, they have greater freedom due to their income. Housewives are limited to households and are totally dependent on their husbands, it minimizes their satisfaction.

Psychological studies of mothers suggested that “mother blaming” of doctors and others for mistakes of children has led to emotional stress and stress related health problems since women may feel less adequate as parents and less satisfied with parenthood. Baruch, Bienet and Barnett are dominant researchers in this field (Marecek 1992: 276).

However, with regard to working women's new equipment, informal support has led to help manage the burden. Hence they support the growth of the family income, provide financial support for children's education and healthy food and also receive better privileges. These abilities have led women to be satisfied and have motivated them towards being engaged in income generating activities. This nature is clearly evident in the *Thunkama* area. The above analysis suggests that women gained better acceptance and recognition through economic power. They share an equal position in family affairs, although culturally they have not received equal position with men. They are qualified leaders and managers in both family and at work. The economic contribution of women has generated family strength and hence, social development. In terms of rural development, it is clear that women have become important role players. Especially in a rural setting, women provide powerful drives for rural development through their economic activities. It should be elaborated as such so that the entire society can extract advantages. Attitude change in culture is a chronicle necessity for this purpose.

### 3. Conclusion

Women's participation in the labor market is not a recent process in many developed, industrial countries (Jayawardhana 1992). Specially, after the breakdown of pre-industrial agricultural economy, the labor market absorbed women participants as well because there was a huge labor demand in the growing industrial sector. On the other hand, expanding urbanization led to rural-urban migration, which is a noble feature in both developed and developing countries. Gradually then women become the vital role players in the national economies. This context is similar to the Sri Lankan situation as well. The Free Trade Zones, agricultural sector and plantation sector are dominated by Sri Lankan women contributing to national economic growth. In addition, there is a dramatic change with the changing socio-economic consequences in the rural sector as well. These factors have directly influenced women's changing position. Especially in rural areas women have become key figures in their economy. Hence development programs are directed towards increasing women's participation, so that rural development is ensured. This condition led the foundation for women's economic productivity not only in Sri Lanka but also in many developing countries including Asia, Africa and Latin America. Women then became an important approach for addressing rural development.

This research analyzed how far women's contribution is important for the enhancement of rural economy. Their changing role, especially, has been elaborated with socio-economic limitations that influence economic activities of rural women. Responding to rural poverty, women's effort on enhancing well-being and their living stands has been elaborated with special reference to a comparison between housewives' and economically active women's contribution in order to make a better understanding of the important role of women in rural areas today. All these factors encapsulate into the overall and specific objective of the study.

Since this study was an attempt to understand women's changing role and their contribution to the rural economy, it was necessary to obtain a macro perspective of the rural development process in Sri Lanka. A larger portion of the country (more than 76% of the population) lives in rural areas. Therefore, the central attention of policy planners focused on rural development in order to reach national economic and social objectives. In this case, women received vital consideration as active participants in rural development.

Traditionally, the village is a male dominant patriarchal society. Today, this dominant nature has been challenged by an emerging female economic power. Therefore, it is important to analyze how structural features have made significant changes inside the village.

The economic well-being of the family is founded by women in the families in the study. They have received good status and power due to economic strength. Women in the private sector, government sector, self-employment and as wage earners can be found among *Thunkama* women. Due to their economic contribution to the family, the traditional explanation of female gender, which is mainly reproduction, has

been challenged. Today, these women play a key role in the productive sector. This strength has allowed them to enjoy freedom, independence, decision making, status, privileges and social recognition. The women are more innovative and determined with modern attitudes. Their favor with regard to career development is high. They are effective role players in both income generation and household management, and contribute to the development of children both emotionally and on material basis.

Although the women in *Thunkama* are engaged in different types of jobs, there are many limitations; gender and education being important among them. Despite these limitations, those who are economically active have received a good level of satisfaction. Although women have received economic strength, men still continue to receive household leadership and ownership of assets.

With regard to women in the *Thunkama* area, there is lack of empowerment. There is also a clash between traditional culture and modern attitudes. Although women have received good social position, it is not parallel to that of men.

It is possible to identify changing gender related roles in relation to women. Traditionally, women were thought to be limited to the house. On preset, this is not visible. In addition to their reproductive role, women also carry out productive roles and engage in community management. Their tendency towards the private sector in the labor market has increased due to the lack of opportunities in the government sector. Although the area is rural, the weakening of traditionalism is the most significant factor. Market values have expanded up to grass root level. But importantly gender barriers and traditional values are there that hindrance the path of areas women. Hence it parallel with Jayasundares explanation that, "In Sri Lanka the status of women in society, employment, production ,education and whatever sphere studied shows that gender neutral policies cannot change the disadvantages and marginalization inherited by women"(Jayasundare 2005: 350). But as a whole women has drawn lot advantages through the income earning and their family including children and elders have received better benefits while they are respected and has cultivated good identity and status up in socially.

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