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## Drivers of labour force participation among female undergraduates in Sri Lanka

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Despite the strong growth over the past decades, which was accompanied by higher labour force participation, lower unemployment rates, women's higher level of education and relatively unhindered access to the job market, the low female labour force participation has become a puzzle and a serious economic issue in Sri Lanka for several reasons. The demographic dividