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Factors Associated with Female Labour Force Participation in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province



Ranmini Vithanagama

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International Centre for Ethnic Studies

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Abstract

Despite its vibrant natural resource endowment, strong agricultural sector, and growth potential in the service sector, the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka has not seen much economic development after the end of the armed conflict in the East in 2007. It continues to remain a small regional economy with low female labour force participation. Against this backdrop, this study investigates how different individual, household, and community-level factors affect women's labour market choices and opportunities in the East. The analysis is based on data collected from 1,000 respondents from the poorer parts of the Eastern Province in the second half of 2018.

The study finds that by and large economic necessity and the need to secure gainful employment drives women to the labour force. Women heading their households, women who have to support unemployed family members, and women who have taken up loans are thus more likely take up work. Greater financial affluence tends to avert such pressure, but access to earning assets such as land and crop, or having participated in a livelihood intervention programme, enables women's work. The findings indicate that women who are driven to the labour force out of economic needs, rather than opportunities, are more likely to be employed than unemployed. Childcare responsibilities make it more likely that women will stay away from the labour market, altogether. They are also more likely to be unemployed if they are in the labour force, possibly due to difficulties of balancing work and family.

The results show that higher educational attainments are associated with the respondents' entry into and success in the labour market. The effects are more pronounced for Buddhist and Hindu women than for Muslim women. Gender norms seem to affect Muslim and Buddhist women's participation decision the most. However, the limits imposed by the household appear to be more pronounced for Muslim women. Poor health tends to keeps women away from the labour market. Overall, the labour market seems to be in favour of women in their 30s. Armed conflict variables and spatial variables suggest that women may join the labour force from a place of disempowerment and poverty. Spatial variables also point to the possible weaknesses in the regional labour market dynamics in generating suitable employment opportunities for women.

The study concludes with some policy recommendations on 1) developing regional economies, building on their comparative advantages, 2) investing human capital not just by way of formal education, but also through vocational training, English

language training, IT skills development, and livelihood development programmes, 3) working around gender norms to create labour market opportunities for women, 4) devising a strategy at the very least to collect reliable and up-to-date information on women heading their households, and finally 5) not forgetting the legacy of the armed conflict when planning development interventions in the East.

Acronyms

CBSL	Central Bank of Sri Lanka
DCS	Department of Census and Statistics
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DS	Divisional Secretariat
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FHH	Female-headed household
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GN	Grama Niladhari
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labour Organization
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam
LFP	Labour Force Participation
LFPR	Labour Force Participation Rate
LFS	Labour Force Survey
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MFI	Micro Finance Institutions
MHH	Male-headed household
MT	Metric Tonne
RCT	Randomized-Control Trial
SLTDA	Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority
SRT	Social Reproduction Theory

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1. Introduction

The end of the armed conflict between the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government in mid-2009 was expected to remove a major impediment to Sri Lanka's economic growth and development. Yet, the peace dividend that followed was short-lived. Although the economy grew at 8 per cent or more over 2010-2012 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka [CBSL] 2020), up from an average annual growth of about 5 per cent over 2000-2009, this growth was largely underpinned by a combination of a rise in consumption, both due to a release of pent up demand as well as expansive fiscal policy measures, increased government spending, and the resumption of economic activities in the Northern and Eastern Provinces where the armed conflict took place. Since 2012, the average annual growth has dropped below 5 per cent, as the impact of these short-term drivers tapered off and the structural weaknesses in the economy (such as the rising foreign debt levels, the weak fiscal position, and the external balance to name a few) began to resurface.

The state-led large-scale capital spending in the Northern¹ and Eastern² Provinces by way of rehabilitation and reconstruction projects during 2007-2011 was one of the key catalysts for Sri Lanka's accelerated Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth following the end of the conflict. However, the available macroeconomic statistics suggest that these significant infusions of capital have failed to yield any substantial long-term economic benefits to both the North and the East. Both provinces have failed to contribute over 5-6 per cent to the overall GDP in the past 15 years, and continue to remain the poorest regions in the country as measured by the mean per capita income level and poverty headcount index. They are also characterised by the lowest female labour force

1 In 2010, the government rolled out a mega infrastructure project in the North titled "Uthuru Wasanthaya" (Flourishing North), which was rolled out in the Northern Province in 2010, following the end of the conflict the year before. It was aimed at restoring and setting up road networks, electricity, water supply, telecommunications, agriculture and irrigation, and housing as well as the settlement of internally displaced people (IDPs). An estimated USD 2 billion from state- and non-state actors was directed to this development initiative.

2 The Eastern Province had a 2-year head start on economic rehabilitation because the armed conflict in the East came to an end in July, 2007. The Eastern Province benefited from capital infusions to the tune of about USD 1.8 billion in a government-led rehabilitation initiative titled the 'Negenahira Nawodaya' (Eastern Revival) from 2007 to 2010. The initial stages of the development programme comprised activities such as the clearance of land mines, restoration of law and order and civil administration, and the reconstruction of infrastructure affected by the conflict, while livelihood development programmes for the resettled communities were rolled out in 2010 (Ministry of Economic Development 2012). The proposed plans also included the development of the Trincomalee harbour and the fishery harbour in Oluvil in the Ampara district. Many other donor-driven programmes were run alongside to revamp the economy and revive livelihoods.

participation (LFP) rates in the country. Importantly, while the male LFP in both provinces is by and large on par with the rest of the country, the female LFP is considerably below the national average as well as the female LFP in most other districts.

The district-wise breakdown of the LFP shows that the lowest rates of female LFP are reported from the Eastern Province. The lowest female LFP rate of 19.8 per cent in 2019 was reported from the Ampara district, while in Trincomalee, the female LFP rate stood at 20.0 per cent and in Batticaloa, at 25.4 per cent (Source: Department of Census and Statistics [DCS] 2020). This compares very weakly against the already low national female LFP rate of 24.5 per cent in 2019. The female LFP rates are significantly low in the Northern Province as well.

In 2015, the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) probed into the issue of low female LFP in the North in a large mixed-methods research study. The quantitative portion of the research set out to understand (i) the factors that were associated with the LFP among women heading their households and (ii) the impact of the livelihood intervention and rehabilitation programmes carried out by state- and non-state actors on women's labour market outcomes, using primary data collected from a sample survey of 4,000 households in the Northern Province (See Gunatilaka and Vithanagama 2018). The study found that generally women heading their households were pushed to work out of necessity. But this necessity to work was ameliorated by the availability of human, physical, and social capital, which generally were more readily accessible for women in male-headed households than women heading their households (Ibid). While this study was originally perceived as an extension to the above-mentioned study, there were other compelling reasons to look at the female LFP in the East.

Rationale

Low LFP statistics by and of themselves do not tell much about women's economic well-being. In fact, in developing countries, high female LFP rates can be associated with a higher incidence of poverty (Verick 2014). On the other hand, economic growth may lessen the need for women to take up precarious and menial work to support their families. Neither scenario seems to apply for the Eastern Province. On the one hand, as described earlier, the Eastern Province has very low female LFP rates, but the male LFP rates are not particularly low compared to the other districts and are broadly in line with the national average

(73.5 per cent in Trincomalee and 72.6 per cent in Batticaloa compared to 73.0 per cent nationally) except in Ampara (70.6 per cent). On the other hand, the Eastern Province has the second-highest poverty headcount ratio of 7.3 per cent, and is home to the second-highest percentage of poor households in the country (5.3 per cent compared to 3.1 per cent nationally). The overlap of poverty with low female LFP rates in the Eastern Province provided a strong impetus to take up this research study.

Gunatilaka and Vithanagama (2018) found that only a few armed conflict-related experiences had any statistical relevance to women's LFP in the Northern Province. Instead, the most important predictor of the female LFP for both women heading their households and women in male-headed households in the North turned out to be the share of employed adult males in the household. Where more men were employed, women were less likely to participate in the labour market. Additionally, the availability of productive capital (financial, capital, crops, and livestock) was found to be associated with a greater likelihood of LFP among women in male-headed households than women heading their households. These findings are symptomatic of the structural and institutional barriers women in the North face in participating in economic activities. On the one hand, men seem to have better prospects in the labour market than women, and are better-positioned to leverage assets to generate income. On the other hand, the differences in the labour market prospects for men and women seem to reinforce women's traditional gender roles.

As the other region that has been affected by the conflict, A reasonable follow-up question was what factors influenced the female LFP in the Eastern Province, the other region that has been affected by the armed conflict, and what similarities and differences existed between the participation drivers in the two regions. This provided another motivation to inquire into the issue of female LFP in the Eastern Province.

A third incentive for this research study was the unique makeup of the Eastern Province in comparison to the North, which affords a distinctive and complex socio-economic context for women's economic activities. Although the armed conflict experience is common to both the North and the East, the North has the additional disadvantages of an adverse geography and less natural resource endowments compared to the East. The strategic location of the Eastern Province in the world map, its large body of natural resource endowments (including the natural harbour of Trincomalee and beautiful long beaches), and the strong

agricultural sector, gives the region a greater potential to diversify its economic activities compared to the North where the human capital endowment is its largest strength (Sarvananthan 2007). Moreover, unlike the North that is home to a Tamil majority, the East is characterised by greater ethno-religious complexity. In fact, the East houses the most ethno-religiously diverse population compared to any other part of the country. The role of religion and culture in the social construct of gender roles has been discussed at length in the feminist literature. Thus, whether and to what extent the different ethno-religious identities affect women's economic participation is also another important inquiry.

In addition, this study is expected to contribute to the growing body of evidence on women's economic participation in Sri Lanka. In particular, the study aims to contribute to the topic of women's LFP in the former conflict-affected regions after 2009, which continues to remain relatively underexplored.

Over the recent years, more and more research has emerged on the country's female LFP (see for example, Solotaroff et al. 2020; Mallawarachchi and Peiris 2020; Samarakoon and Mayadunne 2018; Gunatilaka 2016; 2013; Gunewardena 2015). Many of these quantitative studies are based on secondary data collected in various national sample surveys carried out by the DCS, and look at the female LFP at the national level. Many such studies have had to exclude the North³ and the East⁴ from their analyses due to the non-availability of data for these regions until 2009. Thus, invariably, the Northern and Eastern labour market dynamics have been under-explored. On the other hand, there is a paucity of empirical research on female LFP at the regional level. Quantitative studies using primary data are particularly difficult to come by. To the best of my knowledge, Gunatilaka and Vithanagama (2018) was the first study to look at the female LFP at the regional level using a large primary dataset.

The end of the conflict has sparked greater research interest in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. A sizeable body of empirical evidence has built up on numerous topics such as displacement, militarisation, women and children, female-headed households (FHHs), trauma, violence and psychosocial problems, disability, and issues of transitional justice. While the issue of gender or women as a vulnerable group tends to feature cross-cuttingly across such topics, hardly any empirical research have been carried out with the primary

3 Labour Force Survey (LFS) data for the Eastern Province is from 2009.

4 LFS data for the whole Northern Province is available from 2011. In effect, data for the whole country is available from 2011 onwards.

objective of probing into women's economic participation in the North and East after 2009. Apart from Gunatilaka and Vithanagama (2018), the only other work that explicitly tackles the issue of women's LFP in the North and East is Sarvananthan's (2015) ethnographic study of the impact of the economic growth on women in the Eastern and Northern Provinces of Sri Lanka after 2009. This policy-oriented qualitative research study has provided a holistic account of the institutional, structural, and socio-cultural barriers women in these regions face in participating in economic activities. There are few other qualitative empirical studies which have insightful findings in relation to women's LFP in selected areas of the North and East (See for example Kodikara 2018; Rameez 2020). While these studies provide a rich contextual analysis, the findings cannot be generalised outside the research context. Thus, I believe that this study is the first to look at female LFP in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province, covering all three districts and employing quantitative research methods. It draws on the primary data collected from 1,000 households covering all three districts of the Eastern Province during the second half of 2019, and sets out to address the following research questions:

- 1) What are the labour market outcomes among women in the Eastern Province?
- 2) What are the individual, household-level and societal/contextual factors that are associated with women's labour market outcomes in the East?
- 3) How are these factors similar or different across women from different religious backgrounds?
- 4) Are armed conflict-induced shocks experienced by women associated with their labour market outcomes?
- 5) Are the factors that affect women's labour market outcomes also associated with their employment outcomes? How are these factors similar or different?

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. Chapter 2 presents a review of the relevant theoretical and empirical literature. Chapter 3 reviews the literature, analysing the situation in Sri Lanka. In Chapter 4, I analyse women's LFP in Sri Lanka, and in the Eastern Province using available secondary data. Chapter 5 discusses the methodology, the conceptual framework for the study, and the selected explanatory variables and the rationale underpinning the chosen variables. Chapter 6 provides a descriptive analysis of the data. Next, in Chapter 7 an analysis and discussion of the results of the econometric models follows. Chapter 8 presents the conclusions of the study, and offers some policy recommendations.

2. Female Labour Force Participation: A Literature Review

The peculiar nature of women's employment has lent itself to extensive probing – both theoretically and empirically. How similar underlying factors pan out in different contexts in creating different labour market outcomes for women have been studied extensively, and continue to remain both an important and a relevant empirical investigation globally.

The positive effect of women's economic participation on women themselves, their families, and the economy at large are unambiguous. First, the global economy could expand between about USD 12 trillion to 26 trillion by 2025 (from USD 75 trillion in 2014) if gender gaps in women's LFP, hours of work, and the sectoral representation could be fully closed (McKinsey Global Institute 2015). Separately, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (2011) has estimated that closing the gender gap in the agricultural sector could result in a 20-30 per cent increase in yields which in turn could raise total global agricultural output by 2.5-4 per cent, reducing global hunger by 12-17 per cent. Teignier and Cuberes (2014), Tsani et al. (2012), Costa et al. (2009), Khosla (2009), Klasen and Lamanna (2009), Besley et al. (2005) and Esteve-Volart (2004) have found in their respective studies that an increase in the share of women in the workforce, and the removal of women-specific barriers to LFP can lead to better economic growth, higher per capita income, faster poverty reduction, and better human capital outcomes for women and girl children.

Moreover, income in the hands of a woman can have a strong positive impact on her dependents and the household. Such income can help reduce household income inequalities (Harkness 2010), and allow households spend more on food, health, and education, as well as recreational activities and cut expenses on alcohol and cigarettes (Gummerson and Schneider 2013; Phipps and Burton 1998; Hoddinott and Haddad 1995; Thomas 1992). Importantly, the impact of women's greater access to labour market opportunities may benefit children from the poorest households and girl children the most (Afridi et al. 2012).

Despite the many advantages that accrue to households and the economy at large if more women were to join the labour force, women's LFP continues to remain well below that of men globally. In 2018, the global female LFPR stood

at 48.5 per cent compared to a 75 per cent male LFPR (International Labour Organization [ILO] 2018). The global gender gap in the LFP has closed only about 2 per cent since 1990, much of which has taken place in the years up to 2009, and slowing since. More concerning, the ILO forecasts that the rate of improvement in gender gaps in labour force participation might come to a standstill, or worse, even reverse in 2018-21, cancelling out the slight improvements in closing the gender inequalities in the access to labour market opportunities (Ibid). The decomposition of these headline statistics based on income shows that much of the global gender gap in the labour force participation is attributable to the emerging economies⁵ (30.5 per cent), while the gender gap is lowest in developing countries (11.8 per cent). Regionally, Arab States (58.3 per cent), South Asia (51.4 per cent) and Northern Africa (50 per cent) have the highest gender gaps in labour force participation due to low levels of female LFPR. These statistics point to the complex, elusive, and nuanced nature of factors that shape women's labour force participation and how the interplay of such economic and non-economic dynamics underpin the idiosyncrasies in women's employment.

The first economic theoretical frameworks to understand female LFP emerged in the 1960s with the pioneering work of Mincer (1962) and Cain (1966) who extended the basic static neoclassical model of labour supply to investigate the determinants of the LFP among married women. The model looks at the labour-leisure trade-off where a person attempts to maximise his/her utility within the constraints of income and time. An increase in the wage rate will result in an income effect (where the demand for leisure will increase as a result of a rise in real wages, or due to the presence of other income) and a substitution effect (where the opportunity cost of leisure increases due to a rise in real wages). If the substitution effect is larger, individuals will be drawn to taking up paid work. However, the static model, given that it has been developed with no reference to gender conceptually or methodologically, is limited in terms of its ability to explain married women's labour force participation for whom domestic work is also an important variable that affects their decisions to take up paid work. Thus, women's labour force participation is not only a choice between labour and leisure, but also unpaid housework or family chores, the outcome of which will be a family decision (Mincer 1962).

5 Middle-income countries

Becker's seminal work (1965) on household production and time allocation within the household hypothesised households as utility maximising and producing units which derive their utility from a set of 'basic commodities' they produce by combining market goods and time, within a given resource constraint. The household decision-making is carried out by an altruistic dictator who cares about everyone's utility and welfare (Becker 1976). This unitary model (looking at the household in its entirety) on the one hand ignores the methodological individualism principle that is central to economic theory, and precludes any analysis of the intra-household resource distribution and decision-making. Empirical studies bring out these theoretical weaknesses – firstly, the evidence suggests that the household behaviour is influenced by the origin of the household income (Donni and Ponthieux 2011), and secondly, issues such as domestic violence and the systematic discrimination of household members affect the income distribution within the household, which clearly violates the assumption of altruism central to the unitary model (Alderman et al. 1995).

Bargaining and collective household labour supply models that have been developed in response to the drawbacks in the standard unitary models relax the assumption of income pooling and look at the individual's behaviour in the household decision-making process. Bargaining models look at households as a place where spouses bargain about resource-sharing, where the decision-making process could be cooperative⁶ or noncooperative;⁷ cooperative bargaining will lead to Pareto efficient outcomes i.e. one cannot be made better off without making the others worse off, while in non-cooperative models, such efficiency will not be achieved. A threat point, which corresponds to the utility that household members can achieve outside the family, will influence their bargaining power in the decision-making process. Divorce as a threat point depends on internal factors such as an individual's wages, but also on exogenous variables such as the male-female ratio in the marriage market, divorce and marriage benefits, and other social and traditional norms. A more realistic short-term threat point for daily negotiation within a household is a non-cooperative equilibrium proposed by Lundberg and Pollak (1993) a new model of distribution within marriage. It differs from divorce threat bargaining models (e.g., Manser-Brown, McElroy-Horney in their separate spheres bargaining model. It is a non-cooperative

6 Where the decision-making process is altruistic and the outcomes of the negotiations tend to be equally beneficial to all household members

7 Where each household member makes decisions to maximise his/her utility, based on their personal interests

equilibrium that, unlike divorce, is 'internal' to the marriage (Lundberg and Pollak 1994), and is defined in terms of traditional gender roles and expectations. Collective models on the other hand, unlike bargaining models, do not assume a specific sharing rule and focuses only on Pareto efficiency (Chiappori 1992).

The epistemologically and methodologically cartesian nature of neoclassical economics has brought its theoretical framework under criticism among feminists who have argued that modelling household decision-making based only on economic considerations and abstract assumptions can be over simplistic and inadequate in understanding women's economic participation. For example, Whitehead (1990) has pointed out, although development planners often look at the sub-Saharan African household as an economic enterprise in which its members work together, in actuality these families were very far from being a simple resource holding unit. She explained that on the one hand, a complex array of economic and social factors affects the sub-Saharan African household decision-making. On the other hand, one woman's trade-off between allocating resources for their own independent earning capacity and allocating resources to their work as family labour can be very different to another's, due to these numerous socio-economic factors, including those outside marriage such as her social networks, her own other skills, and those of her children. Koopman (1991) also has made a similar point about the complex realities of women farmers in Africa – that they are neither the free and rational economic agents that neoclassical economic theory assumes them to be, nor are they mere 'family labourers', and development projects based on such a distorted image of the rural households may have little benefit for women.

Moreover, feminists argue that women's strategies are played out in a context of identifiable patriarchal bargains, and the neoclassical analysis of the household pays little attention to the systematic gendered differences in the choices available in a patriarchal system, what roles the social norms and perceptions play in the bargaining process, as well as the socially constructed nature of the preferences that guide individual choices (Seiz 1995; Agarwal 1997). Furthermore, the analysis of gender relations is largely limited to the household, and as such says little about the links between intra-household and extra-household bargaining power (Agarwal 1997). On the other hand, the neoclassical formalistic modelling of economic issues has been argued to be counter-productive for a gender-aware understanding of social reality (Lawson 1999) as the methodology tends to reveal more about mathematics than economics (van Staveren 2005).

The alternative Marxian economic paradigm is also largely gender-neutral, given its overarching class-centric approach to labour supply. Moreover, domestic labour was assumed to be irrelevant for the issue of class exploitation by Marxist theorists (Vogel 2000), and failed to adequately theorize domestic work because what was considered more central to the workings of capitalism was productive labour (Federici 2018; Walby 2001). Nonetheless, the Marxist framework proved to be a lot more amenable than the traditional neoclassical approach to the feminist analysis of women's issues, given that it looked at people's behaviour and decisions as shaped by socio-economic relations in a capitalist mode of production which is characterised by hierarchies, conflicts, exploitation, and inequality. (MacDonald 2005; Benería 1995). The framework lent itself well to the feminist discourse in the early 1970s that was looking to understand why women were oppressed on two fronts: conceptually as oppression was seen as a systematic and built-in feature of the society in the Marxist analysis, and methodologically because the framework was open to an interdisciplinary analytical approach (Jackson 1999; Benería 1995). Moreover, the Marxist theory itself has paid more attention to women and gender relations in comparison to the neoclassical school, although such analysis is subsumed within the dominant class analysis, and relegated into a part of class conflicts (MacDonald 2005). A few studies have looked at women's LFP using the Marxian concept of the Reserve Army of Labour, although it has been discounted as lacking in explanatory power (Anthias 1980).

However, over the years, the feminist discourse has advanced the Marxist analytical framework to critically examine women's oppression. The inadequacy of the Marxist analysis to discuss issues of gender differentiation and gender hierarchy under capitalism was corrected by feminist theory by developing the concept of patriarchy. However, Hartmann (1979) criticized the radical feminist conceptualization of patriarchy as both ahistorical and acultural (See also Acker 1989). Moreover, she argued that in reality there was neither pure capitalism nor pure patriarchy, and instead the two systems were deeply intertwined. Thus, neither Marxist nor radical feminist analysis on its own was adequate to fully understand women's oppression. Instead, Hartmann (1979) proposed what later came to be known as a dual systems theory that combines Marxist and radical feminist frameworks.

Nonetheless, the weaknesses in the dual systems analysis (See for example, Young 1981 for a critique of Hartmann 1979) led to a shift in the feminist theoretical

analysis to a unitary or integrated framework which enfolds both production and reproduction. The Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) pioneered by Lisa Vogel ‘shows how the production of goods and services and the production of life are part of one integrated process’, (Luxton 2006, pp. 36) and how capitalism is in fact a unitary system that can ‘successfully, if unevenly, integrate the sphere of reproduction and the sphere of production’ (Bhattacharya 2013). Moreover, the SRT allows for multiple drivers of oppression to be analysed in direct relation to capitalism unlike in a dual systems method (Čakardić 2018). In fact, its strength lies in this methodological approach which does not focus on the finished entity (like a workplace), and instead interrogates the processes and relations that produces the conditions for the existence of such a finished entity (Bhattacharya 2017).

The Institutional economic paradigm share some commonalities with the Marxist paradigms. For example, with its epistemological foundation in pragmatism, the institutional economic paradigm also provides a methodologically and conceptually less rigorous framework to understanding economic behaviour of individuals, compared to the neoclassical paradigm. Moreover, the institutional paradigm also rejects a reductionist approach that is central to mainstream economics, and inquires holistically into the cultural processes and institutions that shape the behaviour of individuals. However, its conceptualisation of power is not focused on class as in Marxism. In other words, the institutional economic framework perceives a struggle for power as a conflict between new ways of doing things and established traditional methods instead of a conflict between a working class and capitalist class (Dugger and Sherman 1994). Moreover, unlike both neoclassical and Marxist analyses, the institutional economic framework does not follow a strict private-public dichotomy of space, and recognize the interconnections among markets, households, and states (Krishnaraj 2001; Hodgson 2000; Waller and Jennings 1990). Thus, the institutional paradigm provides a framework that looks at women’s paid and unpaid work more holistically.⁸

The “new” institutional economics which draws on the insights from institutional economics but uses them within a neoclassical deductive framework has been

8 However, within the Marxist feminist paradigm, Bhattacharya (2017) has advanced the debate on the private-public dichotomy of space. She argues that although the public (space of production) and the private (space of reproduction) may be separate in a strictly spatial sense, they were integrated both in a theoretical and operational sense, and that “They are particular historical forms of appearance in which capitalism as a process posits itself” (p. 9).

particularly useful in making modern labour market economics less explicitly neoclassical (Brozova 2016). Over the recent years, neoclassical economics has shown a tendency to move away from ‘pure’ theoretical analysis of the labour market and has opened up to recognizing the growing influence of institutions on the labour market (Brozova 2016; Boyer and Smith 2001). Thus, the institutional paradigm has been particularly useful in inspiring the use of a more eclectic and socially relevant collection of variable in analyses of women’s paid and unpaid work.

A large body of literature has spawned about the roles of both formal and informal institutional arrangements in women’s LFP, particularly among married women and mothers of young children. Many studies have found that the institutional arrangement that attempted to reconcile the roles of motherhood with work life had a positive effect on the LFP of mothers and prime-aged women⁹ (Cipollone et al. 2013; Genre et al. 2010; Uunk et al. 2005). These institutional arrangements influence the opportunities available for women in the labour market by affecting the quality of jobs available to them, the chances to (re)enter the labour market, as well as the opportunity cost of non-employment (Cipollone et al. 2013). These arrangements may even attenuate the negative effect of gender norms on women’s LFP (Uunk et al. 2005). But, poorer and developing countries may not be able to afford generous women-friendly policies and public childcare provisions, that affluent economies can offer (Ibid).

Boeckmann et al. (2014) studied the gaps in economic participation between mothers and childless women in 19 different countries¹⁰ using individual secondary data collected in or around 2000. They observed that while the tendency among mothers to not work or work fewer hours compared to childless women was similar across all countries, the motherhood gaps in participation and work hours could not be adequately explained through individual or household characteristics. Instead, the work-family policies and cultural contexts were more critical in understanding the employment of mothers. Thévenon (2016) who analysed women’s LFP in 18 OECD countries from 1987 to 2000 also draws similar conclusions. The author also observes that the effect of the ability to enrol children in formal childcare had a much more robust effect on women’s LFP in these countries than the effects of paid leave or other family benefits.

9 Women aged 25 to 54

10 Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Germany East, Germany West, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Russia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and the USA.

These findings commonly identify the importance of family-friendly employment policies for encouraging female LFP. But these policies are rolled out within an institutional framework which is both formal and informal, and embodies both written procedures and tacit norms which can play a vital role in creating opportunities and constraints for women's economic participation. In other words, the effectiveness of female-friendly employment policies in drawing women to the labour force also depends on how conducive a society's culture and overall institutional framework is towards women's work (Thévenon 2016; Boeckmann et al. 2014). If the social institutions discriminate against women, then interventions to improve their situation through women-friendly education and health policies had limited impact in improving women's LFP (Morrisson and Jütting 2005).

As Klasen (2016) points out, if gender norms that regulate the roles within a household are rigid, then encouraging women's employment, which directly challenges women's role in a family as primary caregivers, might be more difficult than encouraging women's education or health which are less likely to stand in the way of such norms. This could also to some extent explain why there has been greater success in closing gender gaps in the domains of education and legal rights compared to employment, time use, or political participation (Ibid). There is a plethora of work that has explored the issue of norms and values in relation to women's employment. Some relevant studies are discussed briefly below.

Göksel (2013) introduced three variables – religion, social norms, and conservatism – to the standard determinants of LFP to investigate the impact of conservatism on women's economic participation in Turkey. The analysis was based on data from the 2006 Household Structure Survey, and produced important results. First, the study showed that conservatism played an integral role in women's LFP decision and that such attitudes of conservatism were governed more strongly by social norms than religion (See also O'Neil and Bilgin 2013). But, higher levels of education weaken the influence of conservatism in deterring women's participation. Secondly, conservatism is stronger in urban areas than in rural areas. As a result, higher urbanization leads to lower female LFP through greater conservatism. The author's reasonings for these findings are particularly useful. Men (and women) migrate to urban areas with their conservative values. Unlike in rural areas where women mostly work on the land with other women, in cities, women work in offices or factories alongside both

men and women. As a result, men may oppose women's work in urban contexts, especially when their educational levels are low.

Contreras and Plaza (2010) conducted a similar study in Chile using ISSP survey data collected from 1209 individuals in 2002. In addition to the standard variables used in female LFP models, the authors have added two indicators for cultural variables – whether or not women have internalised machismo values and a value index of women's conservative attitudes – to assess the role of cultural factors in Chilean women's LFP. The findings showed that the more women have internalized cultural values, the less likely they were to participate in the labour market, even if they had attained high levels of education. But, on the other hand, female education is inversely related to traditional gender attitudes, indicating that as women become more educated they are less likely to subscribe to traditional gender values.

These findings highlight the importance of addressing the deep-rooted norms and values within a country's institutional framework in creating more equitable labour market outcomes for women. Both Göksel (2013) and Contreras and Plaza (2010) have identified education as an effective means of encouraging women to participate in economic activities, but Morrisson and Jütting (2005) have suggested that better education levels may not translate into better labour market outcomes for women if the underlying social institutions endorse traditional gender norms. Thus, education should also be a transformative tool that can change traditional attitudes (Göksel 2013; Contreras & Plaza 2010). Dhar et al.'s (2018) randomized control trial (RCT) study of a transformative educational programme carried out in the state of Haryana, India is a case in point. The authors evaluate a school-based programme on gender equality which was conducted for seventh to tenth graders. The programme included topics such as gender stereotypes, gender roles at home, and girls' education. Importantly, it prompted students to reflect on their own and society's views. The findings show that the intervention was successful in creating more supportive attitudes towards gender equality, and these effects continued to persist two years of after the programme was completed.

A widely tested hypothesis in reference to women's LFP is its U-shaped relationship with economic development. The initial decline in the female LFP is associated with the structural shifts in the economy from subsistence agriculture to industrial activities that creates jobs that demand more male labour and a

strong income effect at the household level as unearned income increases (Goldin 1994). But as economies grow, household income levels increase further, leading to greater educational attainments and lower fertility levels among women, while on the other hand, the service sector expands creating white collar job opportunities for women, thus establishing the rising portion of the female LFP. At the household level, this can be explained through a strong substitution effect where an increase in wages among women will encourage them to take up paid work. Goldin (1994) also recognised that social norms play a part in the formation of this U-shaped female LFP. She posited that married women's reluctance to take up blue collar work in the manufacturing sector could be partly rooted in the stigma attached to such work,¹¹ as it challenges the husband's role as a provider.

Many subsequent multi-country studies that have explored the nexus between development and women's economic participation have concluded in favour of the U-shaped relationship between the two variables (See for example, Altuzarra et al. 2019; Lechman and Kaur 2015; Olivetti 2013; Tsani et al. 2012; Luci 2009; Mammen and Paxson 2000; Lundberg 1988). However, Lechman and Kaur (2015) observe that the U-hypothesis failed to hold for low-income countries, where in fact the U-shape is inverted.

