

A GENDER PERSPECTIVE ON EXPLORING THE FACTORS AFFECTING UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG YOUNG FEMALES IN SRI LANKA

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Youth unemployment in Sri Lanka is a significant challenge to sustainable development, with young females disproportionately affected. Despite the studies and government interventions, there still needs to be a concrete answer for this socio-economic issue, and females are more vulnerable in the face of youth unemployment. In such a context, this study was conducted with the primary objective of exploring the factors that hinder the employability of young females in Sri Lanka while identifying potential strategies and interventions to enhance their employability. The study also aimed to investigate the current landscape of youth unemployment in Sri Lanka and examine the impact of unemployment on the well-being and social status of young females. This qualitative research employed an ethnographic method with thirty female respondents aged 15-24 from the *Sooriyawewa* Grama Niladari Division selected through purposive sampling. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The findings revealed that domestic chores, harmful experiences of sexual harassment at workplaces, social norms, patriarchal social structure, and gender stereotypes are significant hindrances to women's employability. Issues such as lack of infrastructure, wild elephant conflicts, early marriages, school dropouts, and lack of English literacy and computer skills also contribute to this problem. Moreover, the study uncovered the profound effects of female youth unemployment, including domestic violence due to lack of proper income, drug dealing, inability to fulfill basic needs, health issues, depression, suicidal ideation and attempts, dependency on marriage for employment, and social exclusion. Accordingly, the research proposes implementing awareness-raising campaigns on women's human rights, job prospects within specific industries that offer decent job opportunities, and digital entrepreneurship covering all the settings, implementing support systems such as incubation centers, industrial parks, and zoning with the proper monitoring and evaluation system to promote the youth female participation in small and medium enterprises, policy reforms in education and establishing paternity leave system to strength the work-family balance, and a proper mechanism to identify sexual violation at the workplace. In conclusion, the study recommends opening a broad social discourse regarding female youth unemployment and related labor law reforms to reduce female unemployment in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Employability, policy reforms, youth unemployment, young women