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IDE DISCUSSION PAPER No. 307

Low Workforce Participation of Educated Female and the Role of Work Organizations in Post-war Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Sri Lanka as a developing economy that achieved gender equity in education and a higher literacy rate (both adult and youth) in the South Asian region still records a low labor force participation and high unemployment rate of females when compared to their male counterparts. With the suggestion of existing literature on the non-conventional models of careers those adopted by young and female populations at the working age, this paper discusses the role of work organizations in absorbing more females (and even minority groups) into the workforce. It mainly focuses on the need of designing appropriate human resource strategies and reforming the existing organizational structures in order for contributing to the national development in the post-war Sri Lankan economy.

Keywords: workforce, female, educated, work organization, role, Sri Lanka, non-conventional models of career

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1. Introduction

The Global Employment Trends for Youth 2010 (ILO, 2010) highlights the following: “Young men and women today build the foundations for the economies and societies of today and tomorrow. They bring energy, talent and creativity to economies and make important contributions as productive workers, entrepreneurs, consumers, agents of change and as members of civil society. There is no doubt that what young people strive for is the chance of a decent and productive job from which to build a better future. Take away that hope and you are left with a disillusioned youth trapped in a cycle of working poverty or in danger of detaching from the labor market altogether – thus representing a vast waste of economic potential”.

The above quotation was brought in at the outset as it captures diverse aspects of the issue that is attempted to unveil by the present study. Sri Lanka, a developing economy, has shown a remarkable forward drive in terms of its social and educational indicators when compared to other South Asian nations, as revealed by national and international surveys during the past. Among these indicators, the human development index (HDI), life expectancy at birth, literacy rate, school enrolment, school completion rate etc. have shown continuous upward movements, recording the existence of a healthy and educated workforce that could expedite the national development process in the post-war economy. When looked into more details, it becomes apparent that the female population in the country is outnumbering their male counterparts while reporting similar upward trends in life expectancy, school enrolment, school completion rate and even higher educational achievements. However, the workforce participation is significantly low from the part of the female (only half of that of males) while having records of continuing higher unemployment rates as nearly doubled of that of males. The surpassing trends of females in educational achievements and their low participation in work has been the focal point of the present study. At this juncture, it recognizes the significant role that could be played by the organizational management in the post-war economy in responding to this discrepancy. The educated generations have the inherited tendency of adapting to new work styles and life styles with different sets of aspirations, fashions and values. They show frequent tendencies of being adapted to non-conventional models of career in their work lives. Thus, it makes a new call from such a population to re-visit the existing organizational strategies and practices, especially, those in relation to human resources.

This becomes an obligatory sensitization of the work organizations for their contribution to national development, organizational growth and even for their survival. Towards that end, the absorption of more talented and educated female work population to our work organizations would be a possibility through a systematically designed set of human resource (HR) strategies and carefully drawn HR practices in the respective industries. Such strategizing efforts have to be accompanied with appropriate organizational reforms which could facilitate a flexible and hassle free work environments for the intended workforce. The contemporary world of work offers diverse examples of new and non-traditional forms of work organizations those could accommodate work populations with non-conventional career models. Thus, researching and learning such possibilities and designing appropriate opportunities accordingly, will be the major administrative role of the work organizations in the developing economies of the day.

Looking into the current issue, the present paper is designed in the following structure. Followed by this introduction, it will briefly illustrate the present trends of the labor force participation, education indicators, employment and unemployment situations with some projections of the population growth and dependency in the future. Supplementing with the theoretical underpinnings and a brief review of related literature, it will proceed to examine the possible antecedents those make Sri Lankan educated female out from work or put them in lower paid jobs. With insights from the case of female management graduates on the same issue, it next investigates the role of work organizations of the post-war Sri Lankan economy.

2. A glance at the trends and future projections

“Sri Lanka’s social indicators are among the best in South Asia. The country has achieved near universal literacy and, more remarkably, girls are on par with boys. Sri Lanka—now categorized as a middle income status country by the IMF—has a comparatively low poverty level at 7.6%. In 2010, the country recovered strongly from the effects of the global recession. Capitalizing on the post-war opportunities, 8% average annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth is expected over the next few years” (Asian Development Bank & Sri Lanka, FACT SHEET).

In addressing the issue of low workforce participation of educated females in the Sri Lankan economy, the section follows sets forth some of the highlights of the past trends in the general demography of population, labor force participation, employment, unemployment and some

future projections of work population. The data has been collected from secondary sources while giving priority to the Labor Force Survey data of Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka.

2.1 General demography

More than twenty million population (with a growth rate of 1.1), living in Sq. Km. 65610 (with a population density of 326 km²), records a crude birth rate of 18.4 and a crude death rate of 5.9 (both per thousand) in 2009 (Statistical Data Sheet Sri Lanka 2010, Department of Census and Statistics). A comparison of some of the demographic data with other South Asian countries is given below (table 1).

Table 1: A comparison of demographic factors with other South Asian countries

Country	Area (km ²)	Population(2009)*	density (/km ²)	GDP(nominal) (2009) in mn	per capita (2009)
Bangladesh	147,570	162,221,000	1,099	\$100,002 mn	\$551
Bhutan	38,394	697,000	18	\$1,269 mn	\$1,832
India	3,287,240	1,210,193,422	382	\$1,537,966 mn	\$1,271
Maldives	298	396,334	1,330	\$1,357 mn	\$4,388
Nepal	147,181	29,331,000	200	\$12,615 mn	\$427
Pakistan	796,095	170,608,000	225	\$174,866 mn	\$1023
Sri Lanka	65,610	20,238,000	309	\$53,241 mn	\$5,300

Note:

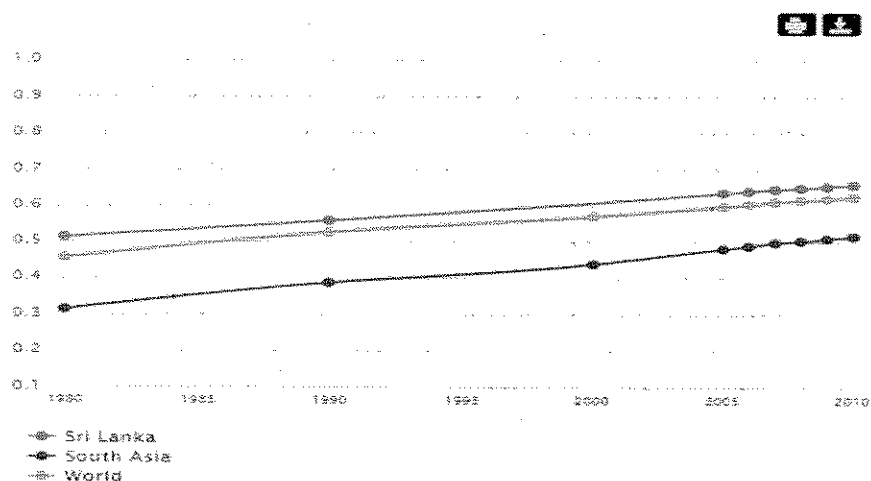
**Figures for India: from censusindia.gov.in 2011. For other countries USCensusBureau: Countries ranked by population, 2009*

Source: South Asia, 2011

The human development index (HDI), a measure of development by combining life expectancy, literacy, education and standards of living of countries, has been used to distinguish whether it is

a developed, a developing or an under-developed country. Sri Lanka is at the 91st place under the category of developing countries with a medium human development (UNDP, 2010).