Several country-specific studies also provide evidence in support of the feminization U hypothesis (See for example Kottis (1990) on Greece; Tansel (2001) on Turkey; Suh (2017) on South Korea; and Mujahid and uz Zafar (2012) on Pakistan). On the other hand, several other studies refute the U-shaped hypothesis. For example, Lahoti and Swaminathan (2013) found in an analysis of state-level employment data from 1983/84 to 2009/10 in India that there was no significant relationship between female LFP and economic development of the states. Like Lechman and Kaur (2015), Bhattacharyya and Haldar (2020) also observe an inverted U-shape in India's female LFP in their analysis using district-level census data for 2001 and 2011. They term this inverted U-shape the 'anti-U feminisation hypotheses'. Separately, Verme (2015) found that the U-curve could not explain female LFPR in the MENA region, although it has outperformed the other regions in the world in terms of the positive structural transformation of the economies, a main factor that drives U-shaped hypothesis.

¹¹ But also partly related to fixed costs associated with leaving home to work in factories such as travel costs.

In the recent years, the U-hypothesis has come under criticism for using only the status of economic development to explain female LFP. By doing so, it oversimplifies the complex and multiple array of economic and non-economic factors that shape a woman's participation decision (Verick 2014). For example, Bhattacharyya and Haldar (2020) posit that the inverted U-shape they find on women's LFP can be explained by patriarchal values and the fear of stigma. Secondly, the composition of economic growth, rather than growth itself, is important in explaining women's LFP (Lahoti and Swaminathan 2013). A rise in female LFP cannot be expected, when economic growth is driven by sectors that are not women-friendly (Ibid). U-shape theory also cannot explain the vast differences in female employment between countries that are at the same level of development. Although the theory stipulates that social stigma about women's work affects their employment, the association of stigma with a country's economic development is too simplistic. Societal norms about women's work can differ across countries for reasons that are not related to its state of economic development (Jayachandran 2019).

Separately, Gaddis and Klasen (2014) have pointed out that the empirical evidence in support of a U-shaped relationship between female LFP and economic development is rather feeble and much depends on the data sources chosen for the analysis. They have argued that the pattern fails to hold once more advanced estimation techniques are applied. They also observed that even if empirical evidence supported the U-hypothesis, it was still too weak to explain the nuances in female LFP across countries. Instead, they found that the historically contingent initial conditions and factor endowments were more important explanans of female LFP.

Following human capital theory, education is an important variable that has been studied extensively in understanding trends and patterns in women's participation in economic activities. Theoretically, education exerts a positive effect on a woman's decision to work (Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos 1989). As an act of investment, there is incentive to enter into paid work to recoup the investment, or as an act of consumption, there is more motivation to join the labour force due to greater employability and higher earnings potential and as a result, the higher opportunity cost of not working (Ibid). Conversely, a good education may allow a woman to achieve her income target faster, and therefore allow them to dedicate more time for leisure/non-labour market activities, working less as a result. Thus, theoretically speaking, the impact of education on

female LFP is a net result of the interaction between its substitution and income effects. But, there is a large body of empirical evidence that has found a positive and significant effect of education on female LFP (See for example, Göksel 2013; Sackey 2005; Fortin 2005; Tansel 2001; Mammen and Paxson 2000). Yet, the positive effects of education on women's LFP fails to hold universally, as its interaction with underlying structural, institutional and socio-cultural conditions affects the importance of education as a driver of women's participation in economic activities (See for example, Afridi et al., 2018; Mehrotra & Parida, 2017; Kottis, 1990; Tansel, 2001)

Education as a driver of women's economic participation is also contingent on their roles as wives and mothers. For example, the husbands' education level can affect the impact of the wives' own education on their LFP, through a ceiling or facilitation effect (Spierings et al. 2008; Róbert and Bukodi 2002; Philliber and Vannoy-Hiller 1990). A woman who has a higher labour market potential than her husband may compromise her opportunities by quitting the labour market altogether or accepting a lower-level occupation than her education and skills merit, in order to avoid conflict within the marriage, i.e., the ceiling effect. Azid et al. (2010) and Bernardi (1999) observed the ceiling effect of husbands' education in relation to women's LFP in Pakistan and Italy, respectively.

On the other hand, a husband with a higher level of education is likely to have more occupational resources, and this social capital in turn can facilitate a wife's LFP. Bernasco et al. (1998) found this positive correlation to hold not just in relation to the wife's (re) entry into the labour market, but also her occupational prestige after (re) entry and after a job change in relation to married women's LFP in the Netherlands. Göksel (2013) also found evidence in support of a facilitation effect in the form of a reduction in conservatism in the households where husbands (and wives) had high educational attainments.

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There is consensus in the empirical evidence that women's role as mothers and primary caregivers lessens the importance of education in their participation decision. Thus, education may have a larger effect on women's LFP if they have a lower care burden (Spierings et al. 2008). Traditional gender expectations may supersede the role of education in drawing women away from the market to form and expand families (Ma 2013; Lau et al. 2006). These expectations may also determine the kind of choices available for childcare (Lau et al. 2006). Thus, education as a driver of female LFP is important in situations where it can really make a difference (Spierings et al. 2008). In other words, the 'net effect' of the opposing forces of care needs and economic needs of a household will influence a woman's participation decision. Where gender roles are strictly observed, a woman's educational attainments may not matter much in producing this 'net effect'.

The relationship between fertility and women's LFP has also been extensively researched in empirical literature. By and large, the relationship between the two variables is negative, although the results may vary depending on whether fertility is taken as endogenous to women's labour supply or not. For example, Ukil (2015) finds the negative effect of fertility to be much less when fertility is considered endogenous to women's labour supply, while Xie (1997) has found the negative effect to be much larger. The inverse relationship between women's educational attainments and fertility is also well documented (See for example Pradhan 2015; Kim 2010; Goldstein 1972). Higher labour market returns to education increases the opportunity cost of child rearing. Also, women with higher education may delay marriage and cohabitation by participating in the market, thereby reducing their fertility window (Kim 2010). Better-educated women are also more likely to be better at adopting contraceptive technology (Ibid). They are also likely to have better bargaining power in terms of the family size, desired number of children, and the spacing between them (Pradhan 2015).

But fertility is a social phenomenon as much as it is a biological one, with significant cultural and religious connotations. For example, Dildar (2015) found a strong inverse relationship between women's religious practice and their LFP. The author observed that women's internalization of patriarchal norms led not just to a preference against paid work outside home, but also a lowering their economic participation through increased fertility or a reduced number of years of schooling. Importantly, the findings showed that the internalization of

patriarchal beliefs can exert a barrier on LFP even among the highly educated women (See also Contreras and Plaza 2010).

Household locality also plays a part in women's participation decision through multiple channels. On the one hand, the locality can influence the societal norms which impede or support the process of women's empowerment (Kabeer 2011; Roy and Niranjana 2004; Jejeeboy 2000). The diversity and heterogeneity in urban areas can contribute to greater tolerance and acceptance of differences, and help lower perceived gendered differences foster equality (Pozarny 2016). But Göskel's (2013) and Azid et al.'s (2010) found that women's propensity to work was higher in rural areas. On the other hand, the drivers of female LFP can be different in rural and urban areas. For example, Barrett et al. (1991) observed in a study of determinants of rural and urban female LFP in China using 1982 census statistics that education was an important determinant of the rate of participation among urban women. However, among rural women, the more important determinants of female LFP were the demographic and social factors (sex ratio and household structure).

The concept of the 'added worker effect' which refers to an increase in the labour supply among married women in response to the loss of job of their husbands is particularly relevant at times of economic deceleration. The idea was first conceptualized by Woytinsky in 1940 in a study of unemployment in the US following the Great Depression, which he defined as 'the person who is on the labo[u]r market because of the unemployment of the usual breadwinner in his family' (Woytinsky 1940; p. 1). Some of the later significant empirical studies on the phenomenon includes that of Mincer (1962) and Lundberg (1985).

Mincer (1962) found that the effect of a reduction in the household's transitory income had a greater effect on women's labour supply than a reduction in permanent income, although this effect was weaker where household heads had higher education levels. A subsequent study conducted by Lundberg (1985) using data from the Seattle and Denver Income Maintenance Experiments between 1969 and 1973, also found that in general wives did responded to the husband's unemployment by increasing their labour supply. The author emphasized on the role of employment uncertainty and credit constraints in studying the added worker effect, as it is typically a transitory response to a brief unemployment spell.

More recent studies following the financial crisis of 2008 have also shown that the added worker effect has led to an increase in the female LFP (See for example, Bredtmann et al. 2018; Khitarishvili 2013; Gong 2010; Mattingly and Smith 2010). On the other hand, Serrano et al. (2019) who analyse harmonized national household survey data from 18 Latin American countries over 1987-2014 find what they describe as an ‘inverse added worker effect’ for female LFP. This refers to a situation in which female LFP declines when macroeconomic conditions improve. The authors find that the female LFP – particularly that of married women, women with children, and other vulnerable women (with low education, living in rural areas) – tends to decline when there are large short-term expansions in GDP, over and above its long-term increasing trend. Thus, while the overall female LFP is positively associated to the trend of the GDP, it follows a countercyclical pattern, declining when there are better economic conditions.

A related concept is the discouraged worker effect, which refers to an individual dropping out of the labour force because s/he believes there are no jobs available to them. Khitarishvili’s (2013) study that used data from the 2010 Life in Transition Survey to analyse women’s LFP in 28 transition economies to look for a distress labour supply among women to the financial crisis of 2008, found effects of discouraged worker effects for both men and women. However, the author observed that the added worker effect (that would pull an individual to the labour force in response to a loss of household income) for women outweighed the discouraged worker effect (that would pull them away from the labour force), thereby contributing to an increase in women’s LFP. But, Tansel (2001) found the discouraged worker effect to be substantial among women in Turkey. The author noted that the negative impact of unemployment on female LFP implied that the discouraged worker effect dominated the added worker effect, thus lowering female LFP. Similar findings were also reported by Kottis (1990) with reference to Greece.

A relatively more recent approach to understanding and predicting female LFP is the Preference theory, developed by Hakim (2003; 1998). As the name itself suggests, the theory is built on the premise that the differences in choices women make in relation to productive and reproductive work is a reflection of their own preferences. The theory classifies women into three groups. The first is the home-centred group, characterized by a choice to prioritise family life. Women in this group may acquire education as part of cultural capital, but prefer not to

work. The second group – made up of adaptive women – is a diverse one where women want to combine work and family, but are not completely career-driven. The final group consists of work-centred women who are typically childless and are driven by a commitment to work.

The Preference theory, to its credit, does acknowledge the heterogeneity of women as a group. The multidisciplinary nature of the framework allows for a nuanced and more realistic analysis of women’s choices. However, the theory has also attracted criticism for the oversimplification of preferences, and failing to account for the complex cognitive, intentional processes that lead to choices and the formation of preferences (Leahy and Doughney 2014). Empirical evidence testing the Preference theory is also mixed, and contests the foundational assumptions in the Preference theory.

For example, Kan (2016), who uses the British Panel Survey data for 1991-1999 for examining married and cohabiting women’s work trajectories, observes in line with the Preference theory, that women who have stayed at home hold consistently more home-centred attitudes over time. However, the author finds that the presence of children has little to no negative effect on a work-centred woman’s opportunity of being engaged in full-time work, while even the most work-centred women have experienced some level of constraints on their employment careers. Separately, McRae (2003) who used longitudinal data from three surveys (1988, 1993, 1998) on women who became mothers for the first time in 1988 in Britain did find that employment careers are important to a small minority of women. Yet, the study contested the very foundation of the theory due to the lack of evidence to support the central hypothesis of the Preference theory that it was preference that distinguished this minority group from the majority. Thus, the author has noted that the study has failed to support the Preference theory’s argument that women living in the US, Britain, and the Netherlands (where women live ‘in the new scenario’¹²) have an unconstrained choice on their lives. On the other hand, the theory is limited in terms of its applicability to different contexts, because it is most relevant in rich modern social contexts (Hakim 1998).

¹² Where societies and labour markets have undergone the contraceptive revolution, the equal opportunities revolution, expansion of white-collar occupation, expansion of white-collar occupation, the creation of jobs for secondary earners, and the increasing importance of attitudes, values, and personal preferences in the lifestyle choices of affluent modern societies (Hakim 2003)

The theoretical and empirical work undertaken to unpack the issue of women's work is quite extensive, and this literature review was an attempt to discuss some of the relevant work in relation to the research questions presented in Chapter 1. Although the neoclassical paradigm dominates the economic analysis of female LFP, the alternative paradigms have provided it with an eclectic collection of socially interesting and relevant variables to be empirically tested. In addition to standard neoclassical variables, issues of domestic violence, time use, institutional factors, lived experiences, and social norms are now central topics to the empirical studies on women's LFP. As a result, many studies have been able to unpack how the standard determinants of labour supply such as a woman's age or education, expected wage or household income etc., interact with the meso and macro socio-cultural environment to produce different labour market outcomes among women. For example, education is traditionally expected to increase women's LFP, but its effect in pulling women to paid work is in fact dependent on a variety of economic and non-economic variables. As such, this literature review will be particularly useful in informing the econometric specification in Chapter 4, in relation to the research questions of this study. Importantly, the institutional factors discussed at length in this chapter will inform the constitutes of the essentially neoclassical empirical model employed in the study. In the next chapter, I review some of the pertinent empirical studies that have explored Sri Lanka's situation on women's LFP.

3. Sri Lanka's Female Labour Force Participation: Relevant Literature

The idiosyncrasies in women's economic participation in Sri Lanka – its persistently low levels amidst structural changes in the economy and different growth rates, the mismatch between women's human capital endowments and labour market participation, and the continued concentration of women's work in elementary jobs, either in agriculture, textile industry, or as domestic workers in the Middle-East – has stirred much research interest, as reflected in the growing body of empirical evidence on the subject. Most recently, Solotaroff et al. (2020) use both primary data and secondary data from 2006-10 Labour Force Survey (LFS) and 2009/10 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) to understand the gender gaps in Sri Lanka's labour market outcomes. The study which is an update to a 2013 study tackling the same issue, finds that the findings of the earlier hold true in the current context as well. The disproportionately large burden of household responsibilities, a mismatch between women's skills and the demands of the job market, and gender discrimination in the job searching, hiring and promotion process have a negative impact on women's labour market outcomes in Sri Lanka. More concerningly, the study has pointed out that gendered social norms appear to be more pronounced in post-conflict Sri Lanka; secondly, that it has become increasingly difficult for women to convert their higher educational attainments into better and higher-paying jobs; and, thirdly, the impact of the deterioration in the labour market outcomes for women is higher for poorer women and women with less education.

The issue of marriage and childcare in relation to women's LFP in Sri Lanka is a recurrent theme. For example, in a study that analysed primary data collected from 500 households from Colombo, Kalutara, and Ratnapura districts, Gunatilaka (2016) found that childcare was a primary reason for women to step out from the labour force. It also showed that where husbands and wives held traditional perceptions of gender roles, women were less likely to participate in paid work. Similarly, Semasinghe (2017) who used both qualitative primary data and published secondary data from the DCS and the CBSL, found that the engagement in household activities was the main reason for low female LFP across urban, rural, and estate sectors in Sri Lanka.

Apart from gendered values, a more practical constraint imposed on married women's labour market opportunities is the lack of institutional support for childcare and that of the elderly, which would in turn ease off some of the care burden (Gunatilaka 2016, 2013a). In fact, Premaratne (2011) found in a study that analysed primary data from 200 households with at least one pre-school child, that many women would like to participate in the labour market if childcare was more affordable and easily available. Importantly, it also observed that most of the women who give up work for childcare are in fact educated women. Separately, Madurawala (2009) who studied the LFP among women of child bearing age in Sri Lanka using primary survey data, in depth interviews as well as Quarterly LFS data, concluded that the legal framework that passed on the burden of costs of maternity and childcare to the employers discouraged the hiring of women. As such, implicitly, there was discrimination against hiring women in recruitment procedures, even though policies were in place against gender discrimination (Ibid).

Samarakoon and Mayadunne (2018) make an important observation in this regard, with reference to the high female LFPR in the estate sector. The authors point out that many plantations tend to have childcare facilities that allow for women to work even when they have children, are allocated a certain number of hours to breastfeed infants, and have more equitable opportunities to earn as much as men. Such arrangements are largely lacking in white-collar employment sectors in Sri Lanka. Only the IT sector is known to offer non-traditional work arrangements such as the flexibility to work from and choose one's own work hours are provided to a large extent only in the IT sector (Wickramasinghe and Jayabandu 2007).

Several studies conclude in favour of a traditional U-shape between women's education and their LFP in Sri Lanka. For example, Cameron et al. (2001) and later the World Bank (2013) and Gunatilaka (2013) have traced a U-shape in relation to education and female LFP. Solotaroff et al. (2020) is the most recent study to have observed a skewed U-shape pattern between women's education and LFP, and they trace the relationship both during 2009-10 and 2012-13. In other words, the participation among women is higher both at the lowest and highest spectrums of educational attainments.

By and large, the empirical evidence is in favour of the hypothesis that higher educational attainments are associated with better labour market outcomes

among women in Sri Lanka (Solotaroff et al., 2020; Arunatilake, 2017; Gunatilaka, 2016, 2013a; Jayathunge, 2016; Malhotra & DeGraff, 1997). However, the role education plays in women's LFP is paradoxical. On the one hand, women with higher educational attainments are likely to participate in the labour market; yet on the other hand, they are also more likely to be unemployed than lesser educated women (Malhotra and DeGraff 1997). Thus, education does not necessarily constitute a useful accumulation of human capital in Sri Lanka, due to limited opportunities in the labour market for skilled workers (Malhotra and Tsui 1996). This lackluster nature of the job market therefore reduces the importance of employment as a source of attitudinal or economic independence among women that can delay marriage (Ibid). This claim insinuates that gender norms are more pronounced in women's LFP decisions in Sri Lanka, at least partly because its labour market has not managed to create opportunities desirable and acceptable to women with higher educational attainments.

Samarakoon and Mayadunne's (2018) findings are useful in understanding how women's own self-imposed restrictions play a role in creating disadvantages for them in the labour market. The authors have explained that most vocational training programmes, which are designed for the skills development of upper secondary school dropouts, usually attract more male candidates than females because of women's own self-inflicted restrictions on what they can and cannot do. This precludes women from acquiring skills that are in demand in the labour market, and as a result, they may not have the soft and hard skills that are required to meet their job and wage expectations.

The impact of education on women's LFP is also moderated by factors such as locality and ethnicity. For example, the World Bank (2013) observed in an analysis of HIES 2006-07 data that women with an education of General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level or more had higher employment rates in urban and rural areas, while this was not necessarily the case for men; conversely, more women with lower education attainments are employed in the estate sector, where the majority of the jobs are concentrated in plantation activities. The deterministic nature of the location can also be due to the ethno-religious characteristics of the area. For example, Malhotra and DeGraff (1997) observed in their study that all else being equal, young Muslim women were much less likely to participate in the labour force compared to Sinhalese women. Gunatilaka (2013) also found similar patterns in women's ethnicity in relation to their LFP; Muslim women were much less likely to participate in the labour

market compared to women of Sinhala or Tamil origin. This may partly explain why the Eastern Province is home to the largest economically inactive population in the country.

The changes in the income-LFP U-shape traced by Solotaroff et al. (2020) indicate that Sri Lanka's labour market situation might be becoming unfavourable to poor women too. For example, the authors notice that the U-shaped pattern of women's LFP in relation to income and education existing in 2009-10 has become flatter by 2012-13. In other words, the new data suggests that the women from the poorest households are likely to participate the least, and the richest the most. This is a concerning trend because, poverty and financial distress can be a strong contributor to women's LFP, particularly among women heading their households (Gunatilaka & Vithanagama 2018).

The issue of gender pay gap in Sri Lanka has also been taken up in several empirical studies. For example, Gunatilaka (2008) studied the nature of informal employment in Sri Lanka using the 2006 Quarterly LFS data and found that being a male contributed for higher wages both in formal and informal employment sectors. Importantly, the author also found that there was no evidence of ethnic discrimination in wage determination. Gunawardena (2015; 2010; 2002) has also found that in the absence of discrimination, women would in fact earn more than men due to their better productive characteristics. However, the labour markets tend to pay less for women even when they have cognitive and non-cognitive skills on par with men (Gunewardena 2015). Even though Gunewardena (2010) did find ethnic wage gaps, such differences were largely related to the productive characteristics of women. More recently, Solotaroff et al. (2020) points out the gender wage gap in Sri Lanka's labour market is more attributable to gender discrimination in the public sector than in the private sector. Accordingly, they posit that if women were to look for employment in the formal private sector, there is a greater possibility that the wages would reflect their endowments, than gender bias.

The impact of the armed conflict has added another dimension to the empirical investigation of women's issues in Sri Lanka, particularly in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Such studies straddle many topics that are very relevant and fitting in a post-conflict context. For example, Samararatne and Soldatic (2015; 2014; see also Samararatne et al. 2018) have studied the inclusion of rural women with disabilities in Sri Lanka in the post-conflict context using qualitative

data collected from the North Central and Eastern Provinces. The authors have observed that women living in rural localities face significant barriers to their social, economic, and cultural empowerment in post-conflict Sri Lanka. More importantly, they have highlighted how the intersection of disability with gender and rurality has resulted in significant drawbacks to this particular cohort in accessing the law and legal systems. Tambiah (2004) has looked at a different dimension of women's rights, looking at the sexual choices available to women in the conflict context of Sri Lanka, particularly with reference to widows and sex workers. An important distinction is made between the sexual right and violation, where the former constitutes an informed and free choice. For example, women may opt to become sex workers as such work is more remunerative than other employment options in an economy broken down by an armed conflict. On the other hand, women who are widowed may be subject to the risk of violation by the community and the state itself, due to its patriarchal values and beliefs that place women, and widows at a secondary level to men.

Separately, Rajasingham-Senanayake (2004) has written about the changes in women's agency at the grassroots during the conflict, and its aftermath, reflected in their new roles within the household as heads of households, primary income earners amidst the loss of family members, as well as outside, negotiating with authorities, the military, and humanitarian agencies. The changes brought about by the conflict to the cultural structures and practices have empowered some women in disempowering circumstances such as displacement. The author has observed however that the process of empowerment is not uniform across all ethnicities, and that what may have contributed to a strengthening of agency among Tamil women, has added to the restrictions faced by Muslim women in displacement camps. On the other hand, much of the post-conflict rehabilitation policies, programming, and projects have narrowly focused on female-headed households, thereby overlooking the other women's role and situation in the economy, as well as any transformations in their gender roles and sense of empowerment (Wanasundera 2006).

Several studies have looked specifically at the Eastern Province and its constituents. For example, Ruwanpura and Humpfries (2003) studied female-headed households in all three districts of the Eastern Province using both primary data collected in 1998 and 1999 and other secondary material. The authors have explained that these households were not a transitional by-product of the conflict alone, but also a result of other and recurrent socio-economic conditions. The

study also found that irrespective of ethnic origin, many FHHs were poor, and relied on extended family for support. However, the type of help available to them showed differences rooted in ethnic differences. For example, Tamil and Muslim households received more of financial assistance from the extended family and relatives, while in Sinhala households, non-financial support was more pronounced as women heading these households were more open to accepting paid work, and mainly needed help with care and household responsibilities. At a policy level, the findings point to the pitfalls of oversimplifying the concept of female-headed households because a number of factors affect the formation of an FHH and how FHHs are formed has ramifications for women socially, financially, and culturally. Moreover, the kind of support already available to such households is varied, depending on their ethnic differences.

More recently, Kulatunga (2016, 2014) has studied the patterns of asset ownership among female-headed households in the Eastern Province. Kulatunga (2014) drew on primary data collected from 144 households in the Seruwila Divisional Secretariat (DS) division in the Trincomalee district to understand the asset distribution by household headship in rural Trincomalee. The findings have indicated an overall growth in assets to the households due to the interventions by state and donor organizations. However, the underlying discrepancies suggested that the overall asset ownership was biased against FHHs, and particularly against households headed by older women, 40 years of age or more, and Muslim women. A broader study investigating the same issue with primary data from 351 households across all three districts in the Eastern Province has produced similar results (Kulatunga 2016). It found that not only was there a significant asset-based welfare bias against FHHs in the Eastern Province, but also that such gaps were typically wider among the asset-poor quintiles. Moreover, even among households in the higher asset quintiles, the presence of a male child or a male partner had a significant positive influence on the households' asset-based welfare, alluding to a higher level of economic vulnerability among single women households.

In a longitudinal study spanning both the Northern (Jaffna and Mannar) and Eastern (Trincomalee) Provinces, Sanguhan and Gunasekara (2017) have also come up with similar findings. The authors have drawn on data collected in two waves (2012 and 2015), and observed an increase in the asset ownership among the households in general in the former conflict-ridden areas. However, FHHs generally owned less assets compared to MHHs. The rise in food insecurity between the two waves was also much worse for FHHs.

The impact of the 2004 Tsunami disaster, on top of the conflict experience, has made the issue of displacement of particular relevance in the Eastern Province. Amirthalingam and Lakshman (2012; 2010; 2009a) have studied the phenomenon both in relation to the conflict as well as the Tsunami disaster in Sampur in the Trincomalee district and in the Batticaloa district, and observed that not only is the displacement experience gendered, but even the coping strategies tend to be disempowering towards women. The sale of assets, which mostly constitutes the sale of jewellery, may help with the financial distress of displacement, but it comes at a loss to women, not only financial, if such heirlooms have a sentimental value to them. The second coping strategy of accessing income is also more difficult for women for reasons such as the limitations imposed through gender norms, care burdens which are often amplified in IDP camps, and the non-availability of paid work for women.

The impact of the armed conflict and the post-conflict development and livelihood intervention programmes on affected people's livelihood outcomes also features prominently in the literature. An earlier study by Korf (2004) has looked at the livelihood strategies among farmers in four villages in the Eastern Province, against the backdrop of an ongoing conflict. The empirical material collected in 2001 has shown that the livelihood strategies adopted by people in the conflict-ridden villages were not necessarily the result of the ongoing war. Instead, such strategies were often dependent on the social and capital assets available to people, which they utilized in the conflict context to stabilize or even advance their livelihood strategies.

On the other hand, Amirthalingam and Lakshman (2009b) have studied the livelihood activities of IDPs in Sampur in the Batticaloa district using qualitative and quantitative data collected in early 2008, shortly after the end of the conflict in the east. They observed in their analysis that by and large, human capital on its own was rather obsolete in the absence of physical, financial, social, political, and natural capital assets. As a result, displacement had a significantly more negative effect on entrepreneurs compared to individuals who were engaged in elementary, but in-demand activities such as masonry or carpentry. Thus, livelihood strategies that may lead to one outcome in normal situations may produce differential results in displacement.

The UNFPA's (2015a) mapping of state and non-state interventions targeting FHHs, and their effectiveness in terms of fulfilling the recipients' needs and

sustainability of the intervention programmes has also elicited important, but unsurprising insights. The report has identified the absence of a consistent and comprehensive definition of the FHH, weaknesses in coordination and monitoring among stakeholders, and a mismatch between the ground-level needs and the type of assistance provided as the key issues affecting the effectiveness of targeting and the sustainability of the intervention programmes.

These views are also resonated in the findings of Jeyasankar and Ganhewa's (2018) study that has explored the livelihood activities of women heading their households in the Northern Province. Based on qualitative material collected as part of the GrOW survey referenced in Chapter 1 above, the study has pointed out that much of the skills that women utilize in their livelihood activities have been passed on to them by their families. Only a few women have received livelihood training from the government or non-state actors, and even then they have encountered difficulties in sustaining these livelihoods either due to lack of resources or low returns. More importantly, the study has observed that many livelihood programmes have failed to focus on the growth of women and their families, and as a result the support from such interventions for women's livelihoods have been both minimal and ineffective. In the same vein, Godamunne (2019) has argued that a main weakness in the post-conflict livelihood programmes was the lack of an understanding of the post-conflict legacies and the fragility of people coming out of an armed conflict. The author has used qualitative information collected from Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts in the East to investigate livelihood outcomes in the East, and observed that women's livelihoods in the informal and unpaid sectors have not changed much now from before or during the war. She also showed that even in industries where more job opportunities have been created, such as the hospitality industry, women's participation is conspicuously lacking. The disruptions to human capital development due to the conflict have also increased women's entry barriers into higher-level jobs in the formal sector.

Silva et al. (2018) also point out the importance of addressing strategic social issues such as trauma, alcoholism, the breakdown of community structures, ethnic resentments and gender and caste disparities for livelihood interventions to be more effective in drawing people out of poverty. Their study that has used qualitative information to look at the livelihood shifts in the Northern and Eastern Provinces since the end of the conflict in 2009 provides useful insights into the landscape of economic activities at the grassroots level. They have observed that

while agriculture continues to remain an important sector in both provinces, there has been a surge in employment in casual labour in the post-conflict context as more people have moved out of farming and fisheries. Such shifts in livelihoods have been underpinned by both the post-conflict development activities, as well as difficulties in returning to the pre-conflict livelihoods due to several complex factors, both related to and unrelated to the conflict. The study, however, has also observed some diversification and modernisation of economic activities such as the expansions in commercial agriculture, hotel and tourism activities, and the IT industry in the region. Such dynamism points to the positive impact of the large-scale interventions that have been aimed at reviving these regional economies. Yet, whether such effectiveness has trickled down to the lowest strata of the community remains doubtful.

Gunatilaka and Vithanagama (2018) studied both the impact of the conflict itself, as well as the role of numerous livelihood intervention programmes rolled out in the North after 2009, in addition to the usual determinants of female LFP. The findings showed that women heading their households were not only more likely to enter the labour market out of economic distress, but were also likely to work more over their lifetime. On the other hand, the ownership of most productive assets led to greater participation among women in male-headed households (MHHs) than women heading their households, possibly because women with husbands were better positioned to leverage such earning assets for income-earning activities. These findings concur with and extend Kulatunga's (2016) conclusions. Not only are households with men more likely to earn assets, but they are also more likely to be able to use such assets for employment purposes. The most important finding from this study however is that the LFP of men in the household influences women's own participation – when the share of employed men in the household increased, women from both types of households were significantly less likely to work. The authors have posited that this overwhelmingly large association of women's LFP with that of men – more so in MHHs than FHHs – was indicative of the underlying gender norms in the Northern Province, as well as the structural weaknesses in the region's labour market such as limited opportunities for women.

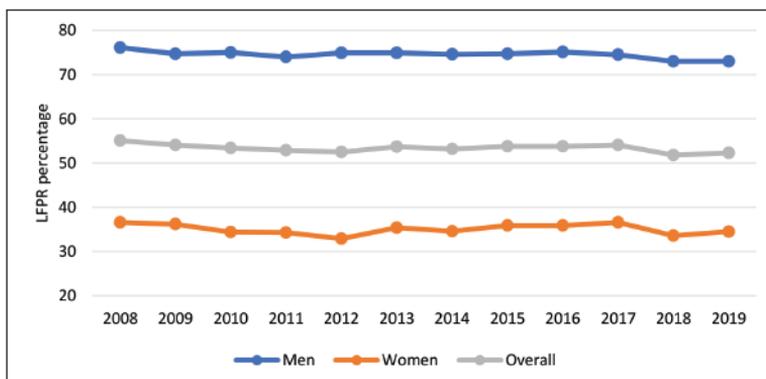
4. Female Labour Force Participation in the Eastern Province

This chapter begins with an overview of women’s LFP in Sri Lanka. This is followed by a brief account of the Eastern Province, and a detailed account of women’s LFP in the Eastern Province.