Figure 1: Human Development Index: Sri Lanka, South Asia and World – A Comparison



Source: UNDP, 2010

The comparison of the HDI among South Asian countries exhibits the stance of Sri Lanka in the region (table 2). It shows a high public expenditure on education and high literacy rate (second only to Maldives) while recording a higher rank in the human development index in the region. Thus, the expectation is that the economy would reap benefits of this investment and its outcome.

Table 2. Human Development in South Asia

Country	HDI Ranking	Public expenditure on education as % of GDP	Literacy Rate 15+ (%)
India	128	3.3	65
Pakistan	136	2.7	54
Sri Lanka	99	5.4	91
Maldives	100	8.3	97
Nepal	142	3.2	55
Bangladesh	140	2.8	52

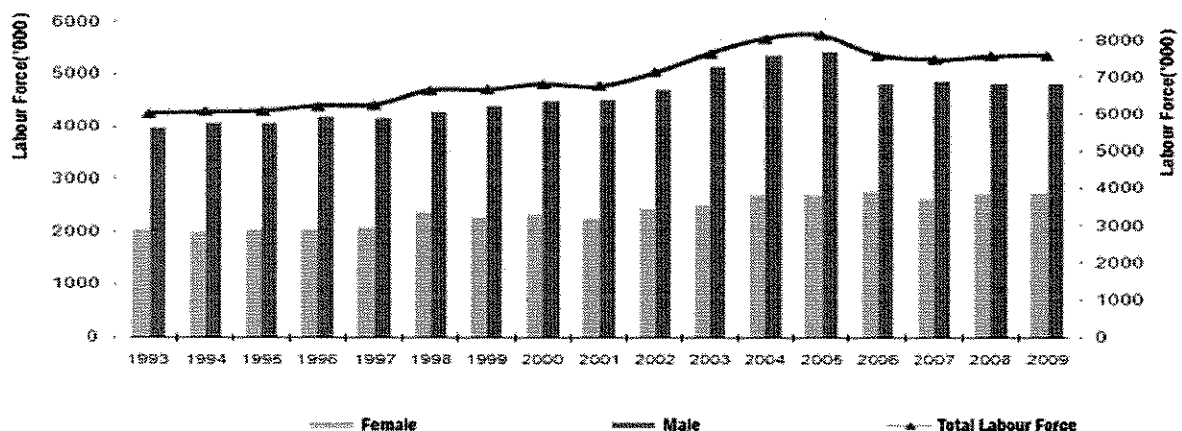
Source: Human Development Report 2007-08, UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2009

2.2 Labor force

The labor force in Sri Lanka is considered as the economically active population of age 10 years and above. The past trend of total labor force participation rate (LFPR) does not exhibit a significant change (from 2001 to 2010 it has been approximately in between 48% – 51%). The LFPR of males has been around 66% to 67% during the past decade, while the same for female has been around 31% to 35% during the same period. Thus, the male LFPR stands nearly more than twice that of females throughout the period. This is a questionable scenario in the labor market when the economy is spending a large sum of money for education, through diverse means (eg. free education, free meals, free uniforms, scholarships etc.), without any gender discrimination in none of such programs.

Figure 2: Labor force by sex (1993 – 2009)

Figure: 2.1 - Labour force by sex (1993 - 2008)



Source: Labor market trends and outcomes, Labor Market Information Systems, 2010

The sector-wise total labor force participation rate evidence a high involvement in the rural sector over the years even though it is in a declining trend over the past three years. The table 3 below shows the figures on these. This trend displays a comparatively slow urbanization process in the economy.

Table 3: Labor force participation by gender and residential sector in Sri Lanka (2001-2010)

LABOR STATISTICS 2001-2010

	2001#	2002#	2003*	2004**	2005***	2006 #	2007#	2008*	2009*	2010*
Labour force participation rate										
by gender										
Both gender	48.8	50.3	48.9	48.6	48.3	51.2	49.8	49.5	48.7	48.1
Male	66.2	67.9	67.2	66.7	67.1	68.1	67.8	67.8	66.6	67.1
Female	31.9	33.6	31.4	31.5	30.9	35.7	33.4	33.2	32.8	31.2
by residential sector										
Total	48.8	50.3	48.9	48.6	48.3	51.2	49.8	49.5	48.7	48.1
Urban	44.2	46.0	44.4	44.9	45.5	45.3	45.0	45.9	43.5	42.0
Rural	49.6	50.9	49.6	49.2	48.7	52.1	50.4	50.0	49.4	49.0

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2010

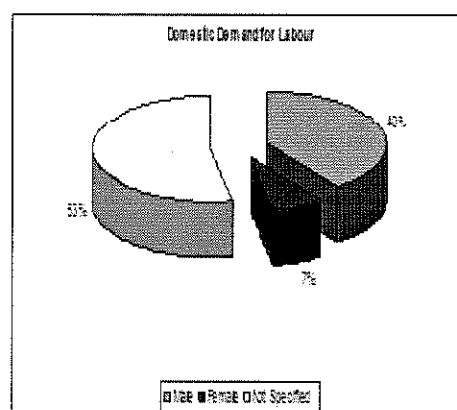
The figures below show the labor force share by age groups and the domestic demand for labor. It is evident from the figures that a higher contribution to the labor force is made by population above 40 years of age. And, the contributions from middle aged groups are in a slight declining trend (figure 3). The point to be highlighted here is the low involvement of young population (who are highly literate than adults) and its decreasing trend over the years. Further, the domestic demand for labor shows a comparatively higher demand for male labor (figure 4).

Figure 3: Labor force share by age groups both sex (1993-2009)



Source: Labor Market Information Bulletin, Sri Lanka, 2010

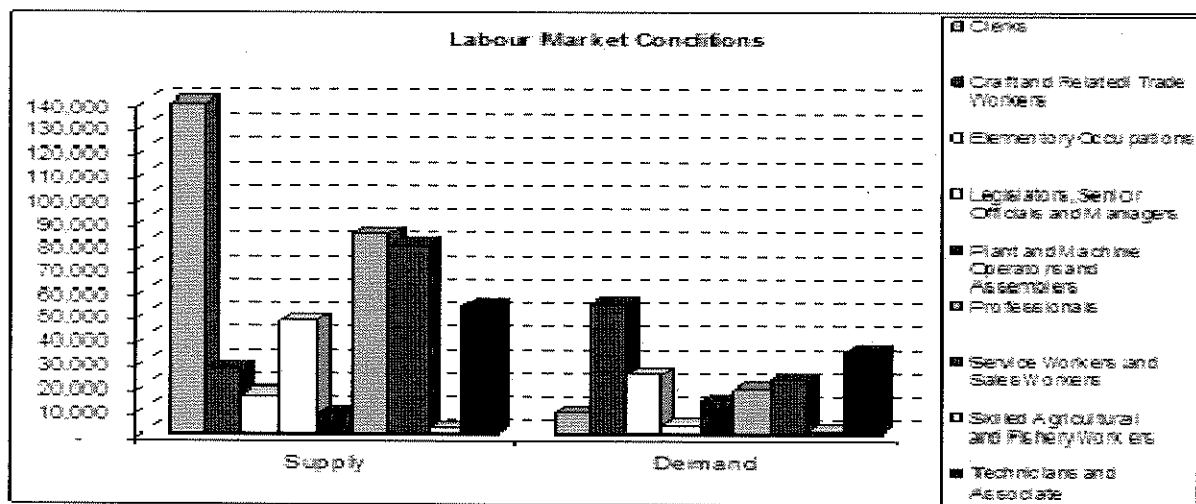
Figure 4: Domestic demand for labor (2006)



Source: Karunathilake, 2006

The labor market conditions exhibit a huge disparity between the supply and demand on different job categories (figure 5). There is seen a higher supply in clerical, service, and sales work related job categories while only a less demand is seen for the same in the labor market. This situation would support the skills mismatch hypothesis in the Sri Lankan labor market. All in all, it displays a picture of a low demand and high supply of labor in Sri Lankan labor market. Thus, it would suggest the low absorption of skilled labor into the work organizations.

Figure 5: Labor market conditions on different job categories

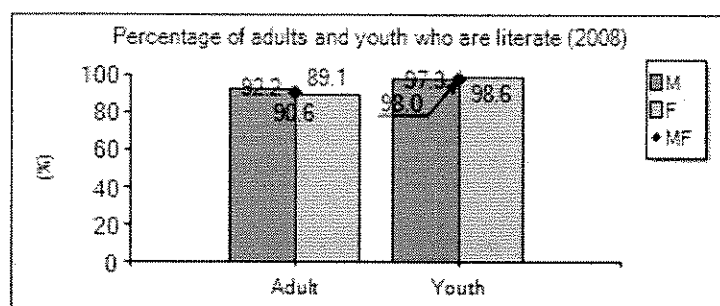


Source: Labor Market Information Systems, 2006

2.3 Education

The educational indicators have shown upward movements as depicted in literacy rate, primary, secondary and tertiary level enrolment rates, completion rate etc., especially due to the continuing government policies on free education, grade five scholarships for disadvantaged students, mid-day meals, free textbooks, free uniforms, and subsidized transport facilities for school students. Sri Lanka achieved an adult literacy rate of 90.6% in 2008 (92.2% for male and 89.1% for female). Youth literacy rate is 98.0% (97.3% for male and 98.6 for female) for the same year (figure 6).

Figure 6: Literacy rate – adults and youth, male and female



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Data Centre, 2008

The data shows that the youth literacy rate is higher than that of adults, and it visualizes the upcoming trend of youth (both male and female) being more literate. Moreover, among the youth, the literacy rate is higher for females than males. The low labor force participation rate of young females in the country would become questionable with an increasing trend of their literacy rates.

The net enrolment ratio, gross enrolment ratio and repetition and completion rates are given below for male and female (table 4). The country also achieved gender equity in education. Thus, it is evident through the similar or above rates of net enrolment, survival and completion rates recorded by females.

Table 4: Education indicators of Sri Lanka (2004 and 2005)

Indicator	Total	Male	Female
Net enrolment ratio (%)			
Primary school NER, 2004	96.7	99.4	99.9
Gross enrolment ratio (%)			
Primary school GER, 2005	108.3	108.4	108.3
Secondary school GER, 2004	87.2	86.4	88.0
Entrance and transition (%)			
Primary net intake rate, 2004	96.7	97.6	97.4
Primary gross intake rate, 2005	108.7	108.7	108.8
Primary entrants with ECCE			
Transition rate primary-secondary, 2004	97.6	96.4	97.7
Repetition and completion			
Primary repetition rate (%), 2005	0.8	0.9	0.7
Secondary repetition rate (%)			
Survival rate to grade 5 (%), 1991	92.2	91.8	92.6
Survival rate to last primary grade (%)			

Primary completion rate (%), 2005	107.5	107.3	107.8
School life expectancy (years), 2004	12.3	12.1	12.5

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Data Centre, 2008

However, the low labor force participation rate of females in the country questions the outcome of gender equity in terms of educational facilities and achievements.

Further, table 5 shows some educational indicators for selected countries, just for understanding the stance of Sri Lanka among them.

Table 5: Education Indicators for Sri Lanka and Selected Countries

Table 1: Education Indicators for Selected Countries Indicator	Sri Lanka	India	Bangladesh	Malaysia	Republic of Korea
A. Adult Literacy Rate (%)^a					
1. Female	89 (2000–2004) 85 (1990)	48 (2000–2004) 36 (1990)	31 (2000–2004) 24 (1990)	85 (2000–2004) 74 (1990)	97 (2000–2004) 93 (1990)
2. Male	92 (2000–2004) 93 (1990)	73 (2000–2004) 62 (1990)	50 (2000–2004) 44 (1990)	92 (2000–2004) 87 (1990)	99 (2000–2004) 98 (1990)
B. Net Primary Enrollment Ratio^a					
1. Female	97 (2004) 90 (1990)	90 (2004) 82 (2000)	94 (2004) 71 (1990)	93 (2003) 94 (1990)	99 (2005) 100 (1990)
2. Male	99 (2004) 92 (1990)	92 (2004) 89 (2000)	92 (2004) 76 (1990)	93 (2003) 94 (1990)	100 (2005) 99 (1990)

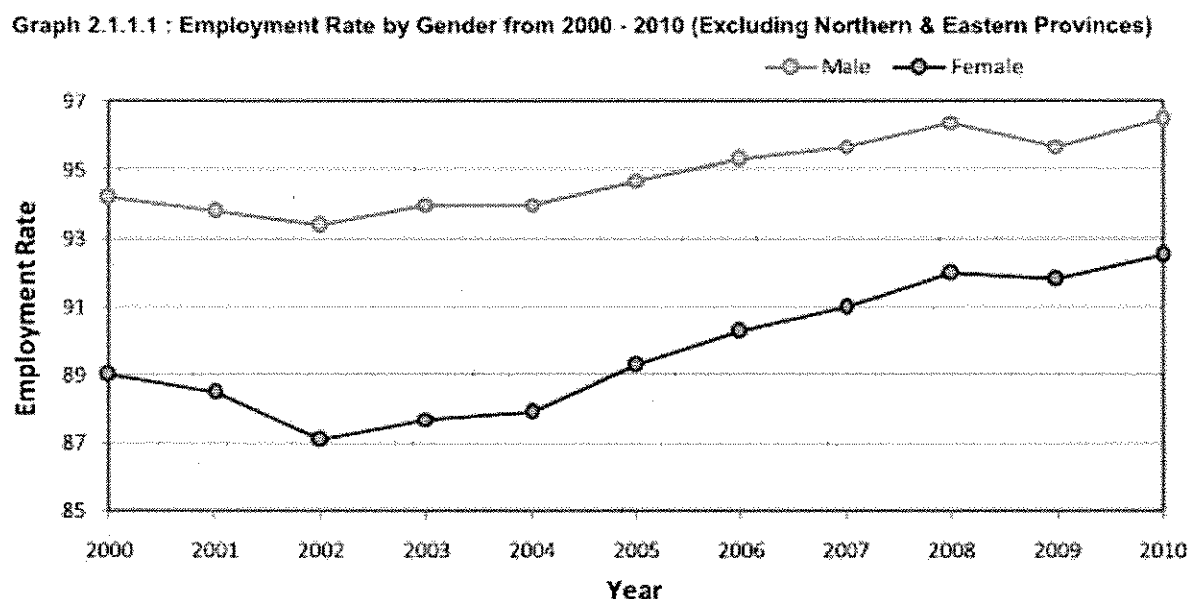
Source: ADB Sector Paper: Education Sector, 2007

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka Economic and Social Infrastructure (2010) reveals that the steps have been initiated to draft a new Education Act with the aim of re-designing the education policy in the country. It believes that this new legislation would ensure an accelerated and optimally qualitative educational development. It further states that the measures are being taken to introduce reforms to the general education system through moving towards a competency based curriculum from an examination oriented, content based curriculum, promoting English and IT in education and providing opportunities for children to gain life skills.

2.4 Employment

The total employment in Sri Lanka from 2000 to 2010 shows an upward movement, even though it seems a decline in 2009. The figure below distinguishes the male and female employment rates from 2000 to 2010. Amid the gender parity reached in terms of education achievements, a huge gap between male and female employment rates exist in Sri Lanka.