Female LFP: The Country Situation

The issue of female LFP in Sri Lanka is a rather perplexing one. On the one hand, the country has nearly closed the gender gap in terms of health and educational attainments. Women are almost as literate as men, expected to live longer, enjoy low fertility levels and make up the majority in the higher levels of educational attainments, nationally. On the other hand, however, these advances in women’s human capital do not appear to be translated into labour market gains, as reflected in the low and sticky female LFP rates of Sri Lanka (See Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: LFPR in Sri Lanka, age 15 years or above (2008-2019)



Source: DCS 2018, 2015

Note: Data for 2008 and 2009 excludes the Northern Province

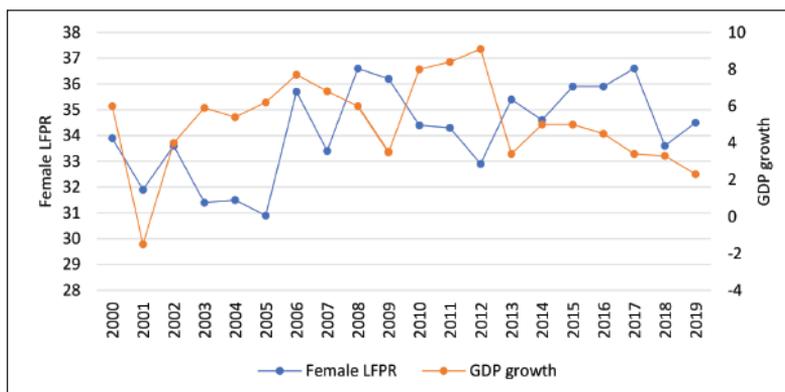
Over 2008-2019, the female LFPR has remained stagnant well below 40 per cent, and around only half of the male LFPR in Sri Lanka. The end of the armed conflict does not seem to have resulted in an increase in the LFP in general, or for women. The female LFP does improve marginally when the age is raised from 15 (34.5 per cent in 2019) to 18 (36.4 per cent) and to 20 years (37.1 per cent) (DCS 2020). However, the ratio still sits well below 40 per cent. In the South Asian

region, Sri Lanka’s female LFPR is ahead of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, but lags significantly behind Bhutan, Maldives, and Nepal.

Even when women participate in the labour market, they are still twice as more likely to be without a job than men. Although the female unemployment rate has dropped from 8.6 per cent in 2009 to 6.3 per cent by, 2012, the unemployment rate has in fact remained above this level since 2013 (CBSL 2020). The accelerated economic growth in the 2010-12 period likely helped generate more employment for women. The slowdown in the economic growth since, is reflected in the gradual pick up in the female unemployment rate.

The impact of the economic growth on female LFPR on the other hand indicates some form of a possible inverse added worker effect that Serrano et al. (2019) found in their study of female LFP in Latin America. As Figure 2 below shows, the direction of the share of women in the labour force is by and large inversely related to the direction of the growth in GDP. For example, in 2012, when the economy expanded to a record high of 9.1 per cent, female LFPR declined to 32.9 per cent. On the other hand, in 2017 when the growth stalled to about 3.4 per cent, the female LFPR rose to 36.6 per cent. This strongly alludes to the possibility of the existence of many non-economic factors that are influencing women’s LFPR in Sri Lanka.

Figure 2: Female labour force participation in relation to GDP growth



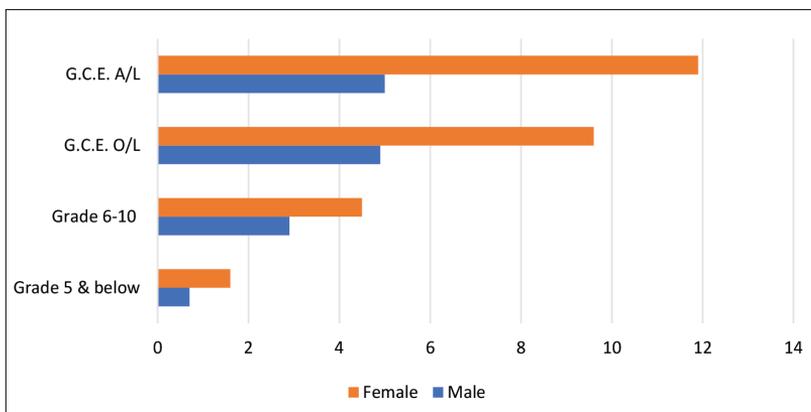
Source: DCS 2020, 2015, CBSL 2020

The female LFP statistics in relation to educational attainments are even more telling. The highest female unemployment rate is recorded among women with the highest educational attainments, and is symptomatic of the underlying

structural weaknesses in the labour market. In 2019, the unemployment rate among women who have completed studies up to GCE Advanced Level stood at 11.9 per cent. The rate of unemployment dropped to 9.6 per cent for women with education up to GCE Advanced Level and to 4.5 per cent for women with education up to Grade 10 (DCS 2020). In contrast, the unemployment rate is negligible for women with no schooling.

This positive correlation between unemployment rate and level of education is common to both men and women up to GCE Ordinary Level. But, Figure 3 below brings out three ways in which unemployment is gendered in Sri Lanka. First and foremost, unemployment affects more women than men at all educational levels. Secondly, the monotonic and linear relationship between education and unemployment tapers off for men when education level jumps from GCE O/L to GCE A/L, but continues to hold for women. Put differently, when education levels go up from GCE O/L to GCE A/L, women’s unemployment rate continues to rise, but men’s unemployment remains around the same level. Thirdly, and most importantly, the gender disparity of unemployment is most pronounced at the highest educational levels. When men and women have an education level of Advanced Level or more, women are twice as likely to be unemployed than men. Moreover, the disparity between the overall unemployment rate and the unemployment rate among individuals with the highest educational level (GCE A/L or more) is much larger for women than for men, as shown in Figure 3 below.

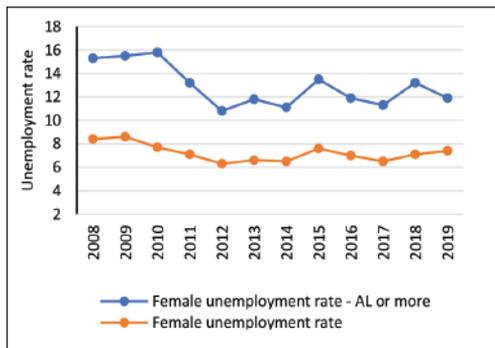
Figure 3: Male and female unemployment rate by educational level (2019)



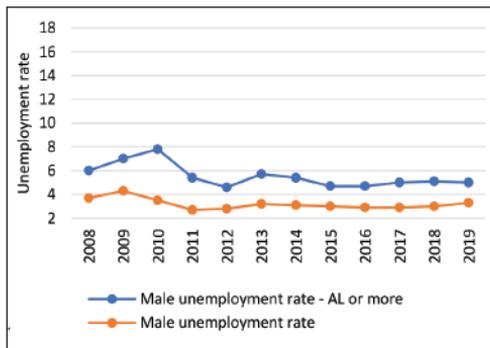
Source: DCS 2020

Figure 4: Unemployment rate vs Unemployment rate at GCE A/L or more (2019)

Panel A: Female unemployment rate



Panel B: Male unemployment rate



Source: DCS 2020, 2015

The available LFP data at the district level are only disaggregated by gender, and classifications by variables such as the age group or education level of respondents are not available. However, even with these limitations, the district-wise LFP statistics are important to understand the regional disparities and nuances in women’s participation. First, the district-level data is insightful in terms of the kind of economic activities that seem to bring women to the labour market. For example, in 2019, the highest shares of female LFPR is reported from Nuwara Eliya (44.6 per cent in 2019), Anuradhapura (42 per cent) and Moneragala (40.7 per cent) districts (DCS 2020). Coincidentally, these are also the districts with largely agriculture-centric economic activities,¹³ where most of the employed population works in the agricultural sector. The agriculture sector contributed to about 51 per cent of employment in the Nuwara Eliya district and a little less than 50 per cent of employment in the Moneragala and Anuradhapura districts in 2019 (DCS 2020). Recall that women’s unemployment rate in Sri Lanka is smallest at the lowest educational attainment levels. These statistics suggest that women are more likely to participate in the labour market in places where there is a strong agricultural sector. Given that over 90 per cent of the agriculture

13 The Nuwara Eliya district has a large estate sector, which has a higher female LFPR (48.7 per cent) than both the urban (30 per cent) and rural (33.6 per cent) sectors. Many of the women in the estate sector are employed in tea and rubber plantation activities. The Anuradhapura district has the second largest agricultural land extent (9.9 per cent) after the Kurunegala district (12.5 per cent). The Monaragala district has 5.9 per cent of the total agricultural land extent in Sri Lanka (DCS 2018).

sector employment is informal¹⁴ (compared to 58 per cent in the non-agricultural sector), it is likely that the women's labour is predominantly concentrated in elementary and even precarious informal agricultural jobs.

However, the postulation that Sri Lanka's female LFP is likely to be higher in areas with a large agricultural sector fails to hold for the Northern and Eastern Provinces which are characterised by large agricultural sectors but low female LFPRs. The North and East house some of the largest extents of small holding paddy land in the country (DCS 2018). For example, the share of paddy extent to the total extent of agricultural land in the smallholdings sector is highest in Batticaloa (74 per cent) and Trincomalee (71 per cent) districts and is fourth highest in Ampara (68 per cent) (Ibid). Yet, except in the Vavuniya district of the Northern Province where female LFP is 30 per cent, all other districts in the North and East have a female LFP rate of 25 per cent or less. The Eastern Province fares most poorly in the country in terms of female LFP. In the Ampara district of the East, less than a fifth of women participate in the labour force, the lowest LFPR in the country. In contrast, the male LFPR in these regions are by and large in line with the rest of the country.

Borer (2009) has pointed out post-conflict experiences are as gendered as conflict experiences, even though the gendered nature of the post-conflict experiences tends to be under-recognized. Thus, a relevant question in light of the above analysis is, if and to what extent, the armed conflict experience as well as the subsequent restorative economic interventions carried out in these regions have played a role in women's economic participation. Looking at the LFP statistics, *ceteris paribus*, one may posit that the development interventions which have catalysed some regional economic growth in the North and East after 2009, have nonetheless failed to yield equitable labour market outcomes for the women in these regions.

But, the female LFP is a complex issue that also depends on non-economic factors such as cultural and machismo norms that a society upholds and women themselves have internalised. As these ideologies are often rooted in religious values, it is useful to overlay the ethno-religious breakdown of the different districts to see what meaningful patterns emerge. In the Nuwara Eliya district,

14 The DCS identifies the informal employment sector to be made up of the following: 1) unpaid family worker 2) employers and own account workers in the informal sector 3) paid employees without a permanent employer, and 4) paid employees whose employers do not make pension or provident fund contributions on behalf of their employees (DCS 2020).

where female LFP is consistently highest among all districts, over half of the population is Indian Tamil and Hindu (DCS 2014). In Anuradhapura, where the female LFP is usually the second largest (and stood at 42 per cent in 2019), over 90 per cent of the residents are Sinhala and Buddhist. However, even though the Polonnaruwa district shares an almost identical ethno-religious composition to Anuradhapura, its female LFP was only 31 per cent in 2019, over 10 per cent less than that of Anuradhapura.

On the other hand, in the Ampara district which posted the lowest female LFP in 2019 (19.8 per cent), the population is broadly split between Sri Lankan Moors and Sinhala Buddhists. In addition, Sri Lankan Tamil Hindus make up a little below a fifth of the population in the Ampara district. The Trincomalee district which posted the second lowest LFP in the country in 2019 (20 per cent) also has a similar diverse ethno-religious composition. In Jaffna, Mannar, Mullaitivu, and Kilinochchi districts of the Northern Province which are also characterised by low female LFPRs, the large majority are Sri Lankan Tamils, and except in Mannar, are Hindus. Thus, a clear relationship between the ethno-religious composition of a district and its female LFP cannot be established. However, considering that the lowest LFP rates are predominantly reported from the parts of the country where there is a higher concentration of Sri Lankan Tamil and Sri Lankan Moor ethnic groups, it is plausible that the socio-cultural roles expected of the women in these communities are more binding than for women from Sinhala or Indian Tamil communities (See also Samarakoon and Mayadunne 2018; Sarvananthan 2015; Gunatilaka 2013a; 2013b).

In summary, the trends and characteristics in the female LFPR discussed above lead to three suppositions. Firstly, the overall economic growth does not necessarily lead to greater participation among women in Sri Lanka. In particular, the end of the armed conflict, which was widely believed to be the main obstacle to economic development, does not seem to have contributed much to women's LFPR nationally. Although some regional economic growth has taken place after 2009 in the North and East, such growth also has not translated into any meaningful improvement in the female LFP in these regions.

Secondly, better educational attainments do not necessarily improve women's participation either. The higher unemployment among better educated women and the higher LFPR among women in predominantly agricultural districts allude to the underdeveloped nature of the labour market in Sri Lanka in relation

to women. That the bulk of the agricultural jobs are in the informal sector, also makes it very likely that even where women's participation rates are higher, such jobs are mainly created in the informal economy that are not regulated by the state, are unprotected by labour laws, and therefore with little or no security.

Finally, that relatively less female LFP is reported from regions that house more Sri Lankan Tamils and Moors might be possibly related to a role played by different religious and cultural ideologies in influencing women's economic participation. However, the associations between the agricultural make up or the ethno-religious dynamics of different districts and their female LFP are hazy and fail to hold robustly across all districts. In fact, the nuances in the female LFPR regionally suggests the complex and varied nature of the determinants of female LFP. As such, probing into these regional idiosyncrasies – economic and otherwise – that may influence women's economic participation in different parts of Sri Lanka is of particular relevance for effective policy formulation. In the next section, I look at the Eastern Province in greater detail.

The Eastern Province

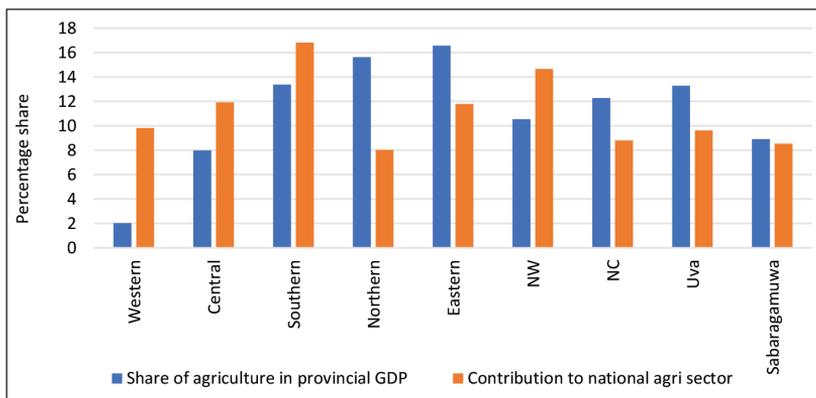
The Eastern Province is a particularly distinctive region in the country on several fronts. Its natural resource endowment is remarkable, and fares significantly ahead of that of the Northern Province. Spread over a landmass of 1,000 square kilometres, or 16 per cent of the area of the country, the Eastern Province also houses 25 per cent of the coast, 16 per cent of lagoons, 28 per cent of mangroves, 31 per cent of fresh marshes and 5 per cent of dunes in Sri Lanka, and has about 55 per cent of the natural vegetation cover, compared to 28 per cent nationally (Jayasingam 2008). It also owns beautiful beaches such as Pasikudah, Nilaveli, Uppuveli and Kalkudah, and unique natural attractions like the Pigeon Island, and has over the years following the end of the armed conflict become a strong tourist destination. Although not strictly part of the natural resource endowment, the location of the Eastern Province is also particularly advantageous with easy access to the rest of the country, unlike the Northern Province which is geographically more isolated and disconnected from the rest of the country.

The Eastern Province is also home to the most heterogeneous population in terms of the ethno-religious composition in Sri Lanka. According to the Population Census and Statistics survey data (2014), of the total population of the Eastern Province, about 39 per cent are Muslims, 37 per cent are Tamils and about 23

per cent are Sinhalese. Other ethnic groups constitute the remaining 1 per cent. The ethnic diversity is also reflected in the religious diversity; About 37 per cent are Islamic, while another 35 per cent are Hindus. Buddhists make up 23 per cent of the population, while Roman Catholics constitute about 3 per cent. The remainder is made up of other religious denominations. In terms of the individual districts, only Batticaloa has a significant concentration of one ethnicity – a Tamil and a Hindu population of 72 per cent and 64 per cent respectively – while both Ampara and Trincomalee districts show a greater diversity in their ethno-religious compositions. More specifically, Ampara is home to about 43 per cent of Muslims, 39 per cent of Sinhalese, and about 17 per cent of Tamils. Trincomalee houses approximately 42 per cent of the Muslim population, 31 per cent of Tamils and about 27 per cent of Sinhalese. The remainder is made up of other ethnicities in both districts.

Against this backdrop, I now turn to look at the economy of the Eastern Province, and its recent performance. Termed the ‘granary of Sri Lanka’, the East contributes close to one-fourth of the national rice production in Sri Lanka. The region is also rich in marine resources, and contributes around 20 per cent of the national fish production. Thus, the share of agriculture in the provincial GDP composition is highest in the Eastern Province, and stood at 16.6 per cent of Eastern Province’s GDP in current market value terms in 2018 (CBSL 2019). However, as seen in Figure 5 below, the Eastern Province has contributed only a little over 10 per cent of the agricultural sector nationally, in current value terms in 2018.

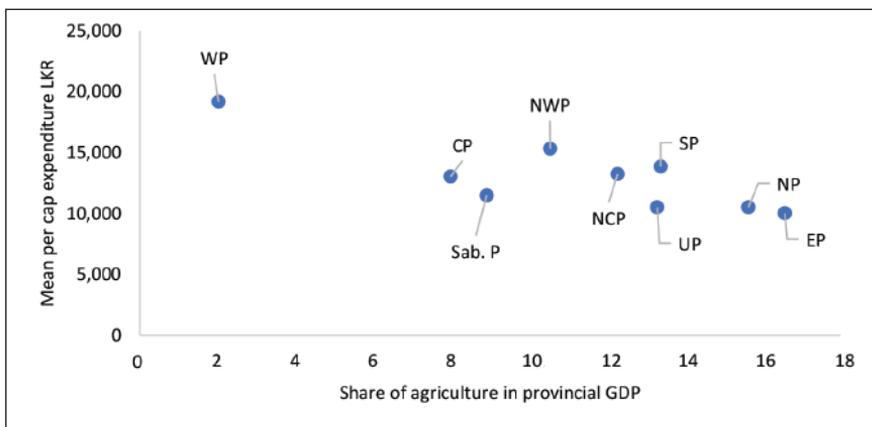
Figure 5: Share of agriculture in GDP in 2018 in current value terms



Source: CBSL 2019

It is commonly known that a larger agricultural sector in the composition of GDP is associated with higher levels of poverty. This can be clearly seen in Figure 6 below in which the Eastern Province, along with the Northern, North Central, and Uva Provinces which have large agricultural sectors, also have higher poverty levels (as represented by the lowest per capita expenditures). Another important observation is that with the exception of the North Central Province, all other regions whose agriculture sector contributes a greater share to the national agriculture income than to their regional GDP tend to have higher per capita expenditure levels.

Figure 6: Mean per capita expenditure vs. share of agriculture in provincial GDP (2018)



Source: CBSL 2019, DCS 2018

The Eastern Province also has a rather strong service sector, as reflected in its regional GDP composition. The service sector in the Eastern Province’s GDP grew from 43 per cent in 2009 to 58 per cent in 2018 in current value terms, while the service sector income from the East to the national GDP also rose from 4.4 per cent to 5.7 per cent over the same period. This growth has largely been supported by a pick up in the region’s tourism sector and port services. Between 2011 and 2017, the gross tonnage handled by the Trincomalee port more than doubled from 1.6 million metric tonnes (MT) to 3.9 million MT, and is the country’s second busiest sea port after Colombo. The accommodation capacity (measured in terms of the number of hotel rooms) in the east coast grew from only 184 in 2007 to 1,201 by 2019 (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority [SLTDA] 2019).

The real GDP growth rates are not computed at the regional level. But available statistics on the share of provincial GDP suggests that the Eastern Province has not had sufficient real economic growth to push its contribution to the national GDP to 6 per cent or more. Although the end the conflict resulted in an increase in the share of the East's GDP in the national economy, this expansion was short-lived. From 4.7 per cent in 2006, the Eastern Province's share of GDP grew to 5.5 per cent in 2008, and reached a highest of 6.3 per cent by 2012 in current value terms, when the national economy grew at a record 9.1 per cent. But, for the most part since 2012, the economy of the East has been fairly stagnant, hovering consistently below 6 per cent of the national economy.

Structurally, the economy of the Eastern Province has undergone some changes since 2007. As presented in Table 1 below, the share of the agricultural sector which was over a third of the provincial GDP in 2007 has dropped to less than a fifth by 2019. The service sector which fell a little below half of the provincial GDP in 2007 is now close to three-fifths of the economy. The industry sector, however, continues to remain small.

Table 1: Economic, social, and demographic profile of the Eastern Province

	Sri Lanka	Eastern Province
Provincial GDP share (%)		
2018		5.6
2008		5.5
GDP composition (%)		
2018		
Agriculture	7.9	16.6
Industry	26.6	17.5
Services	57.1	57.8
2008		
Agriculture	11.7	38.2
Industry	29.9	18.6
Services	58.4	43.2
Contribution to employment by sector (%)		
2019		
Agriculture	25.3	29.5
Industry	27.6	24.5
Services	47.1	46.1

2008		
Agriculture	36.2	30.7
Industry	26.2	24.7
Services	41.2	44.6
Labour force (%)		
Economically inactive population (male)*	24.1	20.1
Economically inactive population (female)*	75.9	79.9
Unemployed population (male)*	57.6	64.1
Unemployed population (female)*	42.4	35.9
Unemployment rate (2019)	4.8	6.4
Unemployment rate (2008)	5.2	7.5
Age dependency ratio (%)		
Total ¹⁵	49.4	53.9
<15 years*	37.7	46.8
>64 years*	11.8	7.2
Literacy		
Literacy (female) ¹⁶	94.6	89.9
Computer literacy (female)	30.8	15.7

Source: DCS 2020, 2014, 2009, CBSL 2019, 2009

Note: * See Footnote 15

The labour market statistics do not paint a better picture either. First, the changes in the GDP composition are not reflected in the employment patterns of the East. Agriculture still contributes close to a third of jobs, and there has been only a very marginal increase in the share of jobs in the service sector. The share of jobs in the industry sector also remains largely unchanged over the 2008-2019 period. Secondly, the Eastern Province is home to the largest economically inactive female population in the country. Nearly four-fifths of the women do not participate in the labour market compared to only about three-fourths nationally (DCS 2014). Coincidentally, the highest age dependency ratio is also reported from the Eastern province. Conversely, the Eastern Province has the lowest share of the economically inactive male population. Thus, the gender difference of the economically inactive population is also highest in the Eastern Province.

15 Available at <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/GenderStatistics/StaticInformation/Population/AgeDependencyRatioBySectorandProvince2012>

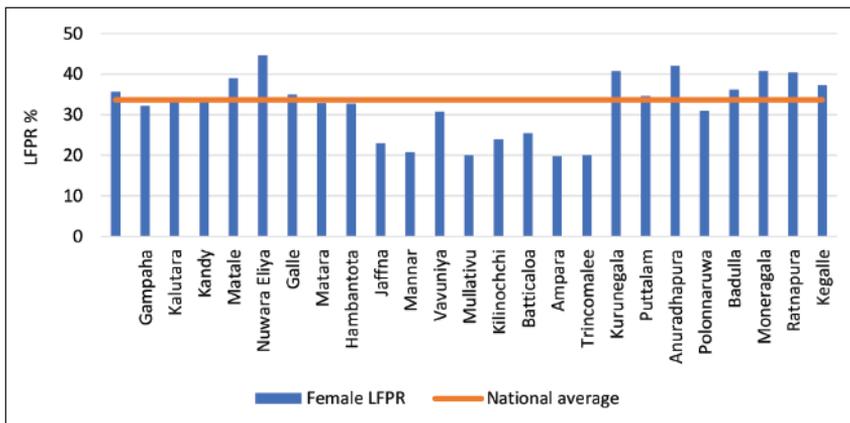
16 Available at <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/CPH2011/Pages/Activities/Reports/SriLanka.pdf>

Not surprisingly, the Eastern Province is also among the poorest in the country, recording the lowest mean per capita household income in the 2016 Household Income and Expenditure Survey, although closely followed by the Northern Province. It also homes the second highest share of people living in poverty as a percentage of the total population in the area. The income inequality in the Eastern Province is lower than the national average, likely because the residents are equally poor. In terms of human capital, the Eastern Province has the lowest female literacy in the country, along with the Uva Province. It also has the lowest computer literacy levels nationally. The Eastern Province is also the most vulnerable among all districts to floods and droughts, a particularly concerning characteristic given its agriculture-heavy economy (DCS 2018).

Female LFP in the Eastern Province

The district-wise employment statistics as presented in Figure 7 below show that not only is the women’s LFP in the Eastern Province lower than national levels, but it is also among the lowest in the country. Moreover, the female LFPR in the province has remained rather static over the past decade (2008-2018), mimicking the national trends. Only the Trincomalee district shows a jump in LFP in 2009, but has since steadily dropped and continues to remain below this historical highest LFPR of 27.6 per cent.

Figure 7: District-wise female LFPR

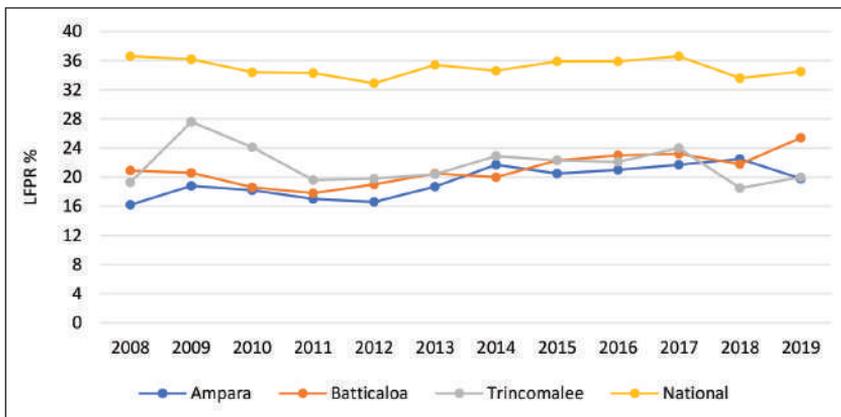


Source: DCS 2020

Roughly, the patterns of the LFPR in all three districts reflect the movements in the national LFPR. For example, the marginal pick up in the female LFPR in 2019

is mirrored in a rise in the LFPRs of both Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts. Oddly though, the female LFPR in the Ampara district has contracted in 2019. Nevertheless, a point to point comparison between 2008 and 2019 shows that female LFPR has grown in both Ampara and Batticaloa districts. Batticaloa has seen the largest expansion in female LFPR over 2008-2019, from 20.9 per cent in 2008 to 25.4 per cent in 2019. The Trincomalee district's female LFPR has remained largely unchanged, and quite volatile.

Figure 8: Eastern Province's female LFPR (2008-2018)



Source: DCS 2020

When income and poverty statistics of the districts are overlayed on the Eastern Province's female LFPRs, insightful trends emerge. As presented in Table 2 below, the Batticaloa district, with the East's highest female LFPR in 2019, is also the poorest, with the largest poverty headcount ratio in the country. Over 10 per cent of its total population lives below the national poverty line, and 8 per cent of its households are living in poverty. The Ampara district which posted the lowest LFPR in 2019 in the Eastern Province appears to be the richest of the three districts, with a significantly low incidence of poverty, even compared to the national average.

The educational attainments show that women in the Batticaloa district are significantly more illiterate than women of the other two districts. The share of the population that has never schooled is also highest in Batticaloa, although the share of population with the highest educational qualifications are also reported from Batticaloa, which is slightly higher than the national average. Overall, however, educational attainments in the East fare below the country situation.

Women heading their households in the Eastern Province tend to be younger compared to the country at large, most likely as a result of the armed conflict. Women aged 25 to 39 heading their households is close to two times the national average. Batticaloa is home to the highest share of youngest female heads of households. Only about a fifth of women heading their households in Ampara and Batticaloa are aged 60 or more, while Trincomalee has a higher share of older female heads of households. By and large, the age distribution of female heads of households in the Trincomalee is the closest to the national distribution.

Table 2: District-wise socio-economic and demographic profile

	Sri Lanka	Eastern Province	Ampara	Batticaloa	Trincomalee
Ethnic composition (%)					
Sinhala	74.9		38.9	1.3	26.7
Sri Lankan Tamil	11.2		17.3	72.3	30.7
Indian Tamil	4.1		0.1	0.4	0.3
Sri Lankan Moor	9.3		43.4	25.4	41.8
Other	0.5		0.3	0.6	0.4
Religious composition (%)					
Buddhist	70.1		38.7	1.2	26.2
Hindu	12.6		15.8	64.4	25.9
Islamic	9.7		43.4	25.5	42
Roman Catholic	6.2		1.2	4.6	3.8
Christian	1.4		0.9	4.3	2
Income and poverty					
Mean per capita household income (LKR)	16,377	11,259	11,248	10,935	11,721
Gini coefficient of per capita income	0.44	0.40	0.37	0.43	0.40
Poverty headcount index (%)	4.1	7.3	2.6	11.3	10.0
Share of poor households (%)	3.1	5.3	2.1	8.1	6.8
Education (aged 5 or more) (%)					
No schooling	3.3	3.9	3.5	4.5	3.7
Primary	23.5	32.0	30.5	33.7	32.2
Grade 6-10	44.1	40.6	40.5	40.4	41.3
GCE OL	15.3	14.9	15.8	13.1	16.0
GCE AL	11.1	6.7	8.3	5.5	5.6
Degree or more	2.7	1.8	1.5	2.8	1.2

Female illiteracy rate	5.4		9.4	12.2	8.3
FHHs by age group (%)					
<25 years	1.3	2.5	0.4	4.2	2.7
25-39 years of age	19.1	34.0	36.4	34.5	28.9
40-59 years of age	38.5	41.1	42.4	41.8	37.5
60 and above	41.2	22.3	20.8	19.4	30.9
Female LFPR (%)	33.6		21.8	22.5	18.5

Source: CBSL 2020, DCS 2014

In sum, this socio-economic and demographic account of the Eastern Province provides a reasonable context to its low LFPR. The lacklustre macroeconomic statistics and the agriculture-centric employment are suggestive of a small and primitive labour market in the Eastern Province. The gendered nature of the economic participation, the lower-than-average female human capital endowment and high dependency ratio allude to a greater prevalence of traditional gender roles in the East, compared to the country at large. It is also striking that the in the Ampara and Trincomalee districts, where female LFPRs are among the lowest in the country, the share of the Moor population is the largest. Note also that Ampara district is the strongest in the Eastern Province on income and poverty metrics. In contrast, the Batticaloa district which has the highest female LFPR is characterised by the most unfavourable poverty statistics in the region, poor literacy statistics, and a sizeable share of young female heads of households (as well as the lowest share of Moors). These patterns in the female LFPR support the idea that economic destitution and necessity are the most likely drivers of women's economic participation in this region, and such women are more likely to end up in informal agricultural labour. A better financial standing may likely alleviate the need for women to seek work. Cultural values might play a role too.

In the next chapter, I discuss the conceptual framework that will be used to look at these complex and nuanced factors that shape women's LFP in the East.

5. Framework, Methodology and Variables

As discussed in Chapter 2, the neoclassical economic paradigm has been criticized at length about its ideological and methodological abstraction and oversimplification of reality, and therefore its application to the study of women's labour market positions. Yet, the heterodox schools have not been able to arrive at a consensus about what an alternative economic paradigm would look like (Johnson 1999). By drawing on the neoclassical assumptions and methods, but incorporating wisdom from the institutional framework on the role of institutions on people's labour market outcomes, the New Institutional Economic perspective provides a happy middle for labour market analyses, which will inform the overarching framework for the conceptual framework used here.

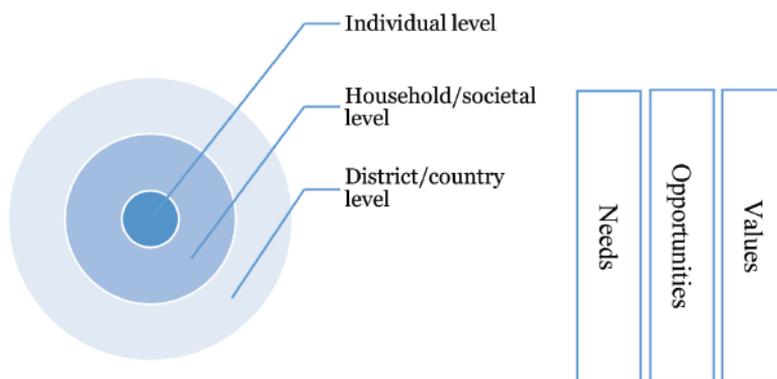
A common starting point for choosing explanatory variables is the standard neoclassical labour supply model which posits that the remuneration from work to be a critical factor influencing individual decisions to participate in the labour market. However, within this framework, the analysis of women's employment is looked at as a choice between holding a paid job and leaving the labour market altogether (Taniguchi 2002). But in reality, the decision to participate in the labour market is not determined as simply or directly. For example, self-employment provides job seekers an opportunity to engage in income-earning activities in which the boundaries between time at home and at work are blurred. Such employment opportunities are likely to be particularly appealing to women with care responsibilities, or who are governed by prescriptive gender norms which restrict the ability to work outside home. It is also a buffer against joblessness for individuals who are pushed to the labour market out of economic necessity, but face significant restrictions in finding employment in wage work (Taniguchi 2002).

Related to this last point, Poschke (2019) finds that self-employment is important in poorer economies in keeping the unemployment rate low. The author posits that the job search is likely to be less attractive in poorer countries, which in turn affects occupational choice, encouraging them to take up own-account work. Thus, the reservation wage may not be a very critical criterion in an employment decision where the labour market is limited in terms of the jobs that are on offer to potential job seekers. This certainly seems to be the case in this particular

sample, given that only 77 respondents out of the total of 1,000 respondents surveyed are employed in wage work.

Following the human capital theory, a woman’s age, level of education, and experience are important determinants of her employment and earnings. But, having sifted through a large body of literature that has studied women’s LFP in different parts of the world in Chapter 2, it is clear that the real-world relationship between such human capital attributes and a woman’s LFP is much more fluid, dynamic, and complex. The interplay of a woman’s human capital and resource endowment with structural, institutional, and societal factors in influencing women’s LFP is a recurrent theme these empirical studies. Thus, variables that straddle both economic and non-economic dimensions are critical for a meaningful analysis of women’s LFP. Spierings et al. (2008) have identified three overarching groups – needs, opportunities, and values that transcend micro (individual), meso (household and community), and macro (local and international economic contexts). This broad vector encapsulates the many economic and non-economic factors that shape a woman’s LFP. In reality, however, it is difficult to neatly fit in variables under each of these sub-categories as needs, opportunities, and values cannot be delineated clinically. Yet, this framework is a useful backdrop for the analysis of results, specifically to understand how these multiple layers interact and produce different labour market outcomes among women.

Figure 9: Conceptual Framework for Women’s Employment Decision



Source: Adapted from Spierings et al. (2008)

Methodology

There are two outcomes of interest in this study. The first is whether the respondent participates in the labour force or not. It takes a value of 1 if a woman participates in the labour force (employed or unemployed) and 0 otherwise. Logistic regression is commonly used in regression analyses where the outcome variable is dichotomous. Thus, the econometric model is specified as follows:

$$Prob(LFPR_i | X_i) = F(\alpha + \beta X_i) + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where X_i represents a vector of explanatory variables, ε_i is the error term, and the logistic function is:

$$F(z) = \frac{1}{1+e^{-z}} = \frac{e^z}{e^z + 1} \quad (2)$$

The regression coefficients “ β ” are estimated using maximum likelihood.

The second outcome of interest is whether a woman a) does not participate in the labour force b) is in the labour force but is unemployed, and c) is in the labour force and is employed. As the outcome variable is no longer dichotomous, a multinomial logistic regression is applied here. The econometric specification corresponds to:

$$Prob(Outcome_i = j | X_i) = F(\alpha + \beta X_i) + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

where j takes a value of 0, 1, and 2 for the three outcomes, not participating in the labour force, being unemployed and being employed, respectively. The ordering is arbitrary. X_i represents a vector of explanatory variables and ε_{ij} is the error term. The regression coefficients “ β ” are estimated using maximum likelihood. The independent variables common to both econometric specifications are discussed in the following section. They are grouped into individual, household, and community/societal-level variables.

Independent variables

Recall that the reservation wage is posited to be an important determinant of women’s LFP in the neoclassical theory. The hypothesis is that a higher reservation wage increases the opportunity cost of leisure, thereby encouraging

women to participate in the labour market. However, data constraints preclude the inclusion the expected/reservation wage as an independent variable in the model. To elaborate, information about wages is available only for women who are employed in wage work. Therefore, the expected wage for women who do not work needs to be computed. Generally, the Heckman (1979) selection bias correction procedure is applied to estimate this expected wage. Usually, only waged individuals are retained to estimate the expected wage for the larger sample and those who are engaged in self-employment are dropped (see, for example, Klasen & Pieters 2012), and those who are engaged in self-employment are dropped. Of the 1,000 respondents in the sample of this research study, only 77 women are engaged in wage work, and therefore, the sample size is too small to apply the Heckman procedure.

The usual variables that measure women's human capital endowments are included at the individual level. These include the respondent's age, its square to capture the non-linearity of experience, education, and the respondent's perceived state of her health. In addition, two variables about women's perceptions about their role in the household are constructed. The first is an index of how they have internalized the socially constructed roles for men and women. Eight statements that measure how women look at their place in the household and society are coded on a likert scale. A highest score of five and a lowest of zero is assigned to each of the statements. Respondents score higher if they have strongly internalized their subordination to men, and lower where women have emancipated ideas about themselves. An internalization index variable is constructed by adding up these scores and it ranges from 8 to 80. A higher index value indicates a greater inclination towards traditional gender roles and vice versa.

The second variable measures how intensely women embrace patriarchal attitudes. The questionnaire enumerated seven types of human, physical, and financial capital, and asked respondents to decide to what extent each of these assets were important for men, women, or both. The variable takes a value of 1 if the respondents believe these assets are more important for men and 0 if they believe otherwise. These values are then summed up to create a patriarchal attitude index. A highest score of seven indicates that women hold on strongly to patriarchal values.

At the household level, a critically important variable is whether the respondent heads a household or not. To collect this information, the survey questionnaire included a question which allowed the respondent to self-identify herself as a female head of household or not.¹⁷ A common hypothesis is that women heading their households are more likely to work than their counterparts in MHHs. They are likely to have a greater economic compulsion to work, but they are also less likely to be restricted by an income-earning spouse, and more likely to be have adult women living in their households helping out with household chores and childcare responsibilities, and thereby allowing them to work (Trotz 1996). But the empirical findings on the relationship between the household structure and female LFPR are in fact, mixed. For example, Gunathilaka and Vithanagama (2018) found that in the North of Sri Lanka, women heading their households are 20 per cent more likely to take up employment out of necessity, compared to women from MHHs. In contrast, Naqvi and Shahnaz (2002), who used cross-sectional data from the Pakistan Integrated Household Survey of 1988-99 to study female LFPR among women aged 15-49, observed that women heading their households were 3.7 per cent less likely than women from MHHs to participate in the labour market. Trotz (1996) has concluded that the relationship between the household structure and female LFP cannot be taken for granted prior to analytical investigations. The author has pointed out that factors such as ethnicity that influence gender identities create variations in women's propensity to participate in the labour market, even if they come from the same household structure (i.e., FHH).

Many studies have shown how household economic distress drives women's LFP. For example, in rural India, the female LFP tends to increase during times of distress in the agricultural sector, and decline again as the economy returns to growth (Lahoti and Swaminathan 2013; Abraham 2009). Similarly, in Bangladesh, the poorest women (who are also more likely to be the least educated and more likely to be heading their own household) are likely to engage in informal waged employment, as a distress sale of labour in response

¹⁷ The question asks the respondent to choose from the three stipulated responses, which makes her the principal female respondent of the household – 1) she is the female head of household 2) she is the wife of the male head of household or 3) she is the mother, sister, daughter, aunt, grandmother of the male head of household. Options 2 and 3 stipulate that the respondent is from an MHH.

to household poverty and the ‘patriarchal risk’¹⁸ (Heintz et al. 2018). Separately, in a study using India’s National Sample Survey data for 1993/94 and 1999/00, Sundaram and Tendulkar (2004) found that the worker population ratio among women was likely to be higher in households below the poverty line. They termed this phenomenon ‘a compelling need-based participation in the work force’ where it is poverty, *ceteris paribus*, that drives female LFP. On the other hand, Eberharter (2001) found that gender norms with respect to the employment of men and women prevailed in financially better off households, while the pressure to contribute to household income was stronger among poorer households. The household prosperity, or the lack thereof, can have an impact on a woman’s decision to enter the labour force.

Thus, several variables are introduced to capture the household economic situation. *The share of unemployed individuals in the household as a proportion of the adults (excluding the PFR)* is used to proxy economic distress. Five other variables are used to proxy household financial affluence. First, a *household index* that has been constructed to range between a highest value of 15 if the house is constructed of bricks, has a private toilet, has electricity, water, cable TV, and telephone, and a lowest of two if the house is a temporary construction, uses open space as a toilet and does not have electricity, water, cable TV, and a telephone. Next, a variable is constructed to measure the *difference between the mean per capita expenditure of the district and the household’s own per capita expenditure*. A negative difference indicates that a household is better off compared to an average household in the district, and a positive difference suggests that a household is worse off than an average household in the district. *The ownership of the house with a deed, the respondent’s ownership of land and jewellery as well as whether a household uses an electric cooker to prepare meals* are the four other constituents used to capture the household’s economic situation.

Several empirical studies show that households adjust not just their consumption, but also their labour supply, in the presence of debt constraints. Studies have shown that household indebtedness can push women to the labour market

18 This is a term coined by Cain et al. (1979). It refers to the ways in which women try to hedge against the economic risks they face in a patriarchal society in which material resources are controlled by men, and such practices are supported by kinship, political and religious systems. Women’s seclusion makes it difficult for them to earn independent income, but in the face of rising poverty, men may not honour the obligation to support women and women without a male partner have to find work in a system that is discriminatory towards them.

(Belkar et al. 2007; Del Boca and Lusardi 2003). Especially if male earnings are low, there is a need for female labour to sustain the debt repayment of the household (Pizzinelli 2018). In light of such evidence, I introduce a *dummy variable to capture whether or not a loan has been obtained in the respondent's name*.

The burden of care and its association with women's participation decision has been looked at extensively in empirical studies. A large corpus of evidence from economic, feminist, and development literature shows that the presence of young children in the household is a key deterrent to women's participation in the labour market. The availability childcare services can encourage women to participate in the labour market, even in the absence of an extended family to share the care burden. However, paid childcare services may not have much of a positive effect on women's LFP if such services are expensive, and unaffordable (Connelly 1992). On the other hand, if there are adult women in the household who can take up childcare responsibilities, mothers may have a better opportunity to participate in the labour market (See for example, Mehrotra and Parida 2017; Contreras and Plaza 2010; Gong and van Soest 2000; Hamid and Al-Jalali 1991; Tienda and Glass 1985).

Accordingly, to capture women's child care responsibilities, a *variable is constructed to show whether there are small children (aged 3 or less) in the household or not*. Additionally, a *variable that measures the share of adult females (excluding the PFR) in the household* is also constructed. This variable reflects the kind of childcare assistance and social capital that is available to women in the sample. To a larger extent, the childcare market in developing countries, particularly in South and South East Asia, is made up of extended family and relatives.

Next, a *dummy variable on domestic violence* is introduced. This takes a value of 1 if the respondent has experienced abuse at home or knows of someone who has experienced abuse and 0 if not. Domestic violence can adversely affect a woman's LFP by interfering with her human capital formation, productivity, work hours, mental and physical health, and disability-adjusted life years (Duvvury et al. 2013; Tolman & Wang 2005). Although domestic abuse has been associated with unstable employment (Riger and Staggs 2004), and a negative effect on socioeconomic and occupational status attainment in the long run (Lloyd 1997),

there is no significant effect of such abuse experiences on women's employment per se (Tolman and Rosen 2001; Lloyd 1997).

But most of these empirical studies establish the association between the two variables rather than the causal links due to problems of endogeneity (See for example Paul 2016; Bhattacharyya et al. 2011; Krishnan et al. 2008). Since the analytical methods employed in this research study do not try to correct for endogeneity or determine causality, the inclusion of a variable to estimate the association between LFP and domestic violence is not problematic.

Income-generating assets available to the household can create opportunities for women to take up livelihood activities. As such, *a dummy variable is constructed to capture the ownership of income-generating crops*, which takes a value of 1 if a household owns a paddy, grain, maize, or coconut cultivation, and 0 if not. Additionally, *a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent (or any other member from her household) has participated in a livelihood intervention programme* carried out by state or non-state actors is included for obvious reasons.

Next, I discuss the community/social-level variables. First, *a dummy variable denoting women's membership in any organization in the village* is included. The rationale is that women with such social connections are more likely to be positioned to seek employment than those without. For example, a membership in a village organization might give opportunities for women to improve her own skills, access information, form friendships, and make contacts and network in the public sphere, which in turn can influence their participation decision.

The next group of variables constitutes the war-related experiences which may have had an impact on women's decision to participate. However, to avoid the risk of endogeneity, instead of the individual household experiences, a variable has been constructed to capture the community-level experiences of the conflict. These experiences include the share of households that had experienced the following: *displaced and stayed in camps, displaced and stayed with family and friends, experienced damage to the house, and experienced loss of jobs, loss of assets and disruptions to education*. Although information was collected on whether households experienced deaths and disappearances during the armed conflict, such information was not included in the model because such experiences may have resulted in the creation of FHHs in the sample.

The association between an armed conflict and women's traditional gender roles has been documented fairly extensively. Several studies support the hypothesis that an armed conflict tends to increase the labour market opportunities available for women both out of necessity, and in the form of new opportunities. Women may take up work due to an 'added worker effect' as a result of the displacement of workers due to the conflict (Menon and van der Meulen Yana 2011), but also engaging in work during the armed conflict may give women experience and connections that would allow them to keep the job after the end of the conflict (Shemyakina 2011). Either way, women tend to respond to an economic shock brought on by an armed conflict through changes to their traditional labour allocation within the household (Buvinic et al. 2013). Thus, a conflict experience may in some ways lead to greater participation among women, although whether such effects persist in the long run continues to remain a question.

Next, I turn to the helpfulness of the institutional environment. The questionnaire collected information across a range of institutions – ranging from school administration to the provincial councils. However, the majority of respondents opted not to provide answers about some institutions or did not have an interaction with the institution and therefore found the question inapplicable. Therefore, only two variables from this schedule are introduced in the model – the extent of helpfulness of the Grama Niladhari officer, who is the grassroots-level government officer, and the Divisional Secretariat (DS), the next most frequented government agency, to reflect the association of the institutional environment with the respondents' LFP. The responses collected on a Likert scale take a highest of five if the respondent found the GN officer or the DS office to be very helpful or a lowest of one, if the respondent considered the GN officer or the DS office to be very unhelpful or even obstructionist.

The association of the respondents' spatial characteristics and their LFP is captured by two variables. The locality variable indicates whether the respondent lives in an area that belongs to a Pradheshiya Sabha, the lowest-level local authority, an urban council, or a municipal council, the highest-level local authority. Next, the district variable is included to understand how each district with its different macroeconomic advances, ethno-religious compositions, and resource endowments, contribute to the respondent's LFP.

The ethno-religious diversity of the Eastern Province merits the inclusion of religion as a household-level variable to see its effects on women's LFP. Religion

can play an important role in women's LFP because it (or its institutional interpretation) informs, shapes, and permeates cultural practices that tend to reinforce discriminatory gender ideologies within the society (See for example, Klingorová and Havlíček 2015; Bayanpourtehrani and Sylwester 2013; Pastore and Tenaglia 2013; H'madoun 2010). However, like other variables, religion by and of itself may not create much impact on women's LFP decision. Instead, its interplay with a country's institutional structure, the economic situation, and the socio-political context are more relevant to how religion and religiosity affects women's LFP (H'madoun 2010).

However, the sample was selected to broadly reflect the ethno-religious complexity of the Eastern Province. Therefore, the religion as an explanatory variable may mask spatial socio-economic idiosyncrasies. For example, Eravur Pattu is among the poorest of the DS divisions surveyed in this study and it is made up almost entirely of Tamil respondents. Sammanthurai DS division consists only of Muslim respondents. Therefore, instead of including religion as an explanatory variable in the participation model, three logistic regressions are carried out for subgroups of women from the three main religions – Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic, with LFP as the outcome of interest. A few selected variables from the participation model are used in this econometric specification. The next chapter presents a descriptive analysis of the data, followed by a discussion of the results of the econometric analyses in Chapter 6.

6. Overview of the Data

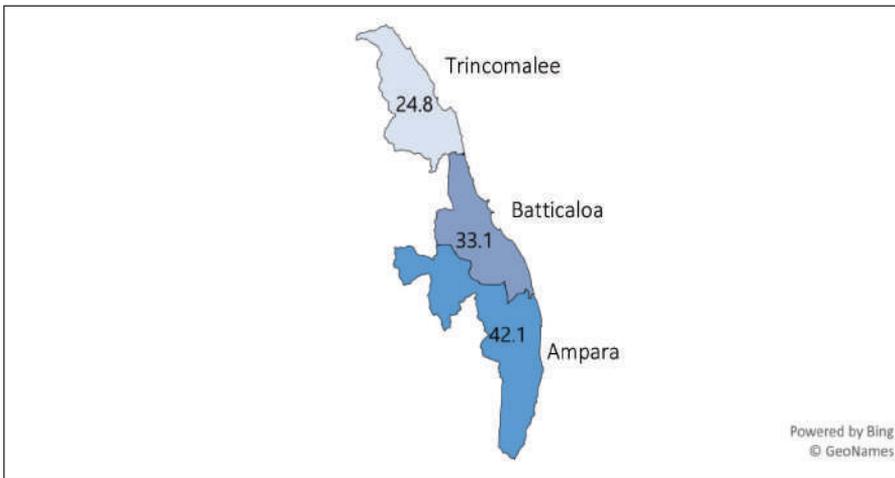
This chapter provides a detailed overview of the sample in relation to women's LFP in the Eastern Province, the outcome of interest, and different individual, household-level, and contextual factors that may be determinants of the outcome variable. The econometric model is limited in terms of the number of explanatory variables it can accommodate without over-specifying the model. But, a descriptive analysis is more expansive in nature and gives room to describe the situation and characteristics of the sample population more completely. A descriptive analysis is also an essential first step to a more complex statistical analysis. Moreover, the technicality of the econometric analysis runs the risk of narrowing its relevance and appeal to a specialized audience. The more descriptive nature of this chapter is expected to generate interest both within the social sciences scholarship that are more qualitative in nature, in the development sector, and among the wider readership. Additionally, this descriptive analysis studies the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the households by the type of headship, with the objective of contributing to the body of evidence on female heads of households in Sri Lanka.

Figures 10 and 11 below present the distribution of the sample by district and the type of household headship. The sample distribution follows the distribution of the population across the three districts of the Eastern Province. The large majority (84.2 per cent) of respondents are from male-headed households, while the remaining 15.8 per cent are women heading their households. This roughly translates into 1 in 6 FHHs, below the national average of 1 in 4.¹⁹ The non-availability of FHH data at the provincial level makes it difficult to assert whether this ratio reasonably reflects the ground reality.²⁰

19 Nationally, the share of FHHs stood at 1.06 million (23 per cent) in 2006/07, but this excluded the Northern Province and the Trincomalee District of the Eastern Province. In 2009/10, FHHs stood at 1.1 million (23 per cent), and importantly, this statistic included the entirety of the Eastern Province and the Jaffna and Vavuniya districts in the Northern Province. In 2012/13, where the HIES survey covered the entire country for the first time in 26 years, the number of FHHs increased to 1.2 million (or 23.5 per cent), and by 2015/16, it stood at 1.4 million or 25.8 per cent of the total households in the country.

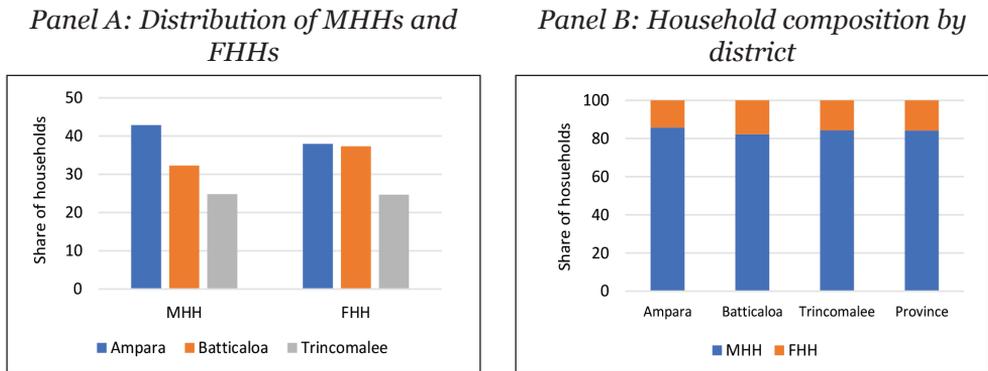
20 A programme proposal for the GoSL prepared by the UNFPA (2015b) using 2012/13 HIES data, estimated the share of FHHs in the Eastern Province to be around 23 per cent. It also estimated that the highest proportion of FHHs in any part of the country was reported from the Batticaloa district (27 per cent). The high prevalence of FHHs in the Batticaloa district is reflected in the sample.

Figure 10: Distribution of sample by district



Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

Figure 11: The composition of households by headship



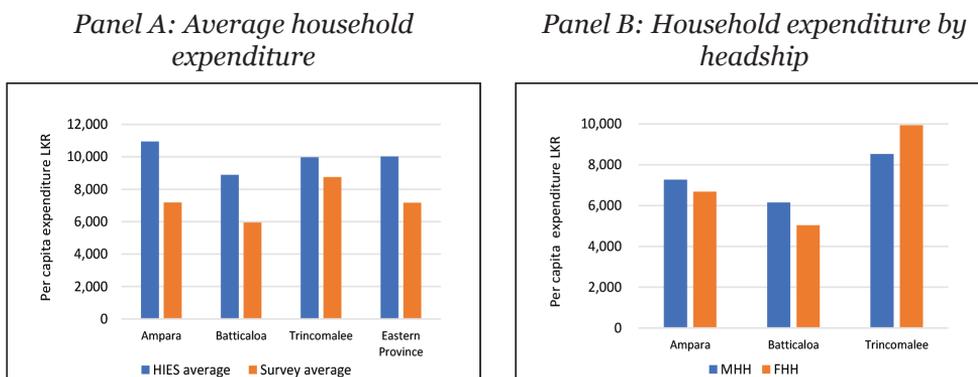
Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

Turning into the economic status of households, as measured by per capita household expenditure, the sample averages exhibit some similarities but also differences compared to the per capita income statistics of the 2016 HIES.

The patterns of the household expenses in the sample are broadly similar to the HIES expenditure estimates (Figure 12: Panel A). The poorest households are located in the Batticaloa district, and this is true for both MHHs and FHHs. However, the mean per capita expenditure of the Ampara district is significantly less than the 2016 HIES estimate. Furthermore, according to the survey data,

the households with highest per capita household expenditure levels are located in the Trincomalee district, whereas such households are located in the Ampara district, according to the 2016 HIES data. As seen in Figure 11: Panel B, not only do FHHs in the Trincomalee district account for the highest per capita expenditure across all FHHs, but they also have the highest per capita expenditure both types of households across all three districts. Trincomalee is also the only district in the Eastern province where the FHH household expenditure is higher than that of MHHs. The lowest per capita expenditure for both types of households are reported from the Batticaloa district.

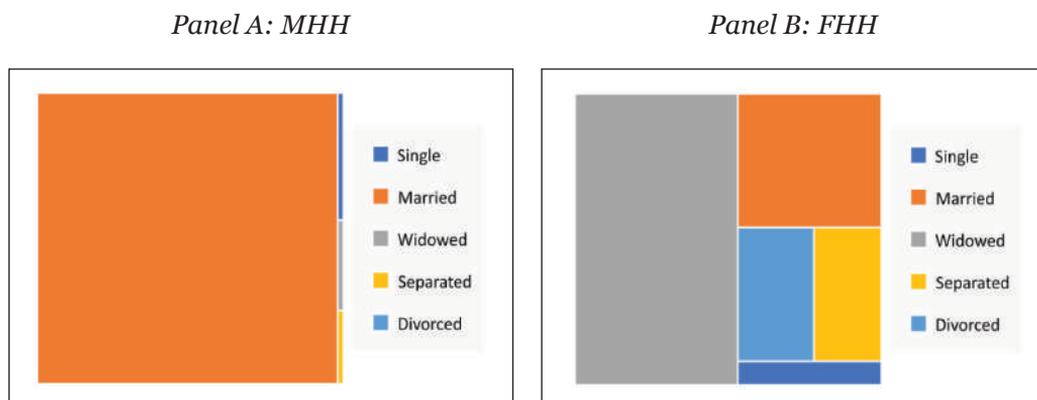
Figure 12: Per capita household expenditure by district



Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

The marital status of the respondents as presented in Figure 13 below shows that an overwhelming majority of women from MHHs are married (Panel A). Single (0.83 per cent), widowed (0.59 per cent) and separated (0.48 per cent) women make up the remainder. On the other hand, women heading their households are characterised by a greater diversity in their marital status (Panel B). A little over half of the sub-group is widowed, while a fifth of the respondents are married. These are likely to be respondents whose spouses have migrated to a different part of the country, or abroad. On the other hand, it is possible that these might be respondents whose husbands have gone missing during the armed conflict, but who hold on to their identity as married women. Another possible explanation is perhaps that some respondents do not want to identify themselves as no longer married, even though in actuality they are separated from their spouses. Divorced and separated women together make up slightly over a fifth, while the remaining 3.8 per cent are single women.

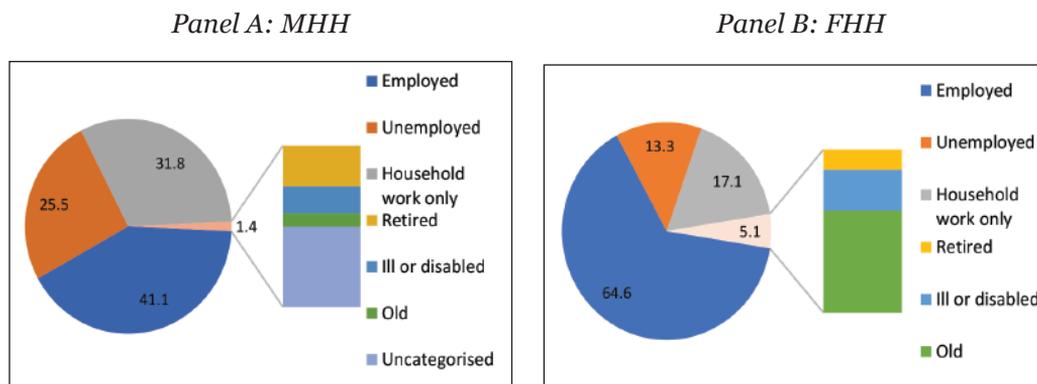
Figure 13: Marital status of respondents



Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

Women heading their households tend to be on average ten years older than women in MHHs. As seen in Figure 14 below, the share of women heading their households is disproportionately larger in the older age groups, which in turn influences this large age difference between the two groups.

Figure 14: Age profile of respondents



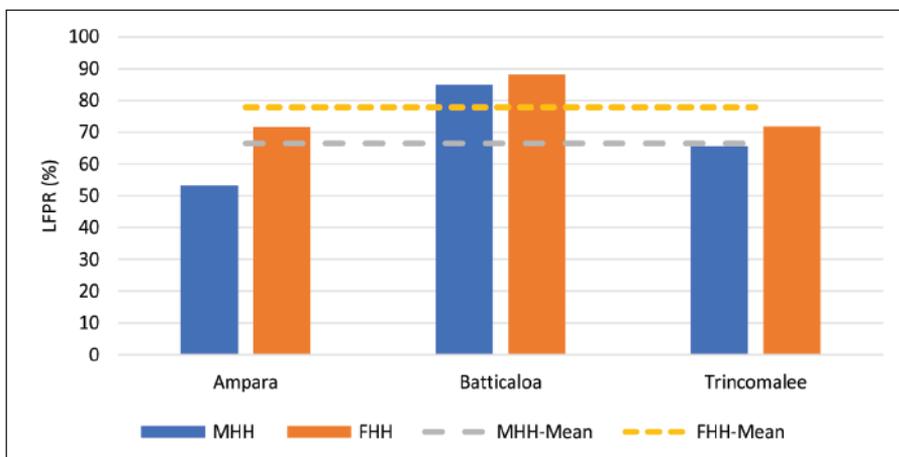
Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

How the composition of women’s usual activities changes when broken down by the type of household headship is rather telling. A little over two-fifths of the women living in MHHs are employed while approximately one-fourth are actively looking for employment (Figure 15: Panel A). Thus, their LFPR is around 67 per cent. Close to a third of the group is engaged in household work

only. In contrast, over three fifths of the women heading their households, are employed while a little over a tenth is unemployed and are actively looking for work (Figure 15: Panel B). Accordingly, the LFPR among women heading their households is close to 78 per cent, over 10 per cent higher than that of women in MHHs. Less than a fifth of the women heading their households are engaged in household work only.

Figure 16 presents the LFPR of the respondents by district.²¹ The pattern of participation in the sample is the same as in the 2019 Labour Force Survey (LFS). Women’s LFPR is lowest in the Ampara district and second lowest in the Trincomalee district. The highest LFPR is reported from the Batticaloa district. However, the LFP of the respondents across all three districts in the sample is significantly higher than the participation rates reported in the 2019 LFS, and are also well above the national female participation rate of 34.6 per cent. Moreover, in all three districts, women heading their households have higher LFPRs, although the participation gap is more pronounced in the Ampara district, compared to the other two. Women in male-headed households in the Ampara district account for the lowest LFPR across all sub-groups. The LFPR is highest for both types of households in the Batticaloa district.