Figure 7: Employment rate by gender from 2000 – 2010 (excluding Northern & Eastern Provinces)



Source: Labor Market Information Systems, 2010

The sector-wise distribution of employment has maintained the same pattern throughout the last ten years while recording the highest employment in the service sector and the second highest in the agriculture (table 6).

Table 6: Employed population (2001-2010)

	2001#	2002#	2003*	2004**	2005***	2006 #	2007#	2008*	2009*	2010*
by industry (parentage)										
Total	6235588	6519415	7012755	7394029	7518007	7105322	7041874	7648305	7602414	
7706593										
%	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)
(100.0)										

Agriculture % (32.7)	(32.6)	(34.5)	(34.0)	(33.5)	(30.7)	(32.2)	(31.3)	(32.6)	33
Industry % (24.2)	(23.9)	(22.4)	(23.0)	(24.1)	(25.6)	(26.6)	(26.6)	(26.2)	25
Services % (43.1)	(43.5)	(43.1)	(43.0)	(42.4)	(43.7)	(41.2)	(42.1)	(41.2)	42.0

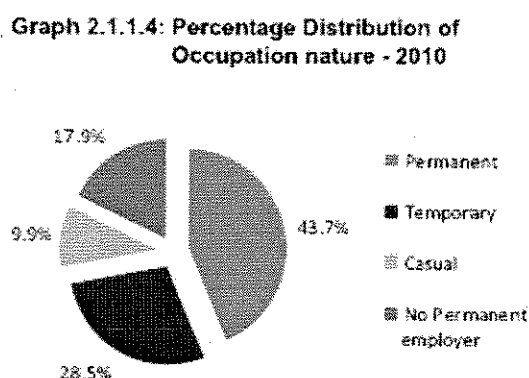
Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2010

Thus, as in many other South Asian countries, the service sector is taking the lead in Sri Lanka, signaling the possibility of its expansion in the process of economic development. It would be hopeful to rely on the organizations in the service sector for their increased involvement in the opening up of avenues for absorbing more skilled labor into economic activities.

The percentage distribution of the employed population by status of employment in the 2nd Quarter, 2010 was: employees in private sector 42.2%, self-employed 30.7%, employees in public sector 14.1%, unpaid family workers 10.3%, and employers 2.6%. Thus, the highest percentage is recorded with the private sector while the second highest being the self-employed population. The economy would foresee a growing private sector at the same time with more opportunities for self-employment.

The percentage distribution of occupation in Sri Lanka shows 43.7% of permanent occupation while 28.5% being temporary and 9.9% being casual in nature. Further, 17.9% is recorded as no permanent employer. Thus the highest percentage is not the permanent occupation (see figure 8).

Figure 8: Percentage distribution of occupation nature - 2010



Source: Labor Market Information Systems, 2010

2.5 Unemployment

The unemployment rate of the country shows a gradual decline over the past few years however the female unemployment remains higher (nearly twice that of male) throughout the past years. Seen from the educational levels, the unemployment rate of the population with G.C.E. (Advanced/Level) qualification and above visualizes the same trend of doubled unemployment rate for females.

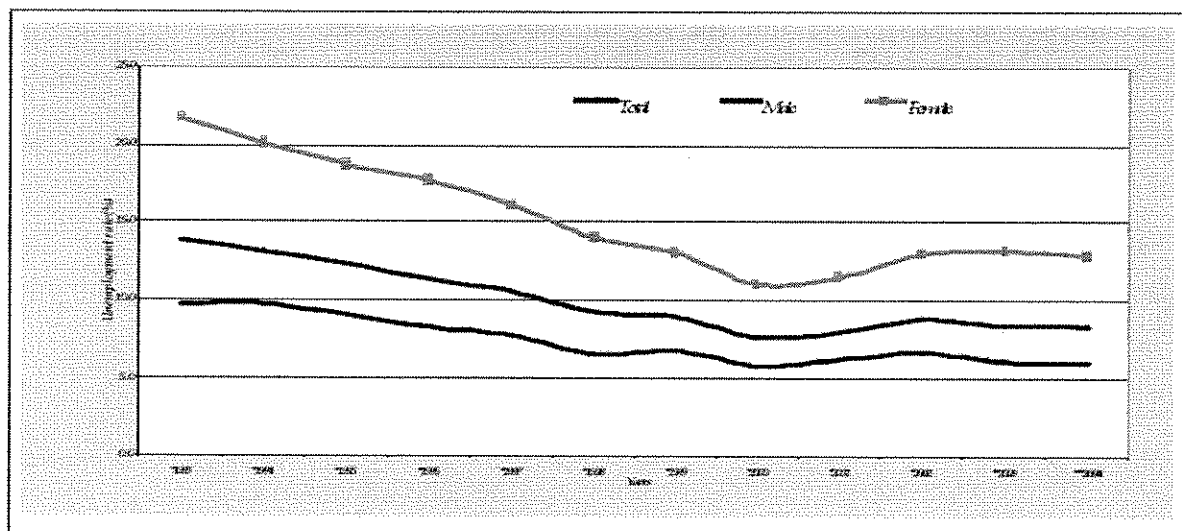
Table 7: Unemployment rate (2001-2010)

	2001#	2002#	2003*	2004**	2005***	2006 #	2007#	2008*	2009*	2010*
by gender										
Both gender	7.9	8.8	8.4	8.3	7.7	6.5	6.0	5.4	5.8	4.9
Male	6.2	6.6	6.0	6.0	5.5	4.7	4.3	3.7	4.3	3.5
Female	11.5	12.9	13.2	12.8	11.9	9.7	9.0	8.4	8.6	7.7
by selected educational levels										
G.C.E.(A/L) & above										
Both gender	15.3	16.8	16.5	16.8	13.8	11.6	11.8	10.5	11.2	11.6
Male	10.1	10.8	10.4	10.5	8.9	6.9	6.6	6.0	7.0	7.9
Female	21.5	23.0	23.3	23.8	19.1	16.8	17.5	15.3	15.5	15.8

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2010

The figure 9 shows the unemployment rate by sex from 1993 to 2004.

Figure 9: Unemployment rate by sex (1993-2004)



* Excluding Northern & Eastern provinces

** Excluding Mullaitivu & Kilinochchi districts

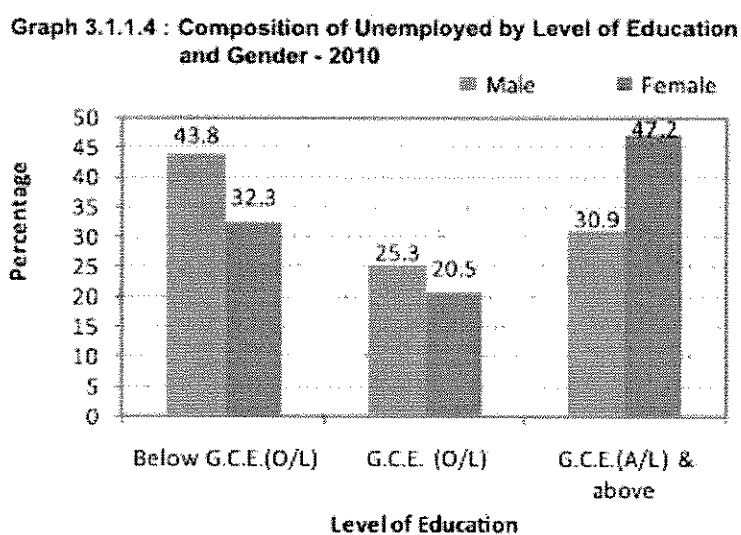
* * Excluding Northern province

Source: Global Employment Trends for Youth, ILO, 2010

The Global Employment Trends for Youth (2010) highlights that “in Sri Lanka, while there was a spike in the unemployment rate between the first and second quarters of 2009 (from 5.3 per cent to 6.3 per cent), the pre-crisis unemployment rate was above 6 per cent and, as of the second quarter of 2010, the rate was down to 5.4 per cent”. It continues with the note that “youth unemployment in the country has not recovered to pre-crisis levels, as the youth unemployment rate stood at 20.7 per cent in the second quarter of 2010, versus 18.0 per cent in the third quarter of 2008”. Its concern is that in the South Asian region as a whole, young people are 3.5 times more likely than adults to be unemployed, with a youth unemployment rate of 9.5 per cent in 2010 (confidence interval from 8.8 to 10.2 per cent). As per the report, “Sri Lankan female youth unemployment rate was 23.3% in Q3 2010, compared to 16.3% for young men. In Japan and the Republic of Korea male youth unemployment rates were 2.5 percentage points higher than the female equivalent in Q4 2010”.