Figure 16: Women’s LFPR by district

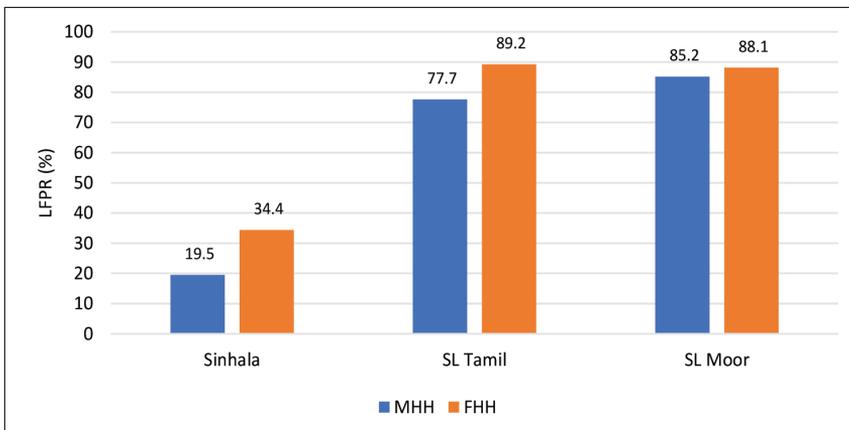


Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

21 LFPR by age group is not included in the discussion as it produces extreme results due to the limited number of observations for women heading their households in the younger age groups. For example, in the 18-24 age group, there is only one respondent heading her household and she participates in the labour force, resulting in an LFPR of 100 per cent.

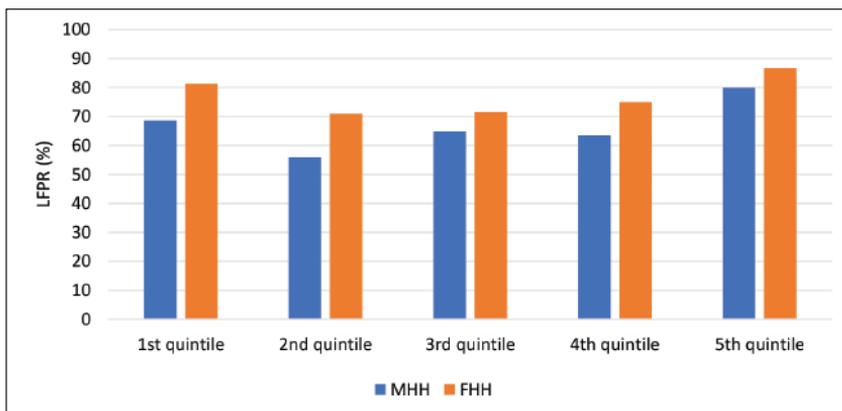
The breakdown of women’s LFPR by ethnicity (Figure 17 below) shows that surprisingly and somewhat counterintuitively, that the economic participation among Sinhalese women is the lowest in both sub-groups. The participation rates are much higher among Sri Lankan Tamil and Moor women. Expectedly the participation rates higher among women heading their households compared to women from MHHs, across all three ethnic groups. Another important observation is how the gap in the participation rates between the two sub-groups is narrowest in the SL Moor community, and widest among the Sinhalese. The LFPR across all categories is highest among SL Tamil women heading their households.

Figure 17: Women’s LFPR by ethnicity



Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

Figure 18: Women’s LFPR by per capita expenditure quintile

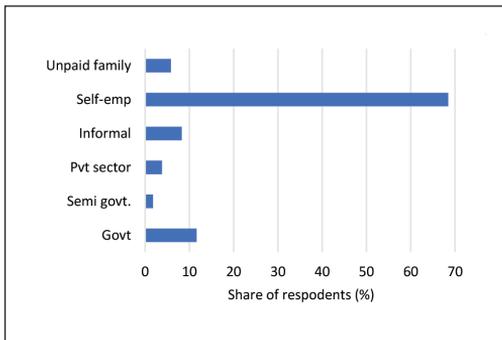


Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

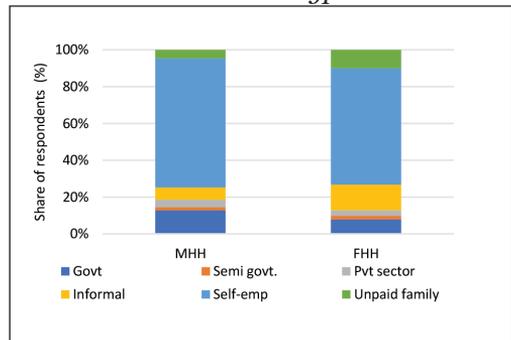
The analysis of women’s LFPR by per capita household expenditure, presented in Figure 18 above, shows that more women heading their households are participating in the labour market than women in MHHs, at all expenditure quintiles. However, the participation gap between the sub-groups is more pronounced among the poorest 40 per cent of the households (1st and 2nd quintiles). In other words, women heading poorer households are more likely to seek work than women in MHHs with similar poverty levels. Moreover, the households falling in the middle of the per capita expenditure continuum have lower participation rates compared to those of the poorest (1st quintile) and the richest (5th quintile) households. In fact, a U-shaped relationship can be traced between the per capita household expenditure and participation rates among women of both groups, specially among women heading their households.

Figure 19: Employment status of respondents

Panel A: Employment status of sample



Panel B: Employment status by household type



Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

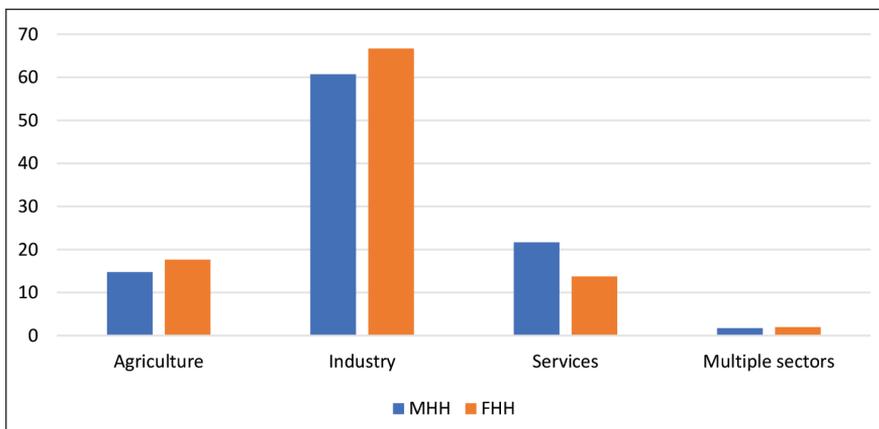
Self-employment is the most common form of employment among women who are engaged in income-earning activities. Close to 68 per cent of the employed women are engaged in some form of self-employment activity. Slightly over a tenth of this group is employed in the government sector. Informal employment (8 per cent) and unpaid family work (6 per cent) are the next most common types of employment.

However, notable differences exist between the employment status of the two types of households. Although government employment is the second most common job status (13 per cent) after self-employment among women from MHHs, only about 8 per cent of women heading their households are likely to

be employed in the government sector. In contrast, their second most common form of work is informal employment (14 per cent). Another tenth work as unpaid family workers. Together, a little below 30 per cent work in the informal economy. In contrast only about 13 per cent work either in the informal sector (7 per cent) or as unpaid family workers (6 per cent). Thus, more women heading their households are employed in informal employment activities, while more women from MHHs work in the formal sector.

The sectoral breakdown of employment presented in Figure 20 shows that the large majority of women are employed in the industrial sector, followed somewhat distantly by the service and agricultural sectors. These findings are somewhat puzzling considering that the Eastern Province has a very small industrial sector and that the services and agricultural sectors contribute the most to the employment in the region. Nonetheless, the distribution of participation across the sectors provides useful insights. More women heading their households are employed in the agricultural and industry sectors than women in MHHs. But the service sector employment is higher among women from MHHs.

Figure 20: Women’s LFPR by major industry group



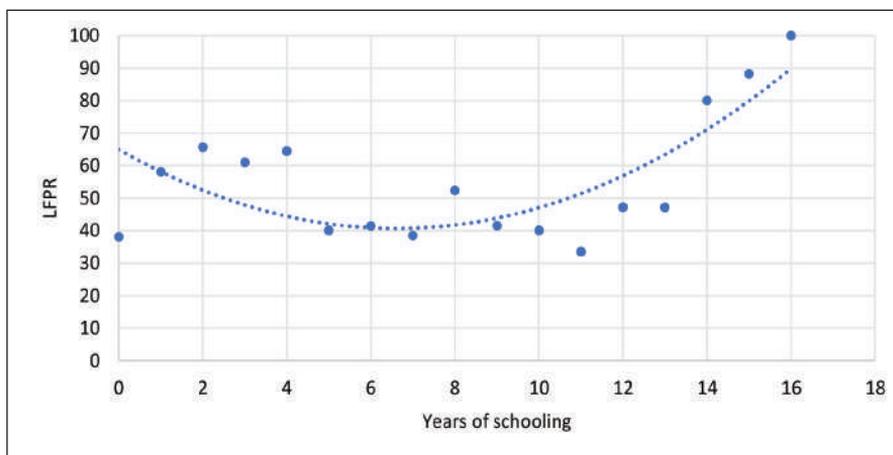
Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

The educational attainment patterns among respondents generally reflect those at the national level, although the available national data are not gender-disaggregated. The majority of women, close to two-fifths of the sample, have had an education up to the GCE Ordinary Level. Close to one-fourth have had only primary education, while another fifth has studied up to Grade 9. About 3 per cent of the women have had a university education or more, while only 2 per

cent have had no schooling at all.

Again, the data disaggregated by household headship gives insightful results. More women heading their households have never attended school, or have had only a primary education, compared to women in MHHs. On the other hand, the share of women heading their households is almost half of that of women in MHHs at the higher educational levels. The years of schooling and women's LFPR follow a broad based U-shape, in line with the human capital theory, and concurs with other empirical evidence on the relationship between education and LFP among women in Sri Lanka, and elsewhere.

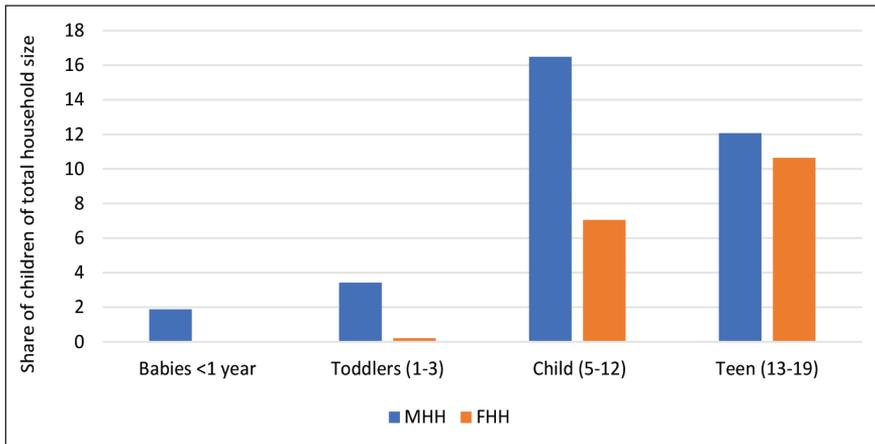
Figure 21: Years of education and female LFPR



Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province, 2018

Moving onto the household-level analysis, the care responsibilities, expectedly, appear to be more demanding for women in MHHs (Figure 22). These households typically tend to have more children aged 5 years or less, while households that women head are more likely to have older children. Across all age groups, the presence of children is higher among MHHs. This is to be expected given that women in MHHs are much younger than women heading their households.

Figure 22: Presence of children in the household

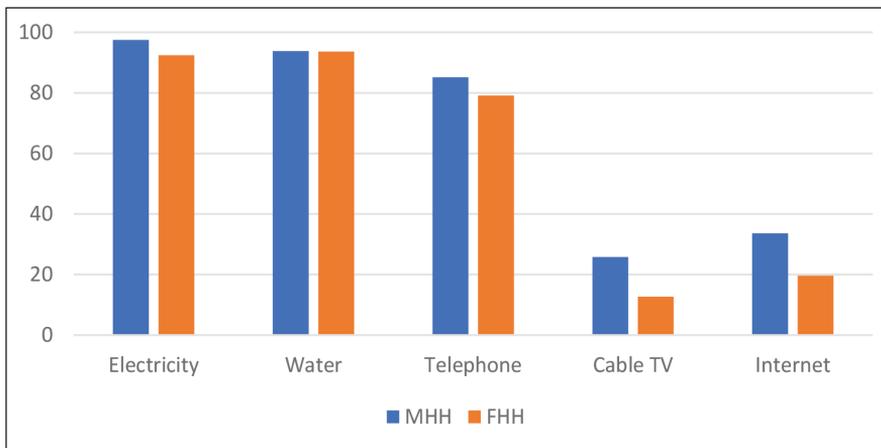


Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province, 2018

On the other hand, the share of adult females in the household (excluding the PFR) is higher among households headed by women (17.1 per cent female adults as a share of the household size, compared to 9.2 per cent among MHH). In effect, women heading their households tend to have more resources available to them to take on household chores and care responsibilities, releasing women heads of households for work. The lower share of adult females, coupled with a higher share of young children in MHHs, is likely to produce a greater care burden among women from MHHs, which may also act as a deterrent to their LFP.

However, why more adult females feature in the household membership of households headed by women than MHHs is understandable. Firstly, women heading their households are more likely to have extended families living with them (Chant 2007; Angel and Tienda 1982). The motivation to include a non-nuclear member in the household would depend on whether such individuals are able to share in the market or domestic workload of the household (Angel and Tienda 1982). Extended family co-residing in households headed by women can help by providing childcare support and other domestic help, allowing the female head of the household to engage in income-earning activities (Villarreal and Shin 2008).

Figure 23: Access to utilities among households



Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province, 2018

Among the assets available to households, the physical structure of the respondents' houses are broadly similar across the two sub-groups. A large majority of households in both sub-groups have been constructed with brick walls, and have access to a private toilet. Furthermore, over four-fifths of all households have access to basic utilities such as water and electricity, irrespective of the type of household headship. But, relatively less households own telephones, while even fewer households own cable TV and internet facilities. Moreover, as seen in Figure 23 above, fewer FHHs than MHHs have electricity, telephones, cable TV, and internet facilities, although the difference is most pronounced among the more luxurious utilities, namely, cable TV and internet facilities.

As seen in Table 3 below, the patterns of access to physical capital such as the legal ownership of the house and land are broadly similar between the two types of households. However, greater variations can be perceived in relation to more liquid assets. For example, women heading their households tend to own less jewellery than their counterparts in MHHs and by extension, the value they can realise if the jewellery is pawned is nearly two-thirds less than the value that will accrue to MHHs. Moreover, the value of financial assets proxied by the value of savings deposits, is about one-third less among FHHs.

Earning assets are those assets that will contribute to the income generation of the households. In this study, such assets include machinery and equipment, breeding and selling livestock (poultry, goats, buffaloes and cows) and crops

(paddy, maize, other grains, and coconut). The differences in the patterns of ownership of earning assets allude to the gendered nature of livelihood activities among the households. For example, FHHs own less machinery and equipment, compared to MHHs, while more FHHs own livestock. Traditionally, the operation of machinery and equipment is associated with a masculine identity, and even within agriculture, the usage of technology is often considered a man's forte. On the other hand, raising livestock could be a man's job where the animals are bigger and stronger, but typically rearing smaller animals such as goats, pigs, and poultry is associated with women (IFAD 2009). In contrast, differences in the crop ownership between the two types of households is much less, and the higher share of crops owned by MHHs could be related to the greater ownership of and the larger extent of land owned by these households.

Table 3: Assets available to the household

	MHH (%)	FHH (%)
Household and land		
Share of households that own house with deed	75.2	73.4
Share of households that own land	90.3	86.7
Share of respondents that own land	15.8	15.2
Liquid assets		
Jewellery	91.3	73.4
Mean value if pawned (LKR)	211,780	127,722
Savings deposit	45.2	40.5
Mean value of savings deposit (LKR)	10,463	7,763
Earning assets		
Machinery and equipment	25.7	15.8
Livestock	34.6	40.5
Crops	82.4	79.1
Other assets		
Vehicle	64.5	33.5
Durable goods	48.4	36.0

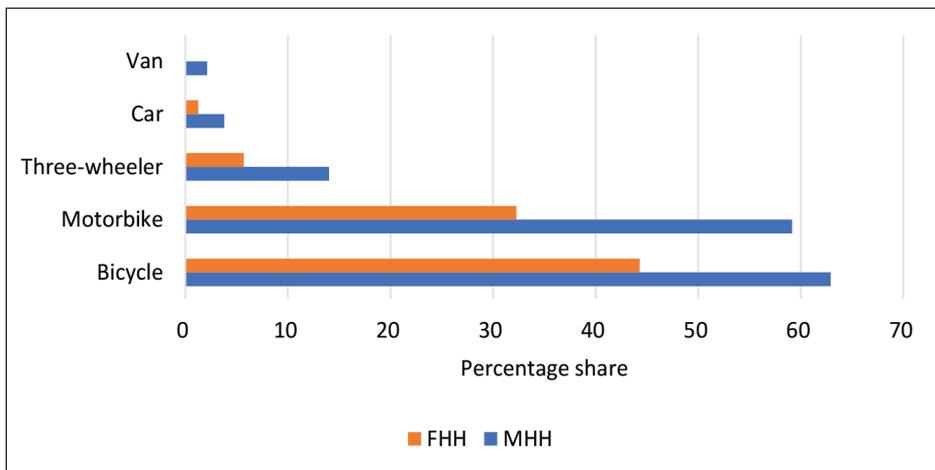
Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province, 2018

Other assets such as motorised vehicles and durable goods are generally non-income generating assets, and therefore are largely an indicator of household prosperity. Clearly, as expected, FHHs own significantly less of these durable consumption goods compared to MHHs. While close to two-thirds of MHHs

own some type of mechanised transportation medium (a car, van, trishaw, or a motorbike), only about a third of FHHs own such an asset. However, this variable needs to be explained further as the market values of the assets grouped under the category of ‘vehicles’ vary significantly from one another, and cannot be considered as indicative of a uniform level of affluence.

Figure 24 below presents the ownership patterns of these four different types of motorised transport mediums, as well as the human-powered bicycles, across the two types of households. MHHs tend to own more of each of the enumerated vehicles. However, the percentage shares indicate that irrespective of the type of headship, motor bicycles are the most commonly-owned motorised vehicle among the households, followed by trishaws. A very few households own a car. Interestingly, there are no FHHs in the sample that own a van. In addition to the affordability constraints, this could also be possibly because a van is traditionally associated with a masculine identity, and therefore not viewed as suitable for a woman. The bicycle is the most commonly-held mobility asset.

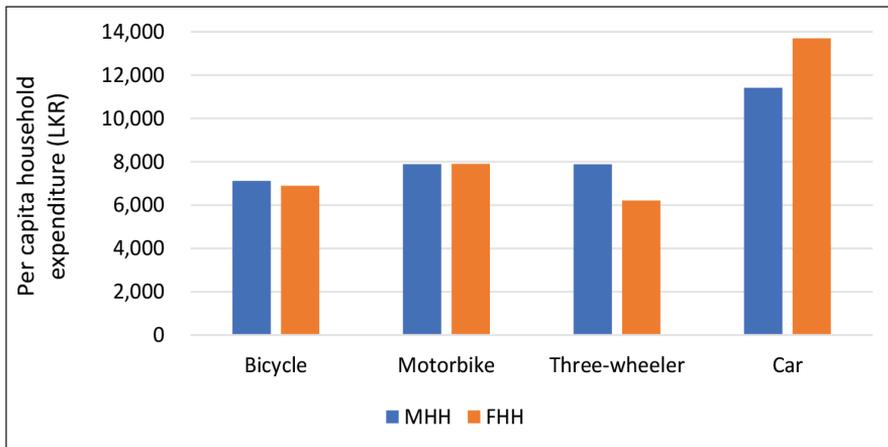
Figure 24: Ownership of vehicles of households



Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

Figure 25 below compares the household per capita expenditure by the ownership of these different mediums of transport.

Figure 25: Per capita expenditure by ownership of vehicle category

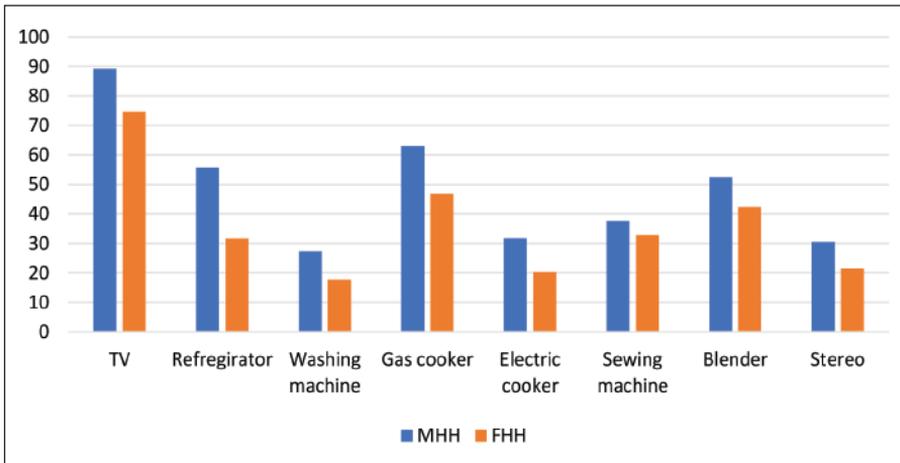


Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

As expected, households that own cars are the richest, as measured by per capita expenditure. Notably, FHHs that own cars are the most well-off among all sub-groups and are better off than MHHs that own a car. However, only 2 out of the 34 households that own a car are FHHs. The large majority of households that own a car are headed by men. Across all categories, FHHs that own a three-wheeler appear to be the poorest. These households might use a three-wheeler as an income-earning asset by renting it for daily hires.

The durable assets consist of televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, gas cookers, electric cookers, sewing machines, blenders, and stereo/DVD/VCD sets. More MHHs compared to FHHs own each of the enumerated assets. This observation concurs with the findings of Kulatunga (2016; 2014) that the asset ownership of the Eastern Province was biased against FHHs. The most widely-owned asset is the television, and the least owned, the washing machine for both sub-groups. The ownership gap is narrowest between the two sub-groups for sewing machines.

Figure 26: Ownership of durable assets by household headship

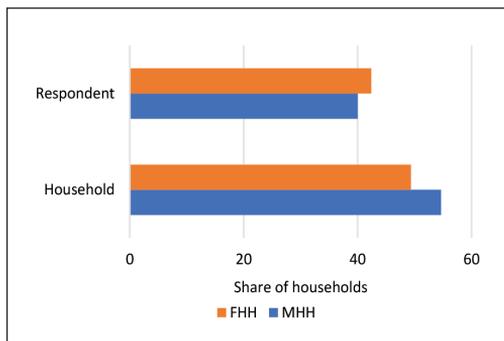


Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

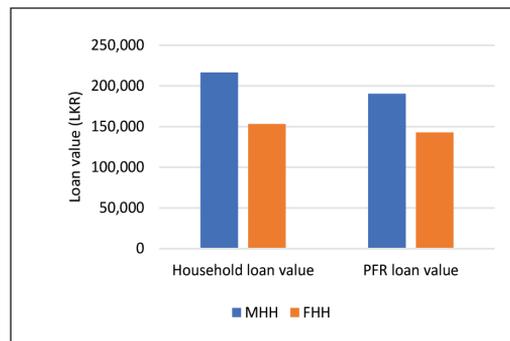
Moving onto the household debt, Figure 27 below shows that a little over a half of MHHs and a little less than half of FHHs have taken out loans (Panel A). More women heading their households have taken out loans in their names than women in MHHs, although the difference is small. Among FHHs it is more likely that loans taken by the household are in the name of the respondent, unlike in MHHs. This could explain the narrower gap between the share of loans taken by the household and in the name of the respondent in FHHs. In terms of the values of the loans, MHHs tend to borrow more both at the household and the individual level. The difference between the household and individual loan values among FHHs is marginal, likely for the same reason discussed above.

Figure 27: Household debt

Panel A: Percentage share of households

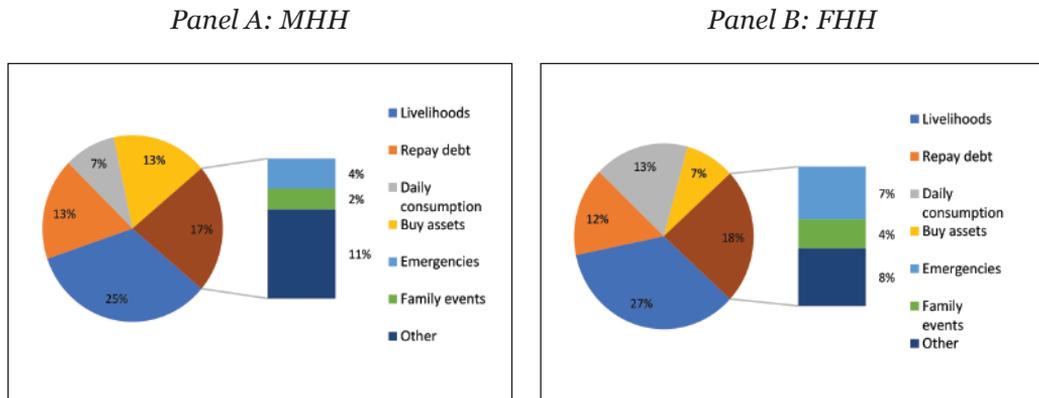


Panel B: Loan value



Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

Figure 28: Reasons for household borrowings



Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

The differences in the reasons for borrowings are striking (Figure 28). The most cited reason for borrowing among both sub-groups is to support livelihood activities, and the shares are broadly alike. Roughly similar shares from both sub-groups also borrow to repay debt. But, more FHHs tend to take out loans to finance day-to-day consumption, whereas more MHHs borrow to purchase assets. FHHs are also more likely to borrow in family emergency situations such as illness and death, as well as events such as weddings.

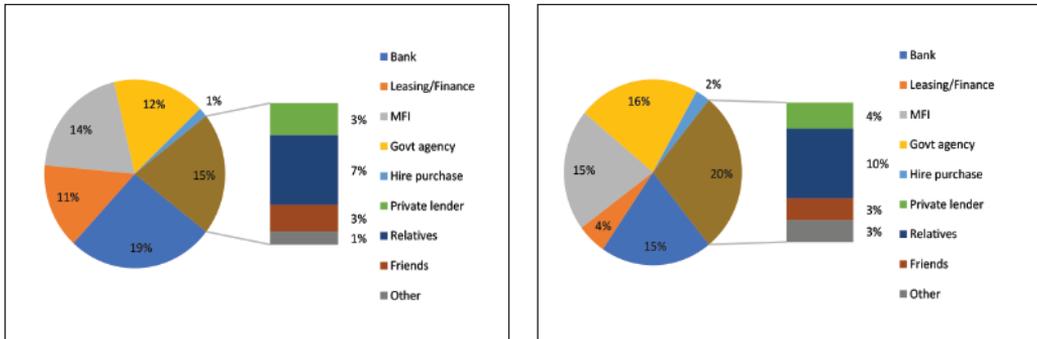
Figure 29 below shows that there are discernible differences in the sources of the borrowings between the two types of households. First, only 15 per cent of the FHHs have met their liquidity deficits through banks. But a little less than a fifth of MHHs have sourced their borrowings from banks. Second, MHHs have borrowed nearly three times more as FHHs from leasing and finance companies. These non-banking financial intermediaries are largely involved in the business of financing motor vehicles. Given the higher vehicle ownership among MHHs, it stands to reason then that a sizeable share of the borrowings of MHHs are sourced from leasing companies.

While both types of households tend to borrow from microfinance institutions (MFIs), more FHHs than MHHs borrow from government agencies such as the Samurdhi or Divi Neguma offices. More importantly, more FHHs (about 20 per cent) tend to borrow from informal sources than MHHs. Relatives are a particularly important source of borrowings for women heading their households.

Figure 29: Sources of household borrowings

Panel A: MHH

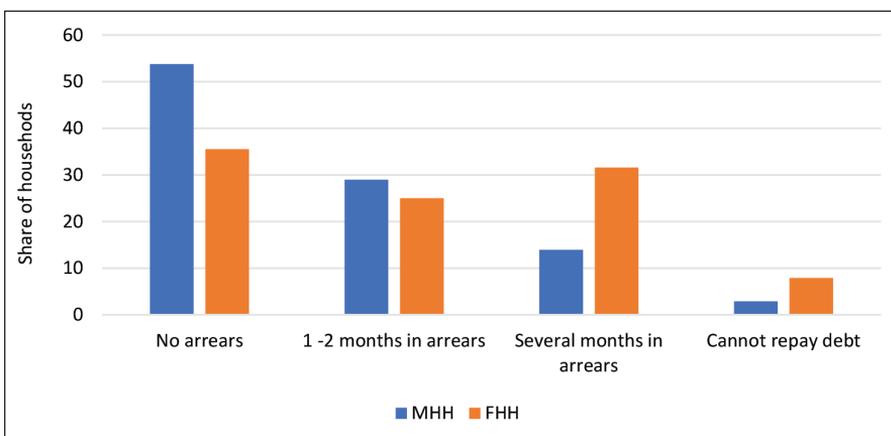
Panel B: FHH



Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

The discussion on the household borrowings is incomplete without an analysis of the capacity to repay them. As seen in Figure 30 below, over half of the MHHs have no difficulties in honouring their debt obligations. In contrast, only slightly over a third of FHHs do not have any arrears on their debt. MHHs dominate the two categories that reflect greater ease of repayment, namely having no arrears or only 1-2 months of arrears on loan instalments. As the number of loan months in arrears increases along the X-axis, there is a linear drop in the share of MHHs, showing that increasingly fewer MHH have long overdue repayments.

Figure 30: Household capacity to repay borrowings

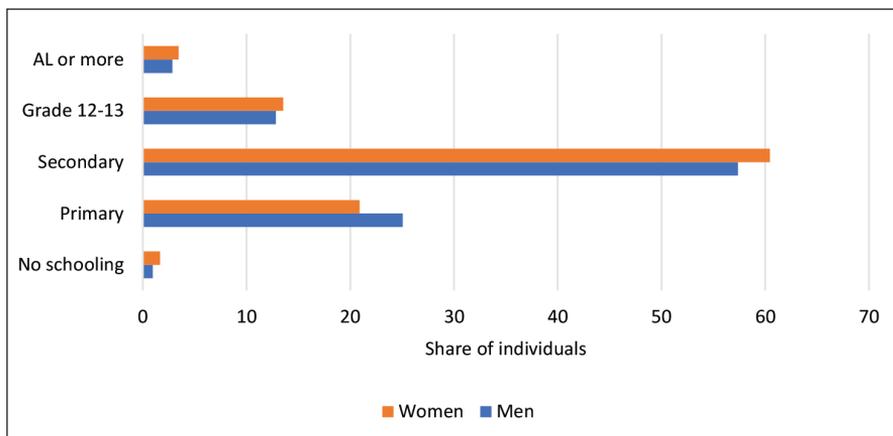


Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

On the other hand, FHHs dominate the two categories that reflect a greater difficulty of repayment. Close to a third of FHHs have accumulated several months of loan instalments. Additionally, more FHHs than MHHs find it extremely difficult to repay their borrowings. The greater difficulty of repayment among FHHs is possibly tied to the purpose of their borrowings. Recall that FHHs borrow mostly for consumption purposes and to finance planned and unexpected life events, and invariably, the repayment of such loans is likely to be problematic.