The unemployment by level of education shows that the highest unemployed percentage of female is in the level of G.C.E. (A/L) and above. (See the figure 10 below.)

Figure 10: Composition of unemployment by level of education and gender - 2010

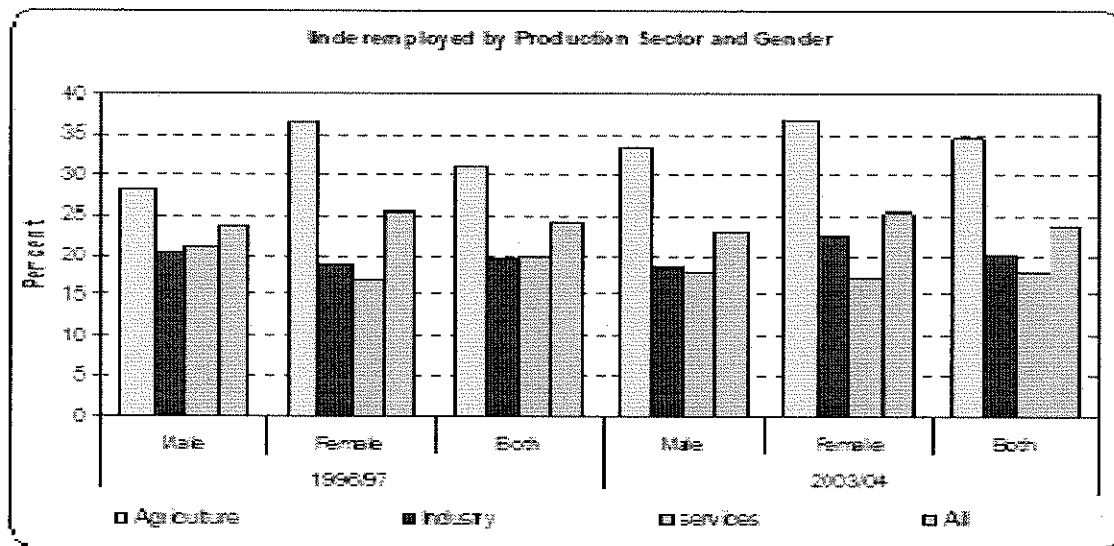


Source: Labor Market Information Systems (LMIS), Tertiary and Vocational education Commission, 2010

2.6 Underemployment

Further to adult, youth and female unemployment patterns and figures it can be noted the status of underemployment in Sri Lanka. The figure 11 below shows the underemployment by sector and gender as a comparison of 1996/97 to 2003/04. The highest underemployment lies with female, especially in the agricultural sector. This situation has not been changed from 1996/98 to 2003/04 period.

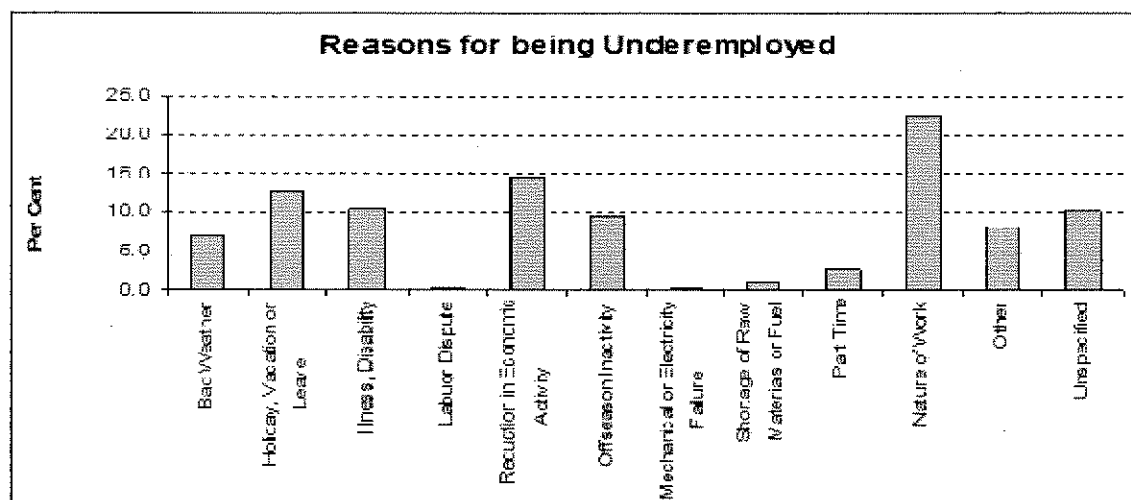
Figure 11: Underemployment by Sector and Gender



Source: Karunathilake, 2006

As per Karunathilake (2006), the reasons for being underemployed have been discovered as in figure 12. Karunathilake notes that nearly 50 per cent of underemployment was due to three reasons, namely, nature of work (22%), reduction in economic activity (15%), and off-season inactivity (10%). Further, there were only a few reasons beyond the control of policies and so he assures that most can be reduced to a great extent by creating a conducive, consistent policy environment for economic activities to expand smoothly (2006).

Figure 12: The Reasons for being Underemployed

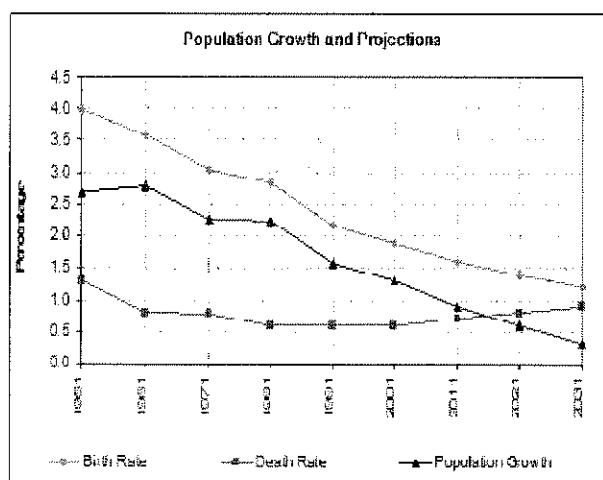


Source: Karunathilake, 2006

2.7 A glance at the future trends – Population and Dependency

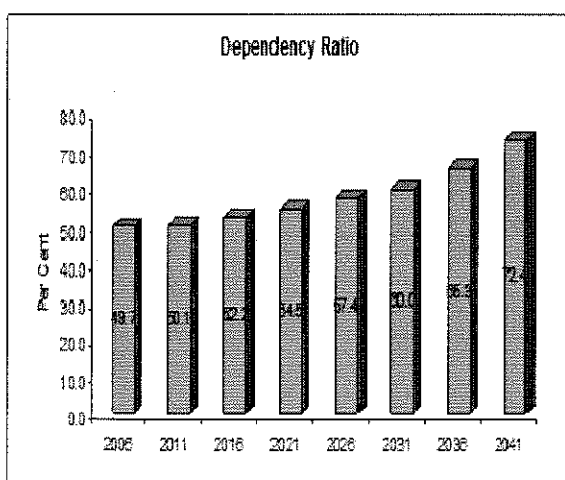
Demographic figures for Sri Lanka shows a low average population growth rate (1.1) which takes a declining trend over the years and showing the same trend in future projections.