A discussion of the husband’s socio-economic status is only limited to those respondents who are currently married. The educational attainments of the husbands are broadly in line with that of their spouses. Although only a very small portion of the both men and women have had no education, women make up the larger portion in this category. Similarly, less wives than their husbands have completed primary education. But, importantly, a higher share of women features consistently among the higher educational categories, starting from the secondary education level.

Figure 31: Education levels of husbands and wives in MHHs



Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

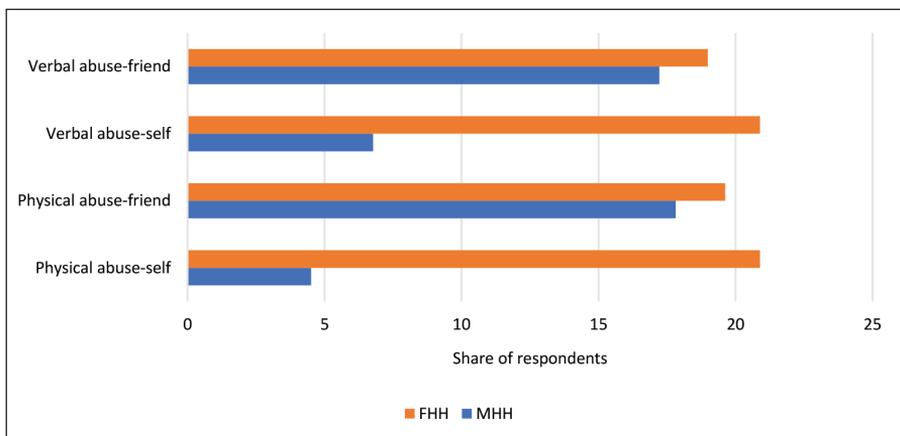
The relationship between women’s LFP and domestic violence is a perplexing one. While conventional models of domestic violence suggest that greater economic participation among women leads to a decline in domestic violence, the empirical results are mixed. Several studies have witnessed a positive association between women’s employment and their susceptibility to domestic abuse (See

for example, Tandrayen-Ragoobur 2018; Lenze and Klasen 2017; Paul 2016). However, Lenze and Klasen (2017) found that once controlled for endogeneity the relationship between the two variables became statistically insignificant.

In order to understand a possible association between domestic abuse and the participation among women in the Eastern Province, one schedule in the questionnaire was dedicated to collecting such information. As the topic is personal and sensitive, the questions were brief and allowed the respondents to opt out of answering them if required. The questions were also drafted in a manner that would allow women to respond truthfully without exposing their own experiences.

Three-fourths of the sample either did not know anyone who was subject to physical abuse at home, or refused to respond. Of the respondents who provided answers, a little over one-fourth claimed that they themselves were subject to physical abuse. The remaining three-fourths claimed that they knew someone who was abused at home. Slightly less than three-fourths of the sample claimed to not know anyone who was abused verbally, or refused to answer. Of those who responded, one-third claimed that they themselves were subject to verbal abuse at home, while the remaining two-thirds knew someone who was verbally abused at home. The results disaggregated by household headship are remarkable. The experience of physical and verbal abuse is significantly higher among women heading their households compared to women in MHHs.

Figure 32: Experiences of physical and verbal abuse

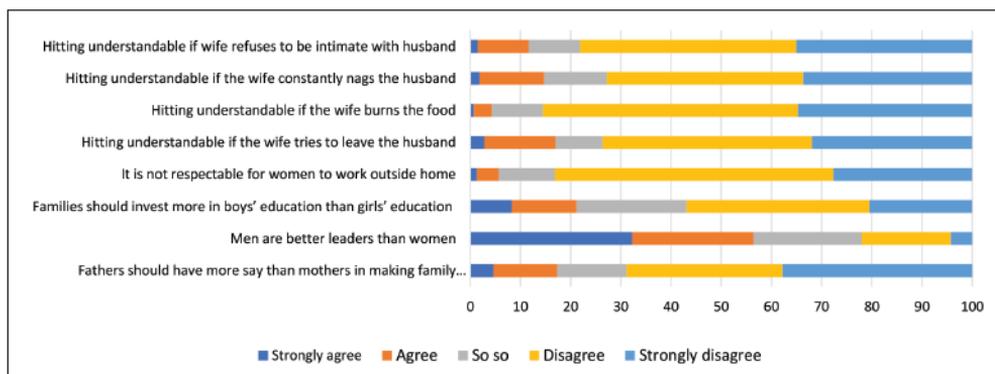


Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

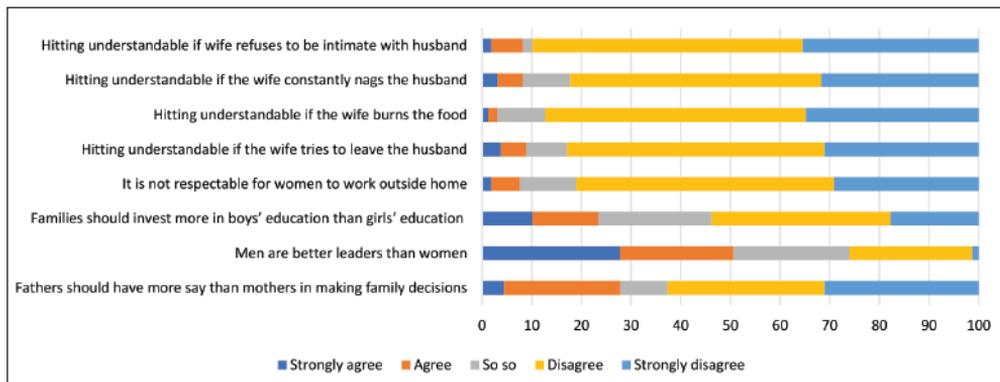
Conspicuously, in MHHs the share of respondents that claim to know someone who is subject to physical and verbal abuse is nearly three-times as high as the share of respondents who admit they themselves are subject to such abuse. One plausible explanation is that some respondents may in fact be portraying their own experience of domestic violence as those of others, because they do want to be perceived as victims, or do not feel safe or comfortable divulging their own vulnerabilities.

Figure 33: Respondents’ perception of gender roles

Panel A: MHH



Panel B: FHH



Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

Next, women’s perceptions of gender roles are summarised in Figure 33 above. Over half of the women from both MHHs and FHHs either agree or strongly agree that men make better leaders compared to women, although this share is slightly higher among women from MHHs (56 per cent) than women heading

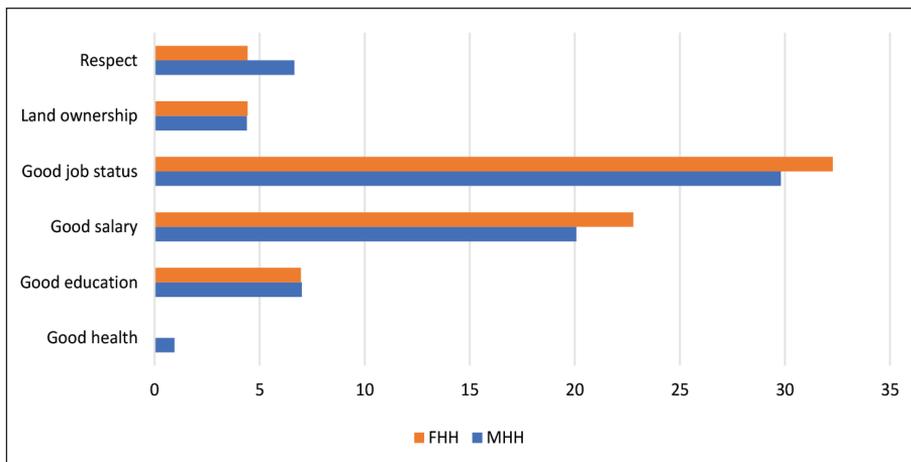
their households (51 per cent). There is also relatively less disagreement among respondents with the statement that families should invest more in boys' education. The acceptance and tolerance of domestic abuse is higher among women in MHHs compared to women heading their households.

But, by and large, well over three-fifths of the respondents from both types of households have an empowered view of women's position and role in the household. There is an overwhelming disagreement with all the enumerated male-biased perceptions, with the exception that men make better leaders. In fact, it can be argued that this idea is connected to the weak representation of women at the higher decision-making leadership positions in the country.

The respondents' own internalised patriarchal values are presented in Figure 34 below. These values are captured through the respondent's opinion of whether men or women or both are deserving of the following endowments – good health, a good education, a high salary, an important job status, ownership of land and others' respect. Figure 34 plots the share of respondents who agree or strongly agree that these attributes are important only for men.

Most of the respondents, irrespective of household headship, believe these endowments to be important to both men and women equally. The most strongly held patriarchal value appears to be that men are more deserving of a good salary and a good job status. Importantly, more women heading their households hold on to this opinion compared to women in MHHs. On the other hand, more women in MHHs compared to women heading their households believe that men are more deserving of others' respect. All in all, many respondents uphold relatively more liberal attitudes towards gender roles, and in relation to the place of women in the household and the society at large. Yet, values pertaining to employment appear to be more entrenched in patriarchal ideologies, and women have relegated themselves to a secondary role as economic agents.

Figure 34: Share of respondents with strong patriarchal values²²



Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

Respondents’ perceptions of the institutional environment are presented next. As seen in Figure 35 below, the majority of government institutions that respondents are likely to frequent such as the Divisional Secretariat, the Grama Niladhari’s (GN) Office, the Samurdhi office, financial intermediaries, and the health and educational institutions are found to be helpful by respondents from both types of households. Both these households have ranked hospitals highest in the degree of helpfulness, followed by the school administration. Relatively less respondents agree that the police was helpful. Notably, only a few women have responded in relation to the helpfulness of the nearest army camp. Of them however, the majority find the military camps to be helpful, and the responses are similar across both women heading their households and women in MHHs.

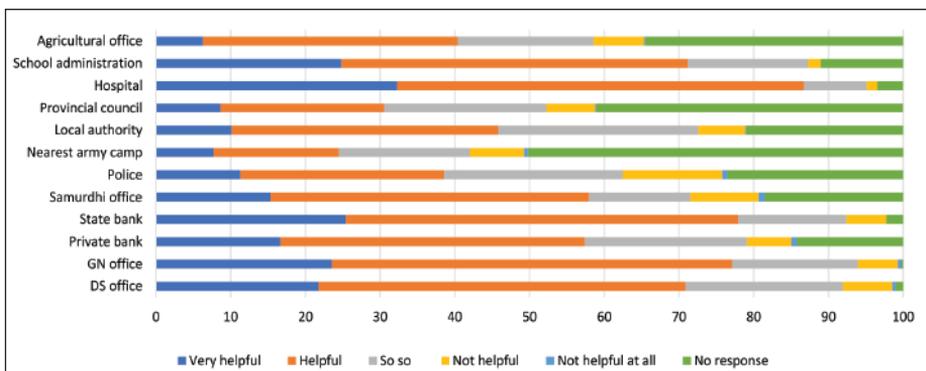
What are the inferences that can be drawn from these perceptions, and more importantly, the fact that these perceptions are broadly the same across both MHHs and FHHs? First, the general helpfulness of the institutional environment is encouraging. Second, the higher share of no response from respondents on the helpfulness of the agricultural office and the provincial council (and to some extent the local authority), suggests that women may not be navigating these government higher-level institutions. A similar explanation would apply to private banks, although the no-response share is less than a

²² The share of respondents who agree or strongly agree that the enumerated characteristics are more important to men than women.

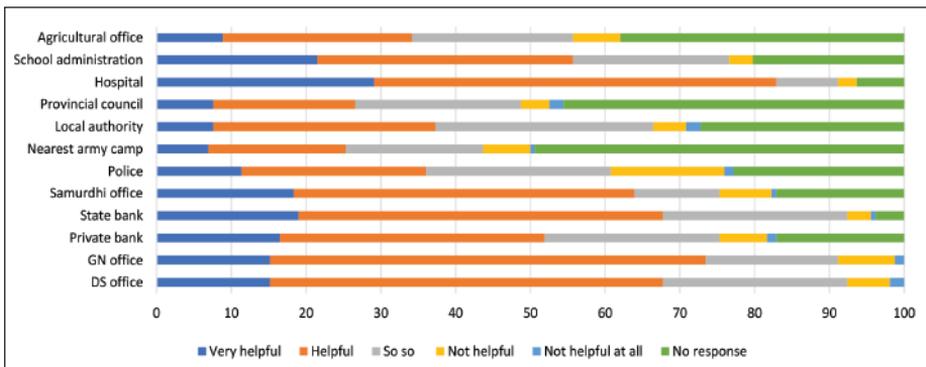
fifth of the respondents, both among MHHs and FHHs. More women heading their households compared to respondents from MHHs find the GN office to be less helpful. Whether women heading their households are discriminated by the GN officers, the majority of whom tend to be male, is a pertinent question. In contrast, the perceived helpfulness of the Samurdhi office, the grassroots-level organization of the national welfare programme, is similar for both type of households, suggesting that the services of the Samurdhi office is more equitable towards both types of households.

Figure 35: Perception of helpfulness of institutions

Panel A: MHH



Panel B: FHH

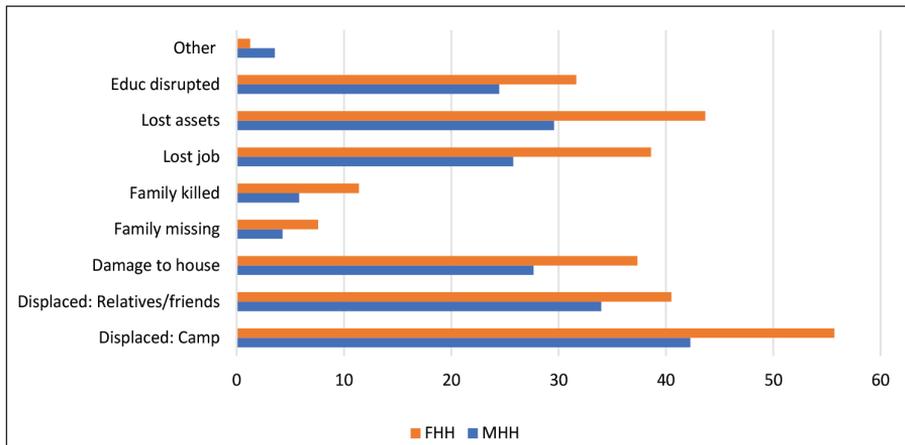


Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

Information collected on the armed conflict-related experiences are presented in Figure 36. Significantly more women heading their households have experienced all, but one (other, not specified) of the armed conflict experiences

that were enumerated. That FHHs have experienced more deaths and missing person situations stands to reason. Such deaths may very well have turned their households into ones headed by women. More importantly, FHHs have also suffered damages to their physical (and financial) and human capital as a result of the conflict. Thus, the legacy of the armed conflict that seems to still linger on, over a decade following the end of the conflict, cannot be discounted in in analysis of women’s economic participation in the Eastern Province.

Figure 36: Conflict experiences of households



Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

7. Discussion and Analysis

This chapter presents the econometric analysis in relation to the research questions laid out in Chapter 1. Table 4 below presents the means and proportions of the individual, household, and community/societal-level variables that are hypothesized to shape women’s LFP in the Eastern Province. Then, Tables 5, 6 and 7 present the results of the econometric analyses. As the overview of the data covered a lot of ground on the sample, Table 4 below will not be dealt with in detail here. However, note that the summary statistics here look at the sample as a whole, and not by the household headship. For example, of the entire sample, 68.3 per cent of women are participating in the labour force, 15.8 per cent are women heading their households, and 15.7 per cent of women own land in their name, so on and so forth. Furthermore, the analysis is only aimed at understanding the associations between the explanatory variables with the independent variable, and does not imply direction.

Table 4: Summary statistics of the sample

	Mean or Proportion	Robust standard error
LFPR	0.683	0.135
Individual level		
Age group:		
Age 18-29	0.119	0.022
Age 30-39	0.286	0.014
Age 40-49	0.297	0.031
Age 50-59	0.221	0.009
Age 60 or more	0.077	0.011
Age squared	1970.139	51.554
Education:		
No education	0.021	0.005
Primary education	0.242	0.045
Secondary education	0.583	0.031
Up to A/L	0.123	0.028
A/L qualified or more	0.031	0.007
In poor health	0.309	0.075
Perceptions:		
Patriarchal attitudes score	1.778	0.190
Gender norm internalization score	19.941	1.734

Household level		
FHH or not	0.158	0.008
Share of unemployed individuals in household	0.177	0.037
Presence of small children	0.508	0.019
Share of adult women in household	0.105	0.004
Respondent abused/knowns someone abused	0.095	0.033
Loan in PFR's name	0.407	0.088
Uses an electric cooker to prepare meals	0.49	0.044
Household wealth index	13.205	0.108
Expenditure gap compared to district average	0.442	0.056
House with deed	0.749	0.065
PFR owns land	0.157	0.036
PFR owns jewelry	0.885	0.025
Household owns crops	0.819	0.042
Has participated in livelihood programme/s	0.412	0.127
PFR is a member in an organization	0.625	0.09
Community/societal level		
Armed conflict experiences		
Displaced and in camp	0.444	0.116
Displaced and with family/friends	0.35	0.08
Damage to house	0.292	0.114
Loss of job	0.278	0.106
Loss of assets	0.318	0.105
Education affected	0.256	0.064
Institutions		
Helpfulness of GN office	3.912	0.138
Helpfulness of DS office	3.808	0.151
Local authority:		
Pradeshiya Sabha	0.805	0.129
Urban council	0.118	0.105
Municipal council	0.077	0.083
Total number of industry, trade, and service establishments in the DS division	3379.308	389.092
District		
Trincomalee	0.248	0.175
Ampara	0.421	0.216
Batticaloa	0.331	0.221

Source: Estimates from survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province, 2018

Table 5 below presents the results of the regression on women's LFP. The marginal effects of the basic model is presented in Model 1. Models 2, 3 and 4 have each been run with an additional group of explanatory variables. Accordingly, Model 2 includes women's perception variables in addition to standard individual variables. Model 3 includes household-level variables in addition to the variables used in Model 2. Model 4 includes all the individual, household, and community/societal-level explanans in relation to the respondents' LFP. The robustness of this extended full model to the addition or omission of different variables have been tested following the method implemented by Barslund et al. (2005). The results are presented in Appendix 1.

The individual-level variables are discussed first, most of which are significant at the critical 1 per cent level. Some of these key individual variables tend to hold on to their significance level even when the model is extended. Compared to the reference group of women aged 18-29, women from all other age groups are more likely to be in the labour force. The marginal effects are statistically significant at the critical 1 per cent level for women aged 30-39 across all five model specifications. The life-cycle behaviour shows that there is a greater propensity among women to participate as they get older. Participation is highest among women aged 50-59 who are 13 per cent more likely to participate compared to the reference group, other things held constant. The reduction in the probability of participation among women aged 60 or more compared to the group aged 50-59 suggests that women may be withdrawing from the labour market due to old age and ill health. In fact, the marginal effects of different age groups trace a concave shape, where participation is lower among younger and older women, compared to those in the middle.

The results in relation to age are similar to those of Gunatilaka and Vithanagama (2018) and Gunatilaka (2013). A few explanations as to why older women are more likely to participate in the labour market than younger women can be conceived. Older women may have grown up children, which may give them more time for market work (Faridi et al. 2011). This may be particularly true for this sample where the large majority of respondents are self-employed. Moreover, older women may also have less restrictions imposed on their mobility compared to that of young daughters and wives.

The square of the age, that approximates experience, is negative, as largely found elsewhere, and the results are statistically significant across all but the extended

model. However, the marginal effect of the variable on women's LFP is miniscule across all specifications. The direction of its relationship with female LFP concurs with the idea that experience has a non-linear effect on women's LFP (Sackey 2005). Poor health is inversely associated with women's LFP, as expected. In the extended model, women who perceive themselves to be in poor health are 9 per cent less likely to participate, and the marginal effects are significant at the critical 5 per cent level.

Table 5: Logit model estimation results: factors affecting women's LFP

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Individual level					
<i>Age group: reference –18-29 years</i>					
Age 30-39	0.1563***	0.1179***	0.1057**	0.0972***	0.1069***
Age 40-49	0.2610***	0.2072***	0.1283**	0.1187*	0.1080*
Age 50-59	0.3256***	0.2858***	0.1717**	0.1559**	0.1323**
Age 60 or more	0.3393**	0.2781***	0.1245	0.0902	0.0552
Age squared	-0.0001***	-0.0001***	-0.0001**	-0.0001**	0.0000
PFR in poor health	-0.2310***	-0.1659***	-0.1588***	-0.1236***	-0.0867**
<i>Education: reference – no schooling</i>					
Primary education	0.1591	0.1926	0.1832	0.1654	0.1740*
Secondary education	-0.0423	0.0152	0.11	0.0895	0.1007
Up to A/L	-0.0197	0.0565	0.1644	0.1452	0.1694**
A/L qualified or more	0.3419**	0.4483**	0.4435***	0.4110***	0.4091***
Patriarchal attitudes score		-0.0225***	-0.0233***	-0.0234***	-0.0194***
Gender norm internalization score		0.0219***	0.0185***	0.0181***	0.0118***
Household level					
FHH			0.1490***	0.1564***	0.1406***
Share of unemployed in household			0.2131***	0.1608***	0.1478***
Presence of small children in the household			-0.0157	-0.0166	-0.0201
Share of adult women in household			-0.0751**	-0.1298**	-0.1106*
Respondent abused/knowns someone abused			0.2094***	0.1944***	0.1457**
PFR has a loan in her name			0.0975***	0.0896***	0.0596***

Household uses electric cooker to prepare meals	-0.0951***	-0.0730*	-0.0587*
Household wealth index	-0.0246*	-0.0252*	-0.0270**
Expenditure gap compared to district average	-0.1408***	-0.1391***	-0.1147***
Household owns house with deed	0.0816	0.0662	0.0586
PFR owns land	0.1676***	0.1420***	0.1262***
PFR owns jewellery	0.0578	0.0381	0.0633
Household owns crops	0.0479	0.0576**	0.0603**
Respondent or household member participated in livelihood programme/s	0.1588***	0.0950***	0.0620***
Respondent is a member in a village organization	-0.0354	0.0079	0.0293
Community/societal level			
<i>Armed conflict experiences</i>			
Displaced and in camp		0.2808**	0.2055**
Displaced and with family/friends		0.1314	0.1978*
Damage to house		0.1583	0.0172
Loss of job		-0.0985	-0.2001***
Loss of assets		-0.1781*	-0.0886
Education affected		-0.0694	-0.0223
<i>Institutions</i>			
Helpfulness of the GN office		-0.0793**	-0.0617**
Helpfulness of the DS office		0.0637***	0.0597***
No. of construction, trade and service establishments in the DS division			0.0001***
<i>Local authority: reference – Pradeshiya Sabha</i>			

Urban Council					-0.2343***
Municipal Council					0.0954
<i>District: reference – Trincomalee</i>					
Ampara					0.0392
Batticaloa					0.1609***
No. of observations	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000

Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province, 2018; Data related to the number of establishments are from the DSC (2015); Data related to the district-level mean per capita expenditure was from DCS (2018).

Notes: Dependent variable LFPR; ***, **, and * denote statistical significance at the one per cent, five per cent, and ten per cent levels respectively. All models have been clustered at Divisional Secretariat's Division level for robust standard errors.

The education variables produce some insightful results. First, compared to the reference group of women who have never been to school, women of all educational levels are more likely to participate in the labour market. The probability of participation is as high as 41 per cent among women who have the GCE Advanced Level qualification or more. The marginal effects of this variable are statistically significant at the critical 1 per cent level in the extended model. These results are congruent with the human capital theory.

The marginal effects corresponding to the different levels of education follow a J-shape, where women with only primary education have a higher probability of participation (17 per cent) compared to women with secondary education (10 per cent). Women with a collegiate-level education is only almost as likely as women with only a primary education to participate in the labour market. Recall that a U-shape was traced in the descriptive statistics analysis in relation to women's LFP and years of schooling. This pattern diverges from the human capital theory, according to which individuals with higher education have more skills and better human capital, and therefore are more likely to be in the labour force. However, these results corroborate the findings of Chatterjee et al. (2018), Kanjilal-Bhaduri and Pastore (2017) and Klasen and Pieters (2013; 2012) for India, and ADB (2016) for rural Pakistan who also trace a J- or U-shape relationship between women's education and LFP. The U- or J-shape of education on women's work might underscore the role of social stigma on women's work (Klasen and Pieters 2013; 2012). Generally, lower levels of education are associated with poverty. Thus, women with lower educational levels from poor households may take up low-end jobs out of necessity. If they are a little more educated and have greater income security, taking up such menial work will be perceived as stigmatic by the household. Women with higher educational attainments are less likely to be bound by familial perceptions or circumstances in their participation decision (Ibid).

The two variables constructed to capture the extent to which women subscribe to patriarchal ideologies are statistically significant at the critical 1 per cent level, and produce insightful results. But the magnitude of the marginal effects are quite small. The association between the patriarchal attitudes score and women's LFP is negative, as expected. Note also that the size and the statistical significance of the marginal effect continue to hold even when additional variables are added to the model specification. In the extended model, a higher patriarchal value score

makes it approximately 2 per cent less likely that a woman will participate in the labour market.

These observations corroborate the findings of Göksel (2013) and Contreras and Plaza (2010) who also reported a negative association between conservative values and women's LFP. However, the magnitude of the negative effect of the patriarchal index score (2 per cent in the extended model) is much smaller than the positive effects of human capital (such as education which is as high as 41 per cent in the highest educational category in the extended model). This result resonates with Göksel's (2013) finding that education weakens the effects of conservatism, but diverges from the observations of Contreras and Plaza (2010). They found in their analysis that the magnitude of the negative effect of women's patriarchal values was comparable to the positive effects of their human capital. In other words, the positive effect of human capital on women's LFP are cancelled out by the negative effects of women's patriarchal values.

How the gender norm internalization score has turned out is somewhat counterintuitive. Although the magnitude of the effect is negligible, the results indicate that the more a woman has internalized their traditional gender roles, the more likely they are to participate in the labour market. One plausible reason is that their perception of themselves as the caregivers push them to seek work to support and improve the well-being of their family. For example, women may seek work with objectives rooted in traditional values – such as supporting the husband, educating their sons, collecting dowries for their daughters, etc.

The positive association between the gender norms score and women's LFP can also be explained in a different way. To do that, first, it is necessary to unpack the primary elements of gender norms. One dimension of gender norms relates to women's safety – for example, at work, when they travel alone, or in public transport (Jayachandran 2019). A second is the idea that women should do the bulk of household chores and caregiving (Bittman et al. 2003). A third is how employment may put a woman at a greater risk of facing violence as men resort to violence to ascertain dominance (Krishnan et al. 2010). By and large the type of work the women in the sample are employed in allows them to work around these limitations. Most women are self-employed, and therefore are most likely able to work at home. This kind of activity allows her to balance work with household responsibilities. Therefore, it is possible that women still can participate in the labour market, upholding traditional gender ideologies, given the nature of the work they typically take up.

Next, I analyse the household-level variables. A woman heading a household is more likely to participate and the results are statistically significant at the critical 1 per cent level across all five specifications. In the extended model, a woman who heads her household is about 11 per cent more likely to participate in the labour force than a woman who does not. Moreover, the marginal effect of this variable is relatively insensitive to the addition of new variables as the model expands.

That a head of a household is more likely to participate in the labour market than a member of a household is a priori expectation because s/he has an obligation to provide for the members of the household. Thus, it stands to reason that women heading their households are more likely to seek work than women who live with male partners or relatives who are the heads of households (Khanie 2019; Fadayomi and Olurinola 2014). Globally, male LFP is high irrespective of what type of household²³ they come from, and there is little variation in their LFP across different types of households. But, women's LFP varies significantly, based on the type of household they belong to. Women heading their households are the most likely to participate among all types of households (ILO and UN Women 2020). Women may have to give up their economic independence (for caregiving) or take up economic responsibility (to provide for households), based on the needs of the household (Ibid). They may also not be bound by strict gendered expectations in the absence of a male partner (Naqvi and Shahnaz 2002). The results above echo this reality. Moreover, they corroborate the findings of Gunatilaka and Vithanagama (2018) in relation to women's LFP in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka.

As expected, the share of adults in the household who are unemployed is strongly and significantly associated with women's LFP. Moreover, its statistical significance at the critical 1 per cent level is retained across all the models, although the size of the marginal effect declines as additional variables are introduced. In the extended model, an increase in the share of the household members who are unemployed makes it approximately 15 per cent more likely that a woman will be participating in the labour market.

The marginal effect on the variable that captures the presence of small children in the household has turned out to be negative. The results conform to the common

²³ Single-person households, couple-only household, couple with child under 6 years and extended-family household with child under 6.

hypothesis that childcare responsibilities tend to keep women away from labour market. However, the marginal effects are not statistically significant across all three model specifications. On the other hand, the association between the share of adult women in the household and women's LFP has turned out to be negative, and is surprising. In the extended model an increase in the share of adult women in the household makes it about 11 per cent less likely that they will participate. However, this marginal effect is statistically significant only at the 10 per cent level.

Generally, it is reasonable to assume that the extended family (adult females other than the respondent in this case) will take up some of the household chores and childcare work, which would allow a woman to work. For example, Chun and Oh (2002) found this to be the case in Korea, and Ejaz (2011), in Pakistan. Both studies found that women living with parents or living in extended/joint households had more support than women living in nuclear families, which in turn freed up their time to seek work.

However, a few plausible reasons why the relationship between this variable and women's LFP is so comes to mind. First, if these adult females (aged over 19) are unmarried daughters, the respondents may not feel comfortable leaving the daughters unattended at home and to go outside for work. Second, the presence of adult females in the house, particularly if they are mothers, mothers-in-law, or older relatives, may reinforce traditional gender roles on the respondents, who would have greater freedom otherwise to seek employment (Ejaz 2007). Thirdly, these adult females might be income earners in the household, relieving respondents of the requirement to become economically active themselves. Gunatilaka and Vithanagama (2018) who find that women's LFP in the north of Sri Lanka is negatively associated with strong networks with relatives, but positively with friends also provide a similar justification. They point out that on the one hand, material help from relatives may ameliorate the need to for women to work, while on the other hand, such networks may hold women to strict gender norms, discouraging their LFP.

The variable that captures domestic violence is positive and significant. Its marginal effect is as high as roughly 15 per cent, and is significant at the critical 5 per cent level in the extended model. Although the causality cannot be established given the analytical methods used, the positive association between the domestic violence variable and women's LFP is both concerning and telling. Logically, a

household bargaining model would suggest that a greater earnings power among women lower the risk of domestic abuse, because a woman who brings home an income has a more credible threat to leave an abusive relationship (Jayachandran 2019). But, if women are employed in menial and informal jobs, or earn incomes that are meagre and volatile, such women may not have a bargaining power within the household sufficient enough to protect her from domestic abuse.

The positive association between the debt variable and the probability of women's LFP is unambiguous and statistically significant at the critical 1 per cent level across all model specifications. In the extended model, other things held constant, having a loan in the PFR's name makes it about 6 per cent more likely that she will participate in the labour market. The results resonate with the findings of Belkar et al. (2007) and Del Boca and Lusardi (2003).