Figure 13: Projections of Population Growth



Source: Karunathilake, 2006

Figure 14: Projection of Dependency ratio



Source: Karunathilake, 2006

The projections for birth and death rates indicate the possibility of a zero population growth (nearly in another 30 years period). The dependency ratio (the ratio of the population in the age groups below 15 years and above 60 years to the rest of the population), is projected to rise at an increasing pace. These projections are likely to hint many socioeconomic problems to be created in the future (Karunathilake, 2006).

3. Theory and review of literature

The present study which attempts to investigate the low workforce participation of educated females in Sri Lanka while analyzing the possible antecedents with the purpose of unveiling the role of work organizations in post-war Sri Lanka claims a multidisciplinary theoretical base stemming from economics theory, social theory, career theory, organization theory and management theory.

3.1 Economics theory

The issues aligned with labor force participation and the education in an economy has been well addressed in the economics theory with the explanations of labor market theory, queuing hypothesis, skills mismatch hypothesis etc. The labor supply and demand, maximization of benefits for employer and worker, vocational training and curriculum reform for matching skills of labor, and expansion of formal sector employment opportunities in the economy had been the theoretically elaborated areas in such explanations. Rama (1994), putting forward the skills mismatch hypothesis, notes that the problem in Sri Lankan labor force participation and education gap is 'not a shortage of jobs but the artificial gap between good and bad jobs'. Further he highlights with a time-series analysis of the impact of unemployment on wage increases across sectors that many unemployed people are waiting for "good" job openings, but are not interested in readily available "bad" jobs (Rama, 1999). He believes that policy efforts can reduce the gap between good and bad jobs by making product markets more competitive, and by reducing excessive job security, which has been activated negatively on labor demand, and by reforming government policies on wage and employment. Karunathilake (2006) noted that the labor force participation rate is also sensitive to the availability of employment opportunities, and the changes in attitudes.

3.2 Social theory

On the other hand, the trends of workforce participation are influenced by the changing socio-cultural dimensions of a society. Thus, social theory becomes much explanatory in the areas alike changing social roles, social status, social structure, social institutions and the transition of gender roles. The social role theory explains different roles played by males and females at different times depending on their perceived roles in situations. The social roles are formed around the expectations (including gender stereotyping) that society puts upon social members. Female occupational choices most often align with the perceived gender roles in the society. Social status is the position, the rank or prestige an individual holds as a member of the society. Thus, a status structure can be seen in societies with a number of levels in it. The prestige could be ascribed (born with) or achieved prestige. The prestige, position or rank achieved in a society is most often based on the expertise, knowledge or competency gained through education. Further, the occupation, the work organization, the community attached may be helpful in achieving prestige. Thus, social roles and status can be changed over the circumstances. It is well accepted that social status are more open to change through marriage, education, talent, and hard work. Contemporary society has increased the opportunities for people to change their social status. And, social status can change social roles played by social members.

3.3 Career theory

When it focuses on the entire work life of individual employees, the already established theory on career patterns and career models become more explanatory. The existing literature evidence the fact that the contemporary work generations are being adapted to non-conventional, risk-taking, flexible, and multidirectional (Baruch, 2004) patterns of career in contrast to the rigid, traditional and life-time bound career. These patterns and models are becoming more usual with the minority work groups and the new generation of the workforce. Some examples of non-conventional career models are relational career (Hall, 1976), protean career (Mirvis and Hall, 1996; Hall et al., 1996), boundaryless career (DeFillippu and Arthur, 1994; Arthur, 2008; Sullivan, 2001), intelligent career (Arthur, Claman and DeFillippi, 1995), kaleidoscope career (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2008), and post-corporate career (Peiperl and Baruch, 1997). Relational career is meant to be an individual career developed through reciprocal, mutually beneficial,

interdependent connections with another person (Hall, 1976, p. 17). Protean career is entirely an individual's responsibility while s/he becomes a free agent while having the career contract with the self (Mirvis and Hall, 1996; Hall & Associates, 1996). The boundaryless career is noted to be "a sequence of job opportunities that goes beyond the boundaries of any single employment setting" (DeFillippu and Arthur, 1994, p. 167; Arthur, 2008). It can exist when the actual career transcends the boundary of a single path within the boundaries of a single employer. The intelligent career exhibits the distinct ways of knowing that directs and guides the career behavior of individuals. Those ways of knowing can be knowing why (individual motivation and values), knowing how (career-relevant experiences), and knowing whom (relationships with the surrounding; family, society, industry etc.) (Parker, Arthur and Inkson, 2004). The kaleidoscope career model, which attempts to explain the career behaviors of women holds the view that there are three-fold parameters in the career life span of a female, those are, challenge, balance and Authenticity. These three parameters are associated with the individual stages of life; that is early career, mid-career and later career (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2008). Postcorporate career illustrates the instances of Shifting of whole career to an entirely different work setting. It suggests the possibility of across organizational movements for individuals on different assignments or contracts at different organizations, and thus the alternative arrangements for individuals are, consultation, temporary work, self-employment, professional partnerships, secondments, outsourcing etc. Dissanayake (2010) highlights the point that amid these diverse career models of work population, the work organizations have to be sensitive to the 'new needs' of the 'new generation' at all the times. This sensitivity will be developed by updating through regular and continuous research on changing workforce and their changing value systems. Such changes will reflect the economic, socio-cultural, demographic or even geography-based changes of the workforce.

3.4 Organization and management theory

In a discussion of the roles to be played by organizations in such an endeavor, the existing knowledge on organizational functions, processes, structures and relationships become the focal theoretical stance. Macro organization theories, for instances, population ecology model (Hannan and Freeman, 1977), transaction cost theory (Williamson, 1981), neo-institutional theory, (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), resource dependence perspective (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978)

unveil several perquisites and measures those secure and strengthen the survival and growth of work organizations, such as, how organizational survival is determined by their environments (including the general public as well as general environment), how internal and external transaction costs determine behavior of organizations, how the organizations take similar forms through imitating the strategies used by more successful organizations, and what strategies would make organizations control the environment etc. The knowledge on organizational structures, structural configurations (Mintzberg, 1983), and even new forms of organizations including virtual organization, network organization, cellular organization, modular organization and bounadryless organization disclose the avenues for contemporary work organizations to make their structures more flexible and agile.

4. Multi-faceted antecedents¹

A comprehensive review of the possible reasons for low workforce participation of educated female in Sri Lanka resulted in a diverse set of antecedents which represented both macro and micro level facets. Among them, the economic, socio-cultural, and general institutional factors correspond to the macro level, while the self-centered, family-bound, and work organization-specific factors signify the micro level. However, a deeper analysis revealed a duality of the impacts made by these factors on rural and urban populations.