The affluence level of the household is captured through several variables. Women from households that use electric cookers regularly to prepare meals are less likely to participate in the labour market. The same holds for women from households that score higher on the household wealth index, and where the household has a higher per capita expenditure compared to the district-level mean household per capita expenditure. However, the results are the most robust for this last variable. The marginal effect that captures the per capita expenditure gap between the household and the district average is statistically significant at the critical 1 per cent level across all three model specifications that include the variable. In the extended model, respondents from households who have a higher per capita expenditure than an average household in the district are about 11 per cent less likely to participate, other things held constant. Among the household affluence-related variables, only the variable denoting the legal ownership of the house has turned out to be positive, but the marginal effects are insignificant. The results of the financial well-being of the household on the respondents' FLP are by and large congruent with the existing empirical evidence (See for example, Gunatilaka and Vithanagama 2018; Gunatilaka 2013; Malhotra and Tsui 2000).

Women's ownership of land makes it more likely that they will participate in the labour market, and the marginal effects are statistically significant at the critical 1 per cent level across all three model specifications that include the variable. In the extended model, a woman who has land in her name is about 13 per cent more likely to participate than a woman who does not, other factors held constant.

That women who have land in their name are more likely to participate stands to reason. First, in a predominantly agricultural regional economy, women can easily take up agricultural activities in their own land. For example, Atieno (2006) who looked at female LFP in different sectors of the Kenyan labour market using data from the 1998 Kenya Welfare Monitoring Survey found that land ownership was positively associated with women's LFP in agriculture and unpaid family work. Separately, Marennya et al. (2017) concludes that the lack of access to land is a main factor that underscores the disadvantages FHHs face in relation to the maize market participation in Ethiopia. Moreover, family members may consider women's employment in their own land to be more acceptable over the sale of their labour as casual workers in others' agricultural activities.

Second, access to and ownership of land has a positive effect on women's autonomy empowerment. For example, Mishra and Sam (2016) find in a study that used two waves of data (2001 and 2011) from the Demographic and Health Surveys in Nepal that land ownership has a positive and significant effect on women's empowerment, defined as their bargaining power on their healthcare, large household purchases and mobility. A higher bargaining power within the household in turn may give them freedom to participate in the labour market and defy traditional gender roles, than women without such autonomy might be bound by. A third, and a less likely, possibility is that the land ownership gives women better access to credit, as land is traditionally well recognized as collateral, which in turn drives their LFP by using such credit to start self-employment activities. The results also sit well with other empirical studies such as Gunatilaka and Vithanagama (2018) and Emran and Shilpi (2017) although such studies looked at the extent of land women have access to rather than whether women own land. Both studies found the extent of land owned had a positive effect on women's LFP.

If a respondent owns jewellery, she is more likely to participate in the labour market. But, the marginal effects are statistically insignificant across all model specifications. If jewellery is inferred as a sign of wealth or social status, then it is perplexing as to why women who own jewellery are more likely to participate in the labour market. It contests the hypothesis that women from well-off households are less likely to come to the labour market which was supported by several affluence-related variables discussed above. However, the ownership of jewellery, especially among agricultural households in Sri Lanka, is a fungible

quasi-liquid asset that can be used to smooth consumption during poor harvests (Quisumbing et al. 2013; Doss et al. 2008; Frankenberg et al. 2003).

Women from households that own crops are more likely to participate, in line with expectations. The marginal effect is statistically significant at the 5 per cent level in the extended model. The marginal effects on the participation in a livelihood programme are positive, and statistically significant at the critical 1 per cent level across all three model specifications that include the variable. In the extended model, a woman from a household that has participated in a livelihood intervention programme is about 6 per cent more likely to participate in the labour force, other things held constant. The results point to the success of such interventions carried out in the East, most likely after 2007. The membership in civic groups in their locality is positively associated with women's LFP, but the results are not significant. However, note that the size of the marginal effect increases as more explanatory variables are added to the analysis.

I now move on to the community/societal-level variables. I begin with a discussion of the armed conflict experiences. Recall that these variables are constructed to show the share of respondents in a GN division who have undergone a given experience to avoid the problem of endogeneity. The associations between the armed conflict experiences and women's LFP are mixed. If more households in a GN division have been displaced and stayed in camps or with friends or relatives, or have experienced damage to their property, women from this group are more likely to participate in the labour force. But the results are not significant for the variable on damage to property. If a woman is from a community that has been displaced and stayed in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, she is about 21 per cent more likely to participate in the labour market as the results are significant at the 5 per cent level. If she has been displaced but stayed with friends or relatives, she is about 20 per cent more likely to participate, but the results are significant only at the 10 per cent level. However, the marginal effects are sizeable and show that displacement experiences make it more likely that women will seek work.

Conversely, if more households in a GN division have experienced loss of jobs and assets and disruptions to the education of family members, women from these backgrounds are less likely to participate in the labour market. But the results are statistically significant only for the variable denoting loss of jobs. In the extended model, a woman who comes from a community that has experienced

a loss of job due to the armed conflict is 20 per cent less likely to participate in the labour market, and this marginal effect is significant at the critical 1 per cent level. In fact, among all the armed conflict-related variables, only the marginal effect of the variable denoting a loss of jobs has turned out to be significant at the critical 1 per cent level across all model specifications.

Overall, how the armed conflict variables have turned out is reasonable. Globally, poverty is rampant among refugees and IDPs (Pape and Sharma 2019) and women are likely to be drawn to work out of economic compulsion. Perhaps the added worker effect is of relevance here. Another possible explanation is that women may adopt certain livelihood strategies as coping mechanisms to adjust to a life of displacement. (Sanmugeswaran 2010). These strategies may become the only permanent asset available to them to lead a normal life (Ibid). One could also argue that experiences of displacement may have weakened the traditional social fabric and the value system, and women's roles have changed as a result. Another plausible reason is that women (and households) that were displaced due to the armed conflict may have been targeted well in rehabilitation and livelihood programmes carried out in the North and East after the end of the conflict.

On the other hand, that a disruption to education has an inverse effect on women's LFP is indicative of a discouraged worker effect. Importantly, the magnitude of this negative marginal effect is as much as the positive effect of displacement on women's LFP. Together, the results cast doubt on whether the armed conflict has created any empowering effect on women's LFP. The results are also somewhat different from the findings of Gunatilaka and Vithanagama (2018).

Next, I look at the helpfulness of the institutional environment, which is represented by the GN office and the DS office in this analysis. That the perceived helpfulness of the GN office is negatively associated with women's LFP is rather baffling. A somewhat stretched explanation is as follows. It is possible that respondents who perceive the GN office to be helpful are those in touch with the GN office and the GN officer, most likely because they receive government welfare payments. In the absence of such welfare benefits, respondents may be more likely to seek work. A second explanation can be traced to the gender norms entrenched within the state institutional framework. A GN office may treat a woman from an MHH (who is less likely to participate in the labour market), better and with more respect than a woman heading a household. Thus, women

who find the GN office to be more helpful are in the cohort that is less likely to seek work, anyway. Conversely, the DS office variable works well, and its marginal effects on women's LFP are encouraging. In the extended model, women who find the DS office to be helpful are about 6 per cent more likely to work, and the results are significant at the critical 1 per cent level.

The number of industry and construction, trading, and service establishments in the DS division is positively associated with women's LFP. The marginal effects are statistically significant at the critical 1 per cent level, but are negligible. Compared to the reference group of women who live in a *Pradeshiya Sabha* locality, women living in an urban council area are 23 per cent less likely to work, and the marginal effect is significant at the critical 1 per cent level. In contrast, women in a municipal council area are more likely to work than women living in *Pradeshiya Sabha* localities, but the results are statistically insignificant. The administrative boundaries that demarcate urban and rural areas in Sri Lanka do not seem to present an accurate picture of the economic development of the areas. Instead, the local government structure provides a better proxy for the urban-rural differences more realistically. The results corroborate the findings of Göksel (2013) and Azid et al. (2010) who found women's LFP to be lower in urban areas than in rural contexts. Yet, the higher probability of participation in municipal council areas, the highest local authority, although insignificant, provides some evidence in support of the idea that diversity and heterogeneity in urban areas can create better opportunities for women (Pozarny 2016). The results also point to the possibility that the labour markets in peri-urban areas are not able to generate many labour market opportunities for women. These peri-urban areas are probably not rural enough to create agricultural employment opportunities, but also not urban enough to generate non-agricultural jobs for women.

Compared to women living in the Trincomalee district, who are the reference group, women living in the Batticaloa district are 16 per cent more likely to participate, other things held constant. The results are significant at the critical 1 per cent level and concur with the 2019 LFS data which showed that the Batticaloa district posted the highest LFP in the Eastern Province. Women living in the Ampara district are also more likely to participate compared to those living in Trincomalee, but the results are not significant.

In summary, the findings of the preceding econometric analysis are by and large in tandem with the existing evidence. First, women are more likely to participate in the labour market out of necessity. For example, being a head of a household is very likely to propel a woman into the labour force. So does a high share of unemployed individuals in the household. Women with loans in their names are also more likely to participate. In contrast, a higher level of household financial affluence appears to be inversely related to women's LFP. The results are particularly robust for the variable that captures whether a household is richer or poorer than an average household in the district as measured by the difference between a given household's per capita expenditure and the district-level mean per capita expenditure. Women from households that use electric cookers to prepare meals and have a higher wealth index are also less likely to participate. The care responsibilities do not appear to be a significant barrier for women's LFP, contrary to the commonly held assumptions. The armed conflict variables also allude to the possibility that women are drawn into the labour market out of economic destitution. Moreover, that women from Batticaloa, the poorest district in the Eastern province, are more likely to participate than women from Trincomalee also underpins the role of poverty in shaping women's LFP decision. Thus, financial needs of the individual and/or households are important precursors to women's LFP. These findings are also congruent with Verick (2014) who recognised that much of the higher LFP in developing countries has to do with greater household poverty levels.

Nonetheless, opportunities also seem to drive women to the labour market. Among all variables, the highest educational attainment variable (GCE Advanced Level or more) has the single most profound positive association with women's LFP (as much as 40 per cent), and is very encouraging. But the J-shape pattern between LFP and the marginal effects of different levels of education suggests that the labour market does not have sufficient opportunities for women with secondary education levels. The ownership of earning assets such as crops and the participation in livelihood intervention programmes make it more likely that women will participate in the labour market. Moreover, women who own land and jewellery are also more likely to participate, although the marginal effect for jewellery is insignificant. It could be that the ownership of assets improves women's bargaining position within the household to a point where she can negotiate her household chores. That women own property also alludes to the possibility that her family (parents, relatives or husband) may have more progressive ideas about women's place in a family.

Age-related variables are somewhat concerning because the participation is associated with higher age cohorts, suggesting that the labour market opportunities for younger women are perhaps limited in these districts. It could be both due to gender norms which may apply more rigidly for young mothers and wives, but also due to weaknesses in the regional labour markets in creating suitable employment opportunities for young women. On the other hand, that women are likely to work into their 60s brings out concerns about their physical and psychological well-being. Moreover, their perception of health is negatively associated with their participation, suggesting that when they are sick they are also most likely without an income. The institutional environment produces mixed results. The positive association between the helpfulness of the DS office and women's LFP stands to reason. However, the negative association between the helpfulness of the GN office and women's LFP is confusing. Perhaps it masks the institutional gendered prejudices against women heading their households or women without a male partner.

The locality variables also suggest that women living in urban areas may have a greater opportunity to participate, possibly because these areas have more industrial, trade and service establishments. However, women in peri-urban areas are significantly less likely to participate. One possibility is that these peri-urban areas neither have a sizeable agricultural sector where women can work, nor have enough non-agricultural activities to offer decent jobs for women.

The values held by respondents have mixed effects on their LFP. The lesser probability of participation among women who hold on to patriarchal values robustly sits well with the existing evidence. But, thankfully, the magnitude of its negative effect is much less compared to the positive impact of the more constructive variables such as those that relate to women's human capital endowment. That women who have internalized gender norms more, are more likely to seek work is rather confounding at a superficial level. But as discussed earlier, the type of work women choose may allow them to hold on to their values while still participating in the labour market. The positive association between women's LFP and her facing abuse/knowing someone who is being abused is unsettling. It underscores the possibility that women may be vulnerable to being abused by men who resort to violence to assert their dominance in the household. In the same vein, it is disconcerting that the increase in the share of female adults in the household is also negatively linked to women's LFP.

Factors associated with women's LFP by women's religion

Next, I look at the factors associated with women's LFP by women's religion. Given the ethno-religious heterogeneity of the Eastern Province, it is useful to unpack how explanans of women's LFP compare and contrast across women from Buddhist, Hindu, and Islam (Muslim, used interchangeably) religious backgrounds. The empirical findings about the impact of religion on women's LFP are mixed. For example, Göksel (2013) and O'Neil and Bilgin (2013) did not find religion or religiosity as a barrier to women's LFP. Bayanpourtehrani and Sylwester (2013) found the inverse relationship between Islam and women's LFP to weaken as more control variables were added. H'madoun (2010) also found this to be the case, except for Hindu and Muslim women. However, Pastore and Tenaglia (2013) found the negative relationship between the religious affiliation and women's LFP to hold robustly, even when controlled for household heterogeneities and country variables.

However, most studies point to religion (and religiosity) as a driver of gender equality across countries. While Seguino (2011) has concluded that no single religion stands out as more gender inequitable than the others, Klingorová and Havlíček (2015) find that gender inequality is lowest in more egalitarian states, average in Buddhist and Christian states, and highest in Islam and Hindu states. Such gender inequalities in turn manifest through inequitable educational outcomes for girls (Cooray and Potrafke 2011), financial exclusion (Kim et al. 2018), restricted labour market opportunities (Koburtay et al. 2020), limited access to property and assets, discriminatory legal practices (Halder and Jaishankar 2008), domestic violence against women (Al-Tawil 2012) and so on and so forth.

Table 6 below presents the results of the regression analysis by women's religion.²⁴ As the observations for each sub-group of women is now smaller, a fewer number of explanatory variables are used in this analysis. Additionally, a few modifications have also been made to some of the explanatory variables. First, respondent's age is used instead of different age groups. Years of education instead of the levels of education is used to capture respondents' educational attainments. Only the household index score is used to denote the financial

²⁴ The Wald test results (not presented) showed that not only are the coefficients of the explanatory variables significantly different from each other, but also that the three equations are significantly different from each other. As such, estimating separate LFP functions for Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim women is justified.

affluence of a household, and only the helpfulness of the GN office is included as an institutional variable. The armed conflict experiences are now grouped under the household-level variables. The new variable sums up the armed conflict experience variables a household has faced. Thus, it now indicates how many of the enumerated armed conflict experiences a respondent and her household has gone through. The spatial variables are restricted to only the districts, with Trincomalee as the reference category.

Table 6: Logit model estimation results: factors affecting women’s LFP, by religion

	Model 1: Buddhist	Model 2: Hindu	Model 3: Muslim
Individual level			
Age	0.0312***	0.0369***	-0.0014
Age squared	-0.0004***	-0.0004***	0.0000
Years of education	0.0062***	0.0154***	0.0020
In poor health	0.0008	-0.0665	-0.0541
Patriarchal attitudes score	-0.0408**	-0.016	-0.0147**
Gender norm internalization score	0.0075	0.002	0.0085**
Household level			
FHH	0.3193***	0.1824*	-0.0039
Share of unemployed in household	0.0764	0.0744*	0.1181*
Presence of small children in the household	-0.1195**	0.0951	-0.1154*
Share of adult women in household	0.0625	-0.0873	-0.3202**
Respondent abused/knowns someone abused	0.0000	0.0249	0.1764***
PFR has a loan in her name	0.1144**	0.0287	0.0148
Household wealth index	0.0192	-0.0230***	-0.0318***
PFR owns land	0.2091***	0.0123	0.1038**
Household owns crops	0.0264	0.0363**	0.0612***
Respondent or household member participated in livelihood programme/s	-0.1168***	0.1548**	-0.0449
Number of armed conflict experiences	0.0050***	-0.0040	0.0185**

Community/societal level			
Helpfulness of the GN office	0.0120	-0.0471***	-0.0356
District: reference category – Trincomalee			
Ampara	-0.1711***	-0.0662**	0.1314***
Batticaloa	0.0000	0.1225**	-0.1153***
No of observations	233	364	355

Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province, 2018

Notes: Dependent variable LFPR; ***, **, and * denote statistical significance at the one per cent, five per cent, and ten per cent levels respectively. All models have been clustered at Divisional Secretariat’s Division level for robust standard errors.

Age, experience proxied by age squared, and education variables work well for Buddhist and Hindu women, and the results are significant at the critical 1 per cent level. The marginal effects on education are worth being discussed more. An additional year of schooling makes it more likely that Buddhist and Hindu women will participate in the labour market. Moreover, the marginal effect is almost 2.5 times greater among Hindu women (2 per cent) than among Sinhala women (0.6 per cent). The patriarchal attitude scores are significant at the 5 per cent level for Buddhist and Muslim women, but not for Hindu women. Sinhala women who tend to uphold patriarchal values are about 4 per cent less likely to participate, compared to Muslim women who are only about 1 per cent less likely to participate. The magnitude of the effect is somewhat counterintuitive, given the common perception that Islamic ideologies are more prescriptive towards women’s role within the household, than the Buddhist values. The gender norms internalization score is significant only for Muslim women, and the results are significant at the 5 per cent level. Nonetheless, the marginal effect is negligible. It is also noteworthy that only these two variables are of statistical relevance to Muslim women’s LFP, unlike among the other two groups where human capital variables played a role in influencing the probability of women’s LFP.

At the household level, the findings are insightful. A woman heading a household is 32 per cent more likely to participate in the labour market if she is Buddhist, other things held constant. Results are significant at the critical 1 per cent level. A woman is 18 per cent more likely to participate in the labour market if she is Hindu, other things held constant, and the results are significant at the 5 per cent level. Inquisitively, a Muslim woman heading her household is less likely

to participate in the market. Although the results are not statistically significant, and the marginal effect is negligible, its inverse relationship with women's LFP suggests that a Muslim woman heading her household may be bound by stricter gendered values than non-Muslim women. The stronger kinship among Muslim women, and the fact that they tend to live in extended families may also obviate the pressure to provide for her household.

In contrast, an increase in the share of the unemployed in the household makes it more likely that Muslim women will participate. This holds for Hindu women too. However, in both cases, the marginal coefficients are significant only at the 10 per cent level. The presence of small children in the household has a significant negative effect on the LFP among both Buddhist and Muslim women. On the other hand, the presence of small children makes it more likely that Hindu women will participate in the labour market, but the results are not significant. How the share of adult women in the household affects women's LFP is quite telling. An increase in the share of adult women in the household makes it less likely that Hindu and Muslim women will participate in the labour market. The marginal effects, however, are only significant for Muslim women, and at the 5 per cent level. An increase in the share of adult women in the household makes it 32 per cent less likely that Muslim women will join the labour force. Among Sinhala women, although insignificant, the marginal effect is positive. The results suggest that adult women in Muslim and Hindu households might be reinforcing patriarchal ideologies in their families and policing respondents' activities. In contrast, the adult women in Buddhist households seem to fit the idea of traditional social capital that relatives and extended family provide.

The marginal effect of the variable denoting domestic violence is positive, sizeable, and significant at the critical 1 per cent level for Muslim women. A Muslim woman who is abused herself or knows of someone who is abused at home is about 18 per cent more likely to participate in the market, other things held constant. How this variable has turned out really underscores the possibility that Muslim women who seek work are vulnerable to domestic violence if their male partners or adult male relatives perceive her participation as a threat to their dominance within the household or a violation of gendered expectations.

Having obtained a loan in their names makes it more likely that women of all three sub-groups will participate in the labour market, but the results are significant only for Buddhist women. Other things held constant, a loan in her name makes

it 11 per cent more likely that a respondent from a Buddhist household will participate, and the marginal effects are statistically significant at the 5 per cent level. Household financial affluence, proxied by the wealth index, also produces interesting results. The better off a household is, the less likely are women from Hindu (2 per cent) and Muslim (3 per cent) households, to participate in the labour market. The marginal effects for both sub-groups are significant at the critical 1 per cent level. Having a land is positively associated with women's LFP but the results are significant only among Buddhist and Muslim women. Having a land in the respondent's name makes it 20 per cent more likely that a woman from a Buddhist household will participate in the labour market, other things held constant. The marginal effects are significant at the critical 1 per cent level. Muslim women who own land are about 10 per cent more likely to participate, and the marginal effects are significant at the critical 5 per cent level. The ownership of crops also has a positive effect on women's LFP, but the results are significant only for Hindu and Muslim respondents. Muslim women are about 6 per cent more likely to participate in the labour market if the household owns crops, and the marginal effects are significant at the critical 1 per cent level.

Why the participation in a livelihood programme is negatively and significantly associated with Buddhist women's LFP is confusing, and a plausible reason does not come to mind. On the other hand, Hindu women who have participated in such a programme are 15 per cent more likely to participate, other things held constant, and the results are significant at the critical 5 per cent level. The institutional variable denoted by the GN office is significant only for the Hindu cohort. If women find the GN office to be very helpful they are about 5 per cent less likely to participate, and the marginal effects are significant at the critical 1 per cent level. The reasoning discussed earlier may apply here too. The more armed conflict experiences that a household has gone through, the more likely are women from Buddhist and Muslim households to participate in the labour market. Although quite small, both marginal effects are significant. Living in the Ampara district, compared to the Trincomalee district, makes it 17 per cent less likely that Sinhala women will participate, and the marginal effects are significant at the critical 1 per cent level. Hindu women living in Ampara are about 6 per cent less likely to participate. In contrast, Muslim women living in Ampara are 13 per cent more likely to join the labour force than those living in Trincomalee, and the results are significant at the critical 1 per cent level. Living in the Batticaloa district makes it 12 per cent more likely that Hindu women will

take up work, but 11 per cent less likely that Muslim women will take up work, compared to those living in Trincomalee.

To recapitulate, necessity seems to be a driver of women's LFP decisions across all three groups, although household financial affluence appears to be a greater deterrent for participation among Hindu and Muslim women than among Buddhist women. However, opportunities also play a role in women's LFP. Human capital variables work well for the participation decision among both Buddhist and Hindu women, but not so much among Muslim women. By and large, women who have access to land and crops are likely to participate in the market, in line with existing evidence.

Gender values appear to influence the LFP decision more pronouncedly among both Buddhist and Muslim respondents. The very high positive marginal effect of the variable capturing household abuse, and the negative and significant marginal effect in relation to the share of adult women in the household for Muslim women, suggests Muslim women are likely the most bound by gendered expectations. The armed conflict experiences are not quite significant, but spatial variables suggest the Ampara district (compared to Trincomalee) is more discouraging towards the LFP decision among Buddhist and Hindu women, but Batticaloa district is more favourable towards Hindu women's LFP. Given that Batticaloa is the poorest district in the region, it is likely that poverty underlies its positive, significant, and sizeable marginal effect on the participation decision among Hindu women.

Factors associated with different labour market outcomes

The preceding sections looked at factors that drive women's LFP. However, once women come into the labour force they will either secure gainful employment, or be actively looking for work. Therefore, LFP is in fact a means to an end. It is the first step a woman can take towards earning an income, improving her bargaining power within the household, creating better health and education outcomes for her children, and furthering her own empowerment. However, what drives women to participate in the labour force may be of little relevance to securing gainful employment. Thus, Malhotra and DeGraff (1997) have highlighted the importance of delineating LFP from employment in modeling female labour supply behaviour, particularly in situations where the unemployment rates are high.

In this sample, out of a total of 1,000 respondents, 683 participate in the labour market. The remaining 317 women are economically inactive. At the time of the data collection, 235 of the respondents who participated in the labour force were unemployed. This is a little over a third of the respondents in the labour force. The distribution of women across these different categories makes it worthwhile to inquire into what factors that underlie their economic situation. To do so, I employ a multinomial logistic regression as discussed in Chapter 4. The dependent variable takes a value of 1 if a woman is economically inactive. This is the base category against which the other two groups will be compared. The dependent variable takes a value of 2 if a respondent is unemployed and 3, if employed. The same explanatory used in the extended model of Table 5 are used. Table 7 below presents the results of the regression analysis. The last column contains the results of the extended LFP model in Table 5, for ease of comparison.

Table 7: Multinomial logistic regression results on women’s labour market status

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4
Base category: House work only	Pr (Unemployed)	Pr (Employed)	Pr (LFP)
Individual level			
<i>Age group: reference – 18-29 years</i>			
Age 30-39	-0.0095	0.0980**	0.1069***
Age 40-49	-0.0064	0.0832	0.1080*
Age 50-59	0.0419	0.0729	0.1323**
Age 60 or more	0.0932	-0.0854	0.0552
Age squared	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
PFR in poor health	-0.0116	-0.0776*	-0.0867**
<i>Education: reference – no schooling</i>			
Primary education	0.0221	0.1690	0.1740*
Secondary education	-0.0112	0.1321	0.1007
Up to A/L	-0.0707	0.2692*	0.1694**
A/L qualified or more	-0.2373*	0.6703***	0.4091***
<i>Values:</i>			
Patriarchal attitudes score	-0.0070	-0.0148*	-0.0194***
Gender norm internalization score	0.0116***	0.0002	0.0118***

Household level			
FHH	-0.1129***	0.2443***	0.1406***
Share of unemployed in household	0.0248	0.1248***	0.1478***
Presence of small children in the household	0.0383**	-0.0599**	-0.0201
Share of adult women in household	-0.0830**	-0.0310	-0.1106*
Respondent abused/knowns someone abused	0.0464**	0.1366***	0.1457**
PFR has a loan in her name	-0.0318	0.0872**	0.0596***
Household uses electric cooker to prepare meals	-0.0378	-0.0185	-0.0587*
Household wealth index	-0.0048	-0.0205	-0.0270**
Expenditure gap compared to district avg	-0.0503	-0.0412	-0.1147***
Household owns house with deed	0.0377	0.0269*	0.0586
PFR owns land	0.0087	0.0993***	0.1262***
PFR owns jewellery	0.0445	0.0077	0.0633
Household owns crops	-0.0551	0.1097**	0.0603**
Respondent or household member participated in livelihood programme/s	-0.1149**	0.1638***	0.0620***
Respondent is a member in a village organization	-0.0314	0.0463	0.0293
Community/societal level			
<i>Armed conflict experiences</i>			
Displaced and in camp	0.2626***	-0.0667	0.2055**
Displaced and with family/friends	0.0005	0.1921*	0.1978*
Damage to house	0.0452	0.0278	0.0172
Loss of job	-0.0986*	-0.0669	-0.2001***
Loss of assets	0.0293	-0.1439	-0.0886
Education affected	-0.2968***	0.2260*	-0.0223
<i>Institutions</i>			
Helpfulness of the GN office	-0.0475*	-0.0128	-0.0617**
Helpfulness of the DS office	0.0141	0.0442	0.0597***
No of construction, trade and service establishment in the DS division	0.0001***	0.0000	0.0001***
<i>Local authority: reference – Pradeshiya Sabha</i>			
Urban Council	-0.2389***	0.0189	-0.2343***
Municipal Council	0.2228	-0.1267	0.0954

<i>District: reference - Trincomalee</i>			
Ampara	0.1945**	-0.1335***	0.0392
Batticaloa	0.3204***	-0.1428*	0.1069***
No of observations			
	977	977	1,000

Source: Survey conducted for the Study on Identifying Livelihood Opportunities and Economic Empowerment of Women in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province, 2018; Data related to the number of establishments are from the DSC (2015); Data related to the district-level mean per capita expenditure was from DCS (2018).

Notes: Dependent variable LFP category: 1 if engaged in household work only (economically inactive) 2 if unemployed and 3 if employed; base category is 1; ***, **, and * denote statistical significance at the one per cent, five per cent, and ten per cent levels respectively. All models have been clustered at Divisional Secretariat's Division level for robust standard errors. Model 4 is from Table 5.

The analysis brings out some useful insights. First, I discuss the individual-level predictors. If women are within the 30-39 age group, compared to the reference age group, they are about 10 per cent more likely to be employed than to engage in household work only. The results are significant at the critical 5 per cent level. None of the other age-related variables are statistically significant. But the signs of the marginal effects imply that older women who participate in the labour market are likely to find it more difficult to secure employment. Experience proxied by the square of age has turned out to be insignificant across both the probability of being unemployed and being unemployed. Understandably, women who do not feel healthy are more likely to be economically inactive, and engage in household work only. A respondent who perceives her health to be poor is about 8 per cent less likely to be employed than to stay at home, other things held constant. The marginal effects, however, are only significant at the 10 per cent level.

The marginal effects of the education variables continue to maintain the J-shape they traced in relation to women's LFP. A woman with the GCE Advanced Level qualification or more compared to a woman with no schooling is a staggering 67 per cent more likely to work than to be economically inactive, other things held constant. The results are significant at the critical 1 per cent level. She is also about 24 per cent less likely to be unemployed. A woman who has studied up to GCE Advanced Level qualification is about 27 per cent more likely to work than do household work only. Both these marginal effects holds statistically only at the 10 per cent level. Observe also that the marginal effects of education variables, although not statistically significant (except the one capturing the highest

education level), are inversely related to the probability of unemployment. In other words, the probability of unemployment declines as a woman's educational level improves.

The two variables denoting a woman's perception of her position within the household and the society have turned out reasonably well. A woman who believes in patriarchal values is about 1 per cent less likely to be employed than to engage in household work, other things held constant. The marginal effect is significant at the 10 per cent level. On the other hand, a woman who has internalised a secondary role for women in the household are about 1 per cent more likely to be unemployed, other things held constant, and the marginal effect is significant at the critical 1 per cent level. Together, these perceptions suggest that women who subscribe to traditional gender ideologies are more likely to limit themselves to household work only, and even if they do participate in the labour market, their values may likely limit the employment opportunities available to them. Fortunately, however, these marginal effects are miniscule, compared to the marginal effects of the variables that proxy individual and household level opportunities that affect women's LFP.

At the household level, whether a respondent is a head of the household or not seems to profoundly affect her economic status. If a woman heads her household she is 24 per cent more likely to be employed, and 11 per cent less likely to be unemployed than to engage in household work only. The marginal effects are significant at the critical 1 per cent level. The results indicate that not only are women heading their households more likely to participate in the labour market, but they are also more likely to secure gainful employment than to remain unemployed. Unlike women in MHHs, women heading their households may lack the freedom of choice about whether they work or not and the kind of work they do to earn a living.

Khanie (2019) makes similar observations in a study that explores the effects of education on female LFP in Botswana using 2015/16 Multi Topic Household Survey. The author points out that women heading their households are more likely to be wage employed than self-employed, but is more likely to be self-employed than unemployed or staying out of the labour force. She posits that the results allude to the obligation of women heading their households to participate in the labour market to provide for their families. A more upbeat explanation for how these marginal effects turned out is that women heading their households are less likely to be constricted by traditional gender ideologies compared to

women living in MHHs. As such, they are at greater liberty to choose their work. Gunatilaka (2013b) identified that a large informal sector in the district, among other variables, is a driver of participation among female heads of household. That the Eastern Province is a large agricultural economy, which in turn has the largest informal sector in Sri Lanka, connects sensibly with the results in relation to the FHH variable.

Next, a higher share of unemployed individuals in the household makes it 12 per cent more likely that a respondent will be employed than be engaged in house work only, and the results are significant at the critical 1 per cent threshold. The marginal effects on the presence of small children in the household has turned out as expected. In a household that has small children, women are 6 per cent less likely to be employed than to be economically inactive. They are 4 per cent more likely to be unemployed if they were to participate in the labour force, than to be economically inactive. Both coefficients are significant at the critical 5 per cent level. Together, these results suggest that on the one hand small children tend to keep women away from the labour market, as is generally the case for women with young children. On the other hand, even if they were to participate out of necessity or to realise an opportunity, women with small children may not be able to find the kind of employment that allows them to balance paid work and care responsibilities. An increase in the share of adult women has a dissuading effect on the probability of being both employed and unemployed, although only the marginal effects pertaining to the probability of unemployed is statistically significant.

Next, the marginal effects of the abuse variable show that a woman is 14 per cent more likely to be employed, and 5 per cent more likely to be unemployed, than to be economically inactive if she herself is abused at home or knows someone who is abused. Both marginal effects are significant at the critical 1 per cent threshold. The results underscore the possibility that while seeking paid work, and stepping outside the private sphere itself makes women vulnerable to domestic violence, women who are gainfully employed and earning an income are even more likely to be susceptible to violence than those who are unemployed. This analysis strongly suggests that men tend to resort to violence against women who step outside the contours of their traditional roles to seek work. It also questions then how effective employment is in raising women's bargaining power within the household and her overall empowerment, if it is a source of vulnerability at the hands of her intimate partner or male relatives.

By and large, the financial affluence variables are not significant, but the direction suggests that women from well-off households are more likely to be confined to household activities. However, if the respondent lives in a legally-owned house, she is about 3 per cent more likely to be employed than to be engaged in household work only, but the marginal effects are statistically significant only at the 10 per cent cut off. Expectedly, if a woman owns land in her name, she is 10 per cent more likely to work than to be economically inactive. The marginal effect is significant at the critical 1 per cent level. Similarly, if a household owns crops, a woman is 11 per cent more likely to be employed, and the marginal effect is significant at the 5 per cent cut off. It is encouraging to see that participation in a livelihood programme catalyses women's employment. A woman who has taken part in such a programme is 16 per cent more likely to be employed, and 11 per cent less likely to be unemployed than to be economically significant, and the results are significant at the critical 1 per cent and 5 per cent threshold levels, respectively.

Although the coefficients of the membership in a civic organization within the household are insignificant, the signs make an important suggestion. Women who are members in village groups are more likely to be employed, and less likely to be unemployed than to be engaged in household work only. This stands to reason. The participation in civic groups in their villages are likely to provide women with a friendship network which in turn has a positive effect on their labour market outcomes (Aguilera 2002; Stoloff et al. 1999).

Women may not be able to find work, not only because of their domestic work, but also because they lack access to employment-related networks, and access to a different type of social capital than what is traditionally associated with women's roles (Stoloff et al. 1999). They can use such non-traditional social networks to gather information that can lead to increased LFP and employment (Brook 2005; Aguilera 2002). The contrast between the marginal effects of the membership variable (positive) and the share of adult women in the household discussed earlier (negative) is also noteworthy. Thus, it can be posited that while traditional social capital in the form of family and relatives may help share a woman's unpaid care burden, they may not be able to help women find employment, or worse, may discourage their employment.

At the community/societal level, the armed conflict experience variables also unfold some compelling results. Recall that having been displaced tends to drive

women to seek work, irrespective of whether they spent their displacement in IDP camps or with relatives and friends. However, if women have been displaced and stayed in IDP camps, they are 26 per cent more likely to be unemployed than to be engaged in household work, and the marginal effects are significant at the critical 1 per cent level. Conversely, if they have spent their time of displacement with friends and relatives, they are 19 per cent more likely to be employed than to be economically inactive, and the marginal effect is significant at the 5 per cent threshold.

Useful inferences can be drawn by comparing these results. A woman who can afford to spend the time of displacement with friends and relatives most likely has access to a more financially well-off, affluent social network compared to a woman who has had to live in an IDP camp. These social networks in turn can play a catalytic role in finding employment for respondents, by leading them to useful information, contacts, and opportunities. Women who have been living in IDP camps may come into the labour force out of necessity, but they may not be as successful in securing employment. The variable capturing job loss experiences allude to the discouraged worker effect. Women who come from a community where more of its people have experienced job losses due to the armed conflict are more likely to be economically inactive than to work.

How the educational variables have turned out is contradictory and somewhat confusing, but can be reasoned by unpacking what a disruption to education might constitute. On the one hand, where women have experienced disruptions to education, they are 30 per cent less likely to be unemployed than to be economically inactive, and the results are significant at the critical 1 per cent level. The discouraged worker effect is of relevance here, if the disruption to education has precluded women's opportunity to find the kind of job that they hoped for. But on the other hand, the marginal effect of this variable is positive in relation to the probability of employment. In other words, women coming from communities where many have experienced job losses are 23 per cent more likely to be employed, although the marginal effect is only significant at 10 per cent. This positive marginal effect makes sense if the disruption to education is symptomatic of how the armed conflict has aggravated household poverty. Thus, on the one hand this variable may signify a lost opportunity, while on the other hand, it could be an indicator of armed conflict-induced poverty and economic disempowerment.

The institutional variables do not reveal any additional insights than what was discussed earlier. The spatial variables suggest that living in a peri-urban area makes it more likely that a woman will not participate in the labour market, compared to women living in rural areas. As discussed earlier, peri-urban areas may not have the kind of jobs that are deemed acceptable to women. Where there are more industry, construction trade, or service establishment in a DS division, women are more likely to be unemployed than to be engaged in household work only. Although the marginal effect is miniscule, it is significant at the critical 1 per cent level. These results also indicate that greater economic activity may draw women to the labour market, but women may not be able to find work suitable to them and acceptable to their families.

The district-level marginal effects suggest that the regional labour markets of both Ampara and Batticaloa districts are unfavourable for women, compared to the Trincomalee district. In Ampara, a respondent is 19 per cent more likely to be unemployed and 13 per cent less likely to be employed than to engage in household work compared to a woman living in Trincomalee. These marginal effects are significant at the 1 per cent and 5 per cent thresholds respectively. In Batticaloa, a woman is 32 per cent more likely to be unemployed than to engage in household work, and results are significant at the critical 1 per cent level. Thus, in both districts, women are more likely to be unemployed and less likely to be employed than to be economically inactive. It is concerning that women who are drawn to the labour market out of economic destitution may have to spend long spells in unemployment due to the regional labour market mismatches possibly due to both frictional and structural reasons.

The multinomial logistic regression results have brought to light the nuances in the ways in which different individual, household, and community-level factors affect women's labour market outcomes. By and large, economic necessity emerges as a clear driver of women's employment. In situations where women head their households, family members are unemployed, and where women have taken out loans, women are more likely to be employed than to be economically inactive. On the flip side, greater household financial affluence may bind women to more traditional household work, because there is no economic need for women to seek work. Similarly, the presence of small children tends to dissuade women's employment. Even if women with small children in their households do seek work, they are more likely to be unemployed, probably because they have difficulty balancing paid and care responsibilities. The conflict variables

also insinuate that women are likely to take up work mostly out of necessity and probably from a place of economic disempowerment.

The role of gender ideologies in women's labour market outcomes is also conspicuous from the analysis. Firstly, women's own mind-forged values and norms make it more likely that they will stay economically inactive, or if they do take part in the labour market, unemployed. The marginal effects, however, are negligible. There is also evidence that traditional gendered expectations are imposed on women by the household. First, respondents from households where there are many adult women, are more likely to be economically inactive. Secondly, women who are abused or knows a woman who is being abused at home are more likely to be employed and unemployed than to be economically inactive.

The findings also indicate that opportunities play a positive role on women's labour market outcomes. The J-shape of the marginal effects on educational variables on women's employment suggests that the labour market may not provide acceptable job opportunities for women with secondary education. However, it significantly rewards women with highest educational outcomes. In addition, access to land and crops makes it more likely that women will be employed than remain economically inactive. The participation in livelihood programmes also creates employment opportunities for women. Age-related variables suggest that the labour market opportunities favour women in their 30s. Although older women tend to seek work, they may not find suitable employment opportunities. Women who perceive their health to be poor, understandably tend to engage in household work only.

The spatial variables point to the possible weaknesses in the regional labour markets. In both Ampara and Batticaloa districts, women are less likely to be employed and more likely to be unemployed than to be engaged in household work only. The results suggest that there is a clear demand-supply mismatch in these regional labour markets. Such a mismatch is rooted in both the structural labour market challenges of creating jobs in a small, stagnant, and backward regional economy, as well as the complex web of competing needs, opportunities and values of the respondents and their households that shape their participation decision.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

This research study investigated the factors associated with women's LFP in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. Data was collected from 1,000 respondents from the poorer DS divisions of the East, straddling all three districts. The analysis was informed by the institutional paradigm and loosely drew on Spierings et al. (2008), to look at the different individual, household, and community/societal-level factors that operate in the form of needs, opportunities and values that influence women's LFP decision. These factors make up the competing influences on a woman's participation decision in the form of needs, opportunities, and values that operate at micro, meso and macro levels. Given the ethno-religious heterogeneity that characterizes the Eastern Province, a second analysis was undertaken to study if and how the predictors of the women's LFP decision were different among Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim respondents. A third analysis looked at how these predictor variables were associated with the labour market outcomes of being unemployed and employed, compared to being economically inactive.

Overview of findings

I begin with a recap of the descriptive analysis. Overall, the LFP among the respondents is much higher than the national average, and the rates reported for all three districts in the LFS data. More women heading their households compared to women from MHHs participate in the labour market. In contrast, more women in MHHs are engaged in household work only, compared to women heading their households. Self-employment is the most common form of employment for both types of households, but more women heading their households than women in MHHs tend to take up work in the informal sector as casual workers. Women at lower and higher ends of the educational attainment spectrum are in the labour force, in line with national patterns.

Women heading their households do not appear to be particularly disadvantaged in terms of access to housing and land. But they clearly own less of liquid assets, durable household white goods, and mechanized transportation assets. The patterns of borrowing suggest women borrow more to smooth consumption and mitigate shocks, and therefore find it more difficult to repay these liabilities. On values, less women have internalized patriarchal values. But, many women

tend to perceive the sphere of paid work through a patriarchal lens, and believe men to be more deserving of well-paying, socially recognized jobs than women. Women heading their households are more forthcoming about their experiences of domestic violence than women in MHHs. By and large women find the institutional environment to be helpful. However, fewer women from both cohorts perceive the police to be helpful.

Moving onto the econometric analysis, the results by and large buttress the existing evidence on the issue of female LFP. Clearly, economic distress is an important determinant of the LFP decision among the women surveyed. This is reflected in the strong and significant propensity among women who are the heads of their households, and women from households with a higher share of unemployed individuals, to seek paid work. While the household affluence discourages women's LFP, the ownership of more income-related assets such as land, crops, and jewellery are positively linked to women's LFP. So is having participated in a livelihood development programme. The institutional variables produce mixed results, but the positive effect on the helpfulness of the DS office is encouraging, and points to an institutional-level opportunity.

The human capital variables, captured by the respondents' age and education are important predictors of women's LFP. Older women are more likely to participate than the younger ones. The results also suggest that younger women may be bound by greater care responsibilities or more rigid gender values, particularly in the presence of adult women. Poor health discourages women's participation, and this is disconcerting considering that women tend to work into their old age. The positive effect of education on women's LFP is encouraging. Women's participation is highest at the uppermost educational levels.

Contrary to expectations, caring for young children does not feature as an important deterrent to women's LFP in the regression results. It is noteworthy how having a higher share of adult females in the household is associated with a lower probability of LFP among respondents. It could be that such women bring home an income, obviating the need for the respondent to seek work, or they make it difficult for women to work due to their traditional gender values. Women's own value system in relation to their role in the family also has a bearing on women's LFP, but the effects are miniscule. The positive association between the abuse variable and women's LFP might be symptomatic of the household's traditional ideologies and gendered expectations. The spatial variables suggest

that women in poorer and less-developed areas are more likely to participate in the labour market. Women's LFP is highest in the Batticaloa district, the poorest in the Eastern Province. Women in urban areas may have better opportunities in urban areas, because they may have more economic activities compared to peri-urban areas.

How are these factors that influence a woman's LFP similar or different across women from different ethno-religious backgrounds? This is a pertinent question in an ethno-religiously diverse geographic context such as the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. To unpack the nuances in the behaviour of predictor variables across groups of women from different religious backgrounds, a second logistic regression was conducted. The dependent variable is LFP and is regressed against three sub-samples of women, Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim. The findings are of interest. First, economic necessity undoubtedly underlies women's LFP, and household financial affluence precludes such a necessity among Buddhist and Muslim women. Human capital variables work well for the LFP among Buddhist and Hindu women, but not for Muslim women. Access to land and crops makes it more likely that women across all groups will participate.

Gender values seem to shape the participation decision of both Buddhist and Muslim women, although its magnitude appears to be far more pronounced among Muslim women. They also appear to be more policed by their families than the other two groups of women. Spatial variables indicate that poverty is most likely a determinant of LFP, especially among Hindu women. This may also explain why they are less bound by care duties than women of the other two groups.

Overall, the findings conclude in favour of the idea that a woman's religion or religiosity in and of itself may not have a detrimental effect on her LFP. Instead, it is how a religion has metamorphosed into culture and informed social norms, that is culpable of creating challenges for women's LFP (Göksel 2013; O'Neil and Bilgin 2013). The findings insinuate that the rigidity with which gender ideologies influence women's LFP is really a function of whether it is financially affordable or not. Having said that, in a household that upholds strict patriarchal values, women may still be driven to work out of economic necessity, but also be abused at home for doing so, as family members try to assert dominance over them.

Finally, what is the strength of association between the explanans and the different labour market outcomes? This question is addressed by employing a multinomial regression analysis. The base category is the group of women who are economically inactive women. The regression analysis establishes the associations between the predictor variables and the probability of women being employed and unemployed, compared to the base category.

Economic needs make it more likely that women are employed, than economically inactive. Women who head their households, have unemployed family members to support, or have taken loans in their name are more likely to be employed, as expected. But, financial affluence of the household tends to keep women economically inactive, as do childcare responsibilities. The armed conflict variables also suggest that women are more likely to be employed out of a place of economic need and disempowerment.

The labour market rewards high educational attainments, but women with secondary education are more likely to stay at home than go to work, most likely because they do not have the kind of non-stigmatized (Klasen and Pieters 2015) and decent jobs that befits their education attainments. The labour market also favours women in their 30s, and while older women may participate, they are more likely to be unemployed than employed. Unsurprisingly, women with access to land and crops are more likely to be employed than to be economically inactive. Spatially, poverty seems to drive women to seek work, but possible demand-supply mismatches make it more likely that women are unemployed and less likely that they are employed, compared to staying out of the labour force.

Implications for policy and some recommendations

Although the econometric analysis undertaken in this research study is not able to establish causal relationships, and does not correct for the endogeneity between variables given the nature of data, its findings still can be insightful and useful information for Sri Lanka's policy discussions on women in general and women heading their households. The findings may also be of relevance in other developing countries and for contexts that are in the long-term recovery from conflict situations.

An important question that comes to mind is what is to be made of the higher-than-average LFP among the respondents. Generally, high LFP is perceived to be a driver and outcome of economic growth and development (Verick 2014). However, this hypothesis clearly does not hold in the stagnant and largely agrarian economic context of the Eastern Province. Another way to look at high LFP is that it is a reflection of poverty (Verick 2014), and this appears to be a more plausible explanation. A decision to participate in the labour force out of economic compulsion cannot be thought of as a strategic life choice (Kabeer 1999). Therefore, it is important to probe into the underlying drivers of women's participation decision.

The analysis shows that respondents' LFP is predicated upon both needs and opportunities that exist at micro and meso levels. On the one hand, the distress-driven, survivalist nature of the LFP cannot be ignored. Women may be pressured to look for work when they are heading their households or when other people in her household cannot find work. When it is needs, and not opportunities, that push women to the labour force, these women may not have the luxury of remaining unemployed for long periods of time, which seems to be the case for women heading their households in this particular sample. Their livelihood outcomes might be less desirable and more precarious, which is worrisome given that most women tend to work into their old age. As most women are self-employed, they are without a pension or any form of social protection that is available to formal sector workers. It is clear from the analysis that the armed conflict has also created more needs than opportunities for women's LFP. Impoverishment due to the conflict experience seems to be a driver, while missed opportunities such as disruptions to their education hold women back from the labour market.

On the other hand, the positive effects of education on LFP and employment are conspicuous. Women with very high educational attainments are more likely to both participate and succeed in the labour market. The catalytic effect of the participation in a livelihood programme on women's employment is also important. The minimal effect of gender values on women's LFP and employment suggests that by and large women are not held back from LFP by their own mind-forged restraints. It is also important to point out here that financial affluence of a household tends to keep women out of the labour force. So does living in an urban area. Therefore, like Spierings et al. (2008) has pointed out, it is possible that education may support women's LFP in situations where it can make a

difference (See also Tansel 2001). For example, women with high educational attainments are likely to be in a position to secure jobs that not only bring in a sizeable income, but also prestige to the family. This may free such women from traditional value constraints. But women from well-off families with a good education, but not high enough to secure jobs perceived to be prestigious by family and relatives (say, in the public sector), may not find much use of their education for employment. Education may also be of little use if the regional labour market cannot offer decent white collar jobs for women (Tansel 2001).

These key findings point to several important policy implications. First, poorer and smaller regional economies need special attention in the macroeconomic development agenda. The LFS data show that LFP is among the lowest in the Eastern (and the Northern) districts. However, that LFP in the sample of women surveyed for this study is significantly higher in all three districts than those reported in the LFS. Poverty is at the crux of understanding both sets of statistics. On the one hand, regional poverty makes for a weak labour market which in turn limits the opportunities for women to take up paid work, especially in the formal labour market. But, as poverty drives women to work, they are likely to find work in the informal economy which may go unreported in national surveys.

Therefore, it is important to understand the ground realities of these economically backward regions through a bottom-up methodology before devising interventions. A useful tool is the Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis, that is widely used in corporate strategic decision making, but has increasingly been used by development agencies such as the ILO in their livelihood intervention programmes. A detailed study is useful to understand the comparative advantages and resource constraints of each region, which in turn will better inform the kind of interventions that are likely to generate sustainable economic growth and development. As Sarvanathan (2007) has proposed, the North's development should leverage on its superior human capital endowment, while the vast resource endowment of the Eastern Province can be used to strengthen its service sector. A systematic analysis of the ground situation is likely to help not just drive development along such regional comparative advantages, but also to strengthen the inclusivity and equity of development initiatives in all communities.

The mega interventions carried out after 2007 in the East and 2009 in the North were well-intended, but as macroeconomic indicators imply, they have failed to

generate much long-term economic impact. Beyond the pent up demand, there was little going on in the East and the North to allow their economic growth into high-single digits. It goes to show that long-term development cannot be imposed upon a region. Such interventions certainly can facilitate, but they should connect to a more realistic regional road map of regional development. Local communities should be stakeholders in preparing such a road map.

Next, human capital development must be structured as a means to an end. Education and skills development should be geared to create a higher return on investment for women, which in turn can help their empowerment. To do so, on the one hand, the labour market should grow enough to generate jobs that require high skills and pay well. This is true not just for the East, but for the overall labour market in the country.

But the current mainstream education may become obsolete in the quest for jobs because it is not particularly geared towards creating future employees. Therefore, it is important to expand, strengthen, and properly regulate ancillary educational opportunities, such as vocational training. Moreover, steps should be taken to improve women's participation in such training programmes. As they are generally better aligned with the requirements of the job market, such programmes are more likely to provide women with skills that can be monetized, than a mainstream secondary education would.

It is important that state educational curricular, particularly at the university level, or even at the school level, are informed by labour market requirements and advancements. This is certainly the case with many privately-offered professional educational programmes which regularly have a dialogue with employers to update and modify syllabi to fit the requirements of the job market. A similar approach by the state education institutions will bring greater utility and empowerment to students, especially the female students, as they enter into the labour force. Well planned livelihood intervention programmes with proper consultations with the community, and robust follow up mechanisms, will also be a productive tool in promoting women's livelihood opportunities, particularly for older women.

In the information age today, there is a large virtual labour market that transcends geographic demarcations. Measures to improve female (and male) computer literacy and their knowledge of English is critical in helping job seekers tap into

the opportunities in this virtual labour market. Sri Lanka's computer literacy stands at 30.8 per cent, and is lower among women (28.9 per cent) than men (32.9 per cent). Age-wise breakdown suggests that people aged 30 or more have a lower computer literacy than younger groups. Computer literacy is lowest in the Eastern Province (15.7 per cent) and the Northern Province (19.3 per cent). Only a little over a fifth of the population owns a laptop or a desktop computer and in the Eastern Province this share is as low as 13.4 per cent (DCS 2020). Plans devised after 2009 to develop Sri Lanka as a regional technology hub, and to increase computer literacy to 75 per cent by 2016,²⁵ have fallen through. However, this is a labour market space that policy makers can explore more easily and practically, compared to say, making efforts to transform gender ideologies. Women can take up work from home in this virtual space, and become self-employed, but not in a traditional sense.

Coming up with strategies that can work around gender norms is a useful way to go about creating favourable labour market conditions (Jayachandran 2019). The point above is a case in point. If norms dictate that it is not acceptable for women to go out to work, then one must look at the job opportunities that can be created for women within this constraint. If women do not own land to use as collateral, then financial institutions must provide an alternative solution for women who are seeking loans. If public transport is deemed unsafe, a certain quota of women-only buses and train cars should be allocated for women's transportation during office hours. All these examples have a common feature, and that is that these measures exogenously create enabling condition for women's employment. As Jayachandran (2019) points out, an increase in women's agency and empowerment brought about by such policies can in turn erode restrictive gender norms.

Directly influencing attitudes and values may be more challenging, but not impossible. For example, the ILO conducted a social marketing campaign titled 'Palama' (the Bridge) as part of its Enterprise Pro-Poor Growth²⁶ livelihood intervention programme to create greater awareness and acceptance of men and women taking up enterprises. Weeratunga (2008) who carried out an impact assessment of this project component found that the Palama theatre production was very effective in creating a positive mindset towards 1) starting and running

²⁵ Mahinda Chintana: Vision For The Future Towards A New Sri Lanka; see pp. 46.

²⁶ This project was carried out in the North Western and North Central Provinces of Sri Lanka. Project information is available at: https://www.ilo.org/empent/Projects/WCMS_112294/lang--en/index.htm

a business, 2) people engaged in business, 3) their role in the communities, and 4) women engaged in business. The interventions were found to have helped the communities to perceive women as good at business, perhaps even better than men (Ibid). McKelway (2019) also find that in Uttar Pradesh, India, women's employment increased significantly after family members were shown a promotional video about job opportunities for women in carpet weaving. Dhar et al.'s (2018) study discussed previously also shows that a targeted transformative educational curriculum can be effective in undermining traditional gender ideologies.

But as it stands, social constructs of gender and traditional ideologies permeate the national school education curricula. As such, the traditional expectations of women are not just learned at home, but also at school. Therefore, an effective way to undo these social constructs is to take a critical look at how formal education reinforces these values and make revisions that promote a more equitable and inclusive society, from a young age. As Göksel (2013) has correctly pointed out, education is not only about literacy. It is also a means to creating a society purged of backward and primitive mindsets.

Next, FHHs need a special place among policies devised for women's empowerment in Sri Lanka. FHHs are not necessarily a homogeneously vulnerable group (Rajkarnikar and Ramnarain 2020; Buvinic and Gupta 1997). Oftentimes, how a woman becomes a head of household has much to do with how vulnerable she and the household is. De jure FHHs (widowed and legally divorced) households often face constraints accessing resources such as property, but they may also be perceived by the community as deserving of support and sympathy, compared to De facto FHHs (non-Widows) who may be perceived to be responsible for their situation and therefore less deserving of such support (Rajkarnikar and Ramnarain 2020; K. Ruwanpura and Humphries 2003; Buvinic and Gupta 1997). Women who head their households in the absence of husbands who have migrated in search of better incomes, may not be income poor, but are likely to be strapped by time poverty, increased care burden, and agricultural work. Variables such as education, networks of relatives and friends, patriarchal values, and the availability of pecuniary and non-pecuniary support also mediate the opportunities available to FHHs and the constraints they are bound by.

Thus, FHHs are a complex and dynamic group that cannot be stereotyped into one category as poor, vulnerable, or disempowered. Any programmes or interventions aimed to support them should be informed by a robust analysis of the different types of FHHs, and their common and different needs. To do so, the catch-all term of FHHs needs to be unpacked. The establishment of a rich, up-to-date database on FHHs in the country with their demographic, household, socio-economic characteristics, values and attitudes etc., is an essential first step in this direction. Thus, initiating a national survey on FHHs is of critical importance. A low-cost route to collecting this data is using an ancillary schedule to the already established HIES or the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS).

Next, the impact and the legacy of the armed conflict experiences cannot be discounted, and its lingering effects on people's financial and psychosocial well-being should be taken into consideration in any development initiative rolled out in the East (and the North). While the state and non-state actors rolled out various livelihood support programmes, they were devoid of psychosocial components that could have created better outcomes for women (and men) (Subramaniam 2017). By and large, the mental and emotional well-being of the communities that have lived through the conflict has been relegated to a lower priority, in an effort to prop up their economic activities. It is important that emotional and psychological well-being are built into the design of future livelihood development programmes, even outside the former conflict-affected areas. Women often grapple with numerous economic and non-economic challenges within the household – they will only benefit from such a thoughtful soft component in a livelihood programme.

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Appendix

Table 8 below shows the summary statistics from the robustness check implemented following Barslund et al (2005). Columns 1-3 presents the maximum, minimum, and average of all the point estimate over all possible regressions using the explanatory variables. Column 4 presents the standard deviations of the point estimate. Columns 5-7 contain the main results from the analysis. Column 5 shows the share of regressions where the point estimate is significant at the 5 per cent level. Columns 6 and 7 show the shares with a positive point estimate and a negative point estimate (but not necessarily statistically significant). Column 8 shows the average t-value over all regressions.

The core variables appear to be robust. Except for one variable, all other core variables do not change sign in any combination with the secondary variables. Fourteen of the core variables are always significant at the 5 per cent significance level. Six more core variables are on average significant at the 10 per cent significance level. The results of the secondary variables tend to be more mixed. Although only four of them retain the same sign in all regressions, five variables are significant at the 5 per cent level.

Table 8: Robustness check results for logistic regression for the full sample of women (Dep var: LFPR)

Core variables	Max	Min	Mean	AvgSTD	PercSigni	Perc+	Perc-	AvgT
Age 30-39	1.073	0.664	0.835	0.323	0.997	1.000	0.000	2.612
Age 40-49	1.223	0.725	0.936	0.569	0.067	1.000	0.000	1.653
Age 50-59	1.485	0.892	1.165	0.659	0.183	1.000	0.000	1.775
Age 60 or more	1.168	0.126	0.602	0.841	0.000	1.000	0.000	0.716
Age squared	0.000	-0.001	0.000	0.000	0.241	0.000	1.000	1.710
PFR in poor health	-0.654	-1.250	-0.951	0.332	0.996	0.000	1.000	2.897
Primary education	2.030	1.071	1.522	1.054	0.017	1.000	0.000	1.452
Secondary education	1.568	0.481	0.983	0.776	0.008	1.000	0.000	1.278
Up to A/L	2.160	0.977	1.509	0.908	0.155	1.000	0.000	1.674
A/L qualified or more	4.256	3.158	3.715	0.695	1.000	1.000	0.000	5.390
Patriarchal attitudes score	-0.146	-0.239	-0.201	0.064	1.000	0.000	1.000	3.184
Gender norm internalization score	0.185	0.077	0.135	0.033	1.000	1.000	0.000	4.193
FHH	1.430	1.061	1.250	0.388	1.000	1.000	0.000	3.254
Share of unemployed in household	1.817	1.314	1.511	0.326	1.000	1.000	0.000	4.703
Presence of small children in the household	-0.014	-0.285	-0.146	0.429	0.000	0.000	1.000	0.339
Share of adult women in household	-0.439	-1.307	-0.938	0.392	0.771	0.000	1.000	2.488
Respondent abused/knowns someone abused	1.719	1.165	1.512	0.693	0.802	1.000	0.000	2.201
PFR has a loan in her name	0.848	0.437	0.626	0.181	1.000	1.000	0.000	3.566
Household uses electric cooker to prepare meals	-0.380	-0.785	-0.567	0.259	0.747	0.000	1.000	2.224
Household wealth index	-0.148	-0.256	-0.204	0.108	0.388	0.000	1.000	1.892
Expenditure gap compared to district avg	-0.750	-1.320	-1.019	0.307	1.000	0.000	1.000	3.343
Household owns house with deed	0.802	0.303	0.548	0.445	0.000	1.000	0.000	1.235
PFR owns land	1.424	0.912	1.174	0.313	1.000	1.000	0.000	3.784
PFR owns jewellery	0.751	0.096	0.402	0.515	0.000	1.000	0.000	0.774

Household owns crops	0.691	0.272	0.478	0.255	0.500	1.000	0.000	1.992
Respondent or household member participated in livelihood programme/s	1.236	0.372	0.801	0.218	0.998	1.000	0.000	3.765
Respondent is a member in a village organization	0.362	-0.331	0.052	0.183	0.018	0.673	0.327	0.705
Secondary variables	Max	Min	Mean	AvgSTD	PercSigni	Perc+	Perc-	AvgT
Displaced and in camp	3.611	0.416	2.398	0.955	0.766	1.000	0.000	2.582
Displaced and with family/friends	3.072	0.884	1.960	1.027	0.491	1.000	0.000	1.945
Damage to house	2.678	-1.448	0.835	0.912	0.170	0.805	0.195	1.153
Loss of job	0.831	-3.059	-1.179	0.593	0.498	0.060	0.940	2.199
Loss of assets	1.892	-3.534	-1.087	0.985	0.263	0.202	0.798	1.452
Education affected	1.427	-1.734	-0.290	1.193	0.000	0.336	0.664	0.508
Helpfulness of the GN office	0.185	-0.712	-0.313	0.213	0.340	0.099	0.901	1.347
Helpfulness of the DS office	0.648	0.025	0.369	0.143	0.684	1.000	0.000	2.436
No. of construction, trade and service establishment in the DS division	0.001	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.823	1.000	0.000	3.305
Urban Council	0.075	-2.581	-1.387	0.376	0.682	0.002	0.998	4.186
Municipal Council	2.147	-1.369	0.354	0.685	0.050	0.648	0.352	0.984
Ampara	1.342	-1.869	-0.440	0.736	0.101	0.272	0.728	1.122
Batticaloa	1.696	-0.433	0.649	0.599	0.295	0.874	0.126	1.324

Factors Associated with Female Labour Force Participation in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province

Ranmini Vithanagama

Using primary data, this study investigates the factors that affect women's labour market choices and opportunities in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. The study finds that by and large economic necessity pushes women to the labour market and to secure gainful employment. Financial affluence obviates such a pressure, but higher educational attainments, access to earning assets, or having participated in a livelihood development programme enables women's participation and employment. The effects of gender norms women have internalized appear to be quite small on their participation and employment decisions. But the findings suggest that the patriarchal values imposed by the household may have a larger effect on women's LFP, especially among Muslim women. The armed conflict experiences seem to draw women to the work force out of poverty, while the spatial variables point to structural weaknesses of the East's labour market. The study concludes that regional economic development and human capital development should be better geared towards creating meaningful economic opportunities for women.

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