4.1 Micro level facets

Certain developments at family level and personal level environments have hinted the signs of low participation of educated females at work in Sri Lankan context. The developments of nuclear families with comparatively a lesser number of children (one or two) have urged the parents to concentrate more on the education of their children irrespective of their gender. Such small scale families have been able to afford to the higher education, professional programs or vocational programs of their children. Further, the parents of most of the middle class families are at least averagely (if not highly) educated, and strongly believe in the correlation between higher education and better jobs, and thus, look forward their children to live in more prosperous lives than they live. Such family backgrounds those created in Sri Lankan society in the past

¹ This discussion might cover a tiny fraction of the entire female work population of the country at certain points.

decades have been conducive for females to enter into education and climb up to higher levels. When seen from the personal grounds of the females who enter into education or higher education, simultaneously, they get used to a life style which is comparable with their status of education, and thus acquire higher social status in the general society. Ultimately, some of them become more suitable candidates for getting marry with well to do males, without being employed or without seeking any employment. The females who become qualified with many paper qualifications, professional programs or vocational training in a family supportive environment do not necessarily need rush into a job, as the prime objective of them as well as the family is not to get into a 'whatever the job', but rather to wait and obtain the highest possible opportunity. Thus, continuously changing social status, social structure, and social roles those perceived at individual levels can be seen as more influential in employment decisions in the contemporary society.

4.2 Macro level facets

It can be identified that to some extent, the general economic, socio-cultural and institutional conditions of the country, in all, has created an environment which make the female generation move forward into education (and higher education) and then refrain from being part of the workforce, or make them engage in lower paid jobs. The general economic conditions and the poor infrastructure prevailing at rural areas of the country compel some educated females of rural origin to enter into any sort of occupation even knowing that it is an under-utilization of their knowledge and expertise. Further, there is a tendency of such group for ending up with jobs in the informal sector. One explanation for that is the high demand for low cost labor at rurally-centered export-oriented organizations, and another would be the lack of enough high status jobs at rural areas and the pressure of female to contribute to their family income. For the urban educated females, there are enough economically proven reasons to refrain from being employed until they find a formal sector, high earning job. High security in economic concerns together with self and family bound social status seems to be leading them to this end.

The inadvertent change of social and cultural traditions have been strong enough to change the mindset of people who undermined the value of education (and higher education) and even vocational training for females in the society. Thus, it is moving (slowly) towards a gender

neutral society which would welcome and anticipate more educated and professionally qualified females. Further, there could be seen a slowly continuing gender role transmission in the society where even the household responsibilities are shared equally by males and females. Combined to these effects, the life styles, living standards and social status of female population is being moving upward. But unfortunately, the stereotypes on female capacity of work and concepts on gendered jobs/occupations have not been evaded from the general and work society. Again, the magnitudes of these socio-cultural changes have been enormously differed in rural and urban societies. In relation to the ethnicity, the female population representing Sri Lankan Moors customarily did not heavily involve in occupations even though they enter into education. The percentage of this ethnic group, out of the total population was 7.2 (as per 2001).

The institutional and educational set up of the country has facilitated more female entry into education and obtaining professional qualifications. It would rather say that the free education and the requirement of compulsory education has been the primary grounds for female entry, while comparatively low cost of higher education programs in the country and more studious and dedicated female studentship being secondary among them. The free education and compulsory education requirements have not shown much discriminative impacts in school enrolment in rural and urban, even though there seem differences in the facilities and infrastructure between the two sectors.

The organizations-specific issues those hinder female workforce participation range from company-wise human resource issues up to certain legal and policy issues of the country. The recruitment and selection policies, remuneration, training and development and even performance evaluation policies are more centered towards the male employees. Beyond these policy related issues, the stereotypes and misconceptions held by most of the (private sector) employers towards educated population (especially graduates, irrespective of gender) have added negative points against recruitment. Further, organizations are reluctant to recruit more female employees due to certain provisions in relation to maternity benefits (see Maternity Benefits (Amendment) Act (1985). Economists believe that there is an extensive legislation covering different aspects of working conditions and government ratified ILO conventions on core labor standards (Heltberg & Vodopivec, 2009). The Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provision) (Amendment) Act (2008) is the mostly cited Act as which makes the employers

reluctant in recruiting more labor. Further, the Employment of Trainees (Private Sector) Act (1978) could be noted as a restriction for recruiting trainees for longer periods.

Apart from these generalized views on the possible antecedents of low workforce participation of educated females in Sri Lanka, it presents below a selected case of female management graduates of a Sri Lankan University for the purpose of highlighting the changing life styles of urban-centered young educated females.

4.3 The case of female management graduates

The case of female management graduates, even though it is not representative of the narrative of the average graduates, brings some reflections of the portrait of expectations and directions of the educated female population while differentiating it from the male population of this sector. When it comes to the metropolitan university, the female enrolment in business administration specialization outnumbers the enrolment of their male counterparts. Further, the annual pass rate records a higher percentage for female students. Finally, when it comes to the graduation, the percentage of first class and second class degree holders, as well as the program completion is recorded as the highest for female graduates. The percentage of female first class holders: 2008: 100%, 2009: 84%, 2010: 95% (Class Lists, 2008, 2009 & 2011.)

The analysis of this situation reveals some comparative indicators which are peculiar to male and female students each. In most of the cases, studious and committed behaviors, accompanied with comparatively higher language skills, communication and presentation skills are seen with female students, leading them to record higher scores for compulsory assignments and semester-end results. The continuous focus, motivation and ambition, sharpened up with better results lead them to end up with degrees with classes. However, with this scenario, one should not undermine the skills and competency of male students. Male students are most often multi-skilled and looking forward to acquire multi qualifications during their studentship by engaging in professionally oriented courses which ease them find an occupation without being idle even after the graduation. This trend of moving for double qualifications is highly seen with male students when compared to female students. Thus, the focus of male students' at the university is not unidirectional as it is seen with female students. Further, due to the socially accepted fact that 'males should have a source of income' or 'boys cannot be always dependent on parents', there

is a high tendency that male students tend to look for 'a job' while they are studying. There is a small fraction of drop-outs those who tend to give up their university education and return to their geographic origin and engage in some occupation or help parents in their family business or agriculture.

The scenario after the graduation is also not the same for both male and female at most of the instances. Majority of male graduates tend to opt to whatever the employment opportunity they get, but the highly qualified female graduates may await for or postpone it for a better chance, or sometimes, will never be employed if they get marry and proceed to a comfortable life. Averagely qualified female graduates with rural origin may return to birthplace and get occupied in any possible employment. (School teaching is comparatively a better opportunity they could get.)

Thus, the females' high involvement in education and low participation in workforce is seem to be a matter that has to be addressed at the socio- cultural, economic, and institutional levels.

5. The role of work organizations

The prevalent trends of workforce participation, enrolment and completion of education and higher education, rates of employment and unemployment of the female population at the developed and developing economies, amid the afore-seen multifaceted antecedents to that effect, overwhelmingly demonstrate the indubitable obligation that lies with the contemporary work organizations to magnify their vision towards the contemporary workforce, their mutable characteristics, patterns and behaviors. Thus, it is a call for the work organizations to widening their horizon for sensitizing, capturing and appropriately capitalizing in the newly emerging atypical patterns of employments, non-conventional models of employee careers, and adventurous work behaviors at the postmodern work environments. These isometrics of organizations demand more agile human resource strategies and practices accompanied with any suggestive reforms to their existing structural configurations.

Sri Lankan organizations and its work population, ending its prolonged civil war for nearly thirty years due to ethnic conflict, are re-gaining their economic powers, freedom and enthusiasm for reaching the so far failed missions in this peaceful environment. The civil lives in Northern and North Eastern provinces are gradually being converted to normality while public sector as well

as private sector organizations are being established with the gradual development of infrastructure. The University of Jaffna, in which the student population is nearly 5800 (University of Jaffna, Wikipedia) is currently functioning smoothly in the previously war-torn area. The current peaceful environment has eased and encouraged people from every nook and corner of the country to make their move and engage in any legal, economically viable occupation. Thus, women, youth or any sort of minority group in the society are free for involving in an employment which is suited to their standard of expertise, in order for experiencing a better living.

Even elsewhere in the globe the public sector organizations are in the path of gradually discovering the 'diversity' of workplace and workforce, crossing over the narrowed spectrum of its dimensions such as, race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion etc. rather accentuating the individually focused dimensions alike work style, communication style, economic status, geographic origin etc. (US Department of Commerce Benchmarking Study, n.d.).

5.1 Non-conventional models of career / individual career

It is not only been theoretically established but also continuously evidenced through empirical sources that the young generations as well as the minority groups in the work population are increasingly being adapted to non-conventional models of career. Thus, the interests, desires, patterns of living, and expectations in the life and for the future, including the individual value systems of the presently educated women and even young generation have been transforming and shifting to unpredictable directions. Despite the higher levels of educational achievements of the contemporary work population, they are most often far beyond the traditional work population in their ambitious, creative and risk taking behaviors. They are not quick movers to whatever the available job opportunity, but are waiting till they find one which most properly matches with their life profiles. Thus, it shows that the situation is not simple enough to explain with a skill mismatch hypothesis or queuing behavior model of the labor force. Even though the government regulations, educational policies, vocational arrangements etc., as already noted in many studies, have been focal and explicative at this juncture, it should be noted that any government policy could lag behind the natural social transformation process of a nation by the time it sets the agenda for absorbing it to the national economic system. On these grounds, the

present study takes the stance that work organizations have a more responsible role to play in making sense of the economic move of the nation as well as the workforce move of the era, and accordingly, formulating all the possible strategies for capitalizing in such a move, especially when it comes to a developing economy.

Apparently, the workforce move at present has been multi-directional towards their-own career destinations. As seen by organizational practitioners and career theorists, and evidenced by the existing literature, there are diverse types of career models (relational, protean, postcorporate, boundaryless, intelligent, kaleidoscope etc.) those adapted by educated female and even male work population of the day. Such adaptations are not mere overnight individual decisions or actions made/occurred at the workplace, but those are phases of the long process of gradual transition of the workforce. Thus, there need a reactive force to recognize this changing phase of the working society.

5.2 The case of educated female population in Sri Lanka

As illustrated in a previous section, the growing population in Sri Lanka consists more of females while the life expectancy too is higher for females when compared to males. The future projections further shows a gradual move of Sri Lankan society into an aged society where the majority of work population is becoming the elder population. When the entry into education and higher education, completion rates and merits are reported as higher figures for female, the redundancy resulted in low workforce participation or engagement in low paid jobs is questioned in this developing economy, especially under a risk-free civil environment like present. Even though the cost of free education is not individually born, it is a publicly born cost where all the citizens at different levels of economy become contributors in some way or the other. Thus, the outcome should be a shared one where the people who contributed to that endeavor could get at least a fewer benefit. When seen from the knowledge, skills and competency of the educated female who ended up with meritorious performances, such an accumulation timely goes *used less* and ultimately becomes *useless*. It further questions the time, effort and the resources utilized for such a production in the economy. A possible question would be raised in relation to the value addition made by the university teachers in that process. Thus, it becomes a point

which should drag the concern of all sorts of possible enterprises those have the power and resources to convert them into useful human resources.

The US Department of Commerce Benchmarking Study (n.d.) notes 'with the increasing richness of diversity in the world and in the workforce, we need to expand our outlook and use creative strategies to be successful. Employees can provide this resource. ... Leaders and managers within organizations are primarily responsible for the success of diversity policies because they must ensure that the policies are effective' (p.5).

5.3 Human resource strategies and practices

In order for offering multiple employment patterns, and thus sensitively utilizing the diverse workforce while accommodating their uniqueness and changing interests, the work organizations need a handful of strategies those designed deliberately for achieving the afore-said very purpose. Suitably formulated human resource strategies aligning with the communities of practices being used at the most successive role model organizations would enlighten the reach of a better-served clientele and a gratified workforce. It would be the timely response to be made to the national economic need by the work organizations of the developing economies of the day.

At this juncture, it would be noteworthy highlighting the fact that, especially, the strategies for recruiting and selecting, orienting and training, remunerating, mentoring and facilitating, managing industrial relations etc. have to be re-visited and re-designed appropriately for a workforce that is adapting to non-conventional models of careers.

5.4 Organizational reforms

Such an endeavor would not be a possibility unless there accompanied the appropriate reforms to the existing structures of the work organizations. Thus, internal organizational structural reforms those directed towards the new patterns of task allocation, new mechanisms of coordination and supervision, different lines of authority and reporting relationships etc. would be the consequent facilitators of the work environment. It will be the time for most of the work organizations in developing economies to re-visit their traditional bureaucratic work set-ups and looking forward the possibilities for introducing more flexible, permeable, and boundaryless configurations of

work. Thus, virtual, net-worked, modular, cellular and many such types of structural patterns would become a possibility.

6. Conclusion, implications and further research

Based on the investigation done, the trends seen, theoretical underpinnings and the discussion followed by, the present study extends its conclusion, implications for organizations and the directions of further research as follows.

6.1 Conclusion and implications

The evidence accrued from the labor market trends and the investigation of multiple antecedents of low labor force participation of educated female in Sri Lanka slightly indicate the persistent gaps between economic and socio-cultural levels, status and structures in the economy and the society. Thus, the divergence in the attitudes, life styles, expectations and desires of educated female population in the rural and urban sectors seems to be activated in contrasting ways to create a low labor participation or underemployment in the economy. This socio-cultural and economic reality has to be well recognized by the institutional set up of the country, and thus be sensitive to intervene in moderating it. It foresees the fact that the organizational administration of the country, especially the private sector has the power, resources and avenues for best utilizing the nation-grown young, educated population with their carefully designed human resource strategies and organizational reforms. And, it need not necessarily be waiting for the central government policy makers to reform educational policies and legislations as those have been done in the country repetitively and even being done at the moment.

It has to stress the view that the rural development and the development of the war-torn areas should be included in the agendas of the economic organizations of the country. Thus, the appropriate strategies and practices have to be formulated for the better utilization of the educated young, female and any minority representations of such areas. A growing positive response and acceptance of the educated female population of the country has been the need of the era, and thus sensitiveness for absorbing them to the work force while responding to the changing models of career in female and younger generations has become the role of work organizations for their survival and success in a developing economy. In this endeavor, the work

organizations have to equip with a changed mind set with free of prejudice and misperceptions of the working capacity of female work population. Further, it seems that dedicated on-going research is of utmost importance in bridging the gap between work organizational practices and the reality of worker aspirations, changing work lives and worker values in an era of generational changes.

6.2 Further research

The present study would serve as an eye opener to the existing and improving issue of low workforce participation of educated female in the country in light of the emerging new and non-conventional models of careers adopted by young and female population, and thus has to be treated as a ground work for a list of investigations to be done and a number of reports yet to be produced. As one step further, it will investigate the non-conventional models of career adopted by new generations of the workforce and their special characteristics that have to be considered by work organizations in formulating human resource strategies and designing their structures. Next, it will focus on the possible human resource strategies and practices those adopted by the work organizations in the Asian region in employing female and young generations in their workforces. Further, it will look into the organizational reforms, the structural adjustments and the new forms of organizations those required for absorbing more young and educated female population of a developing economy.

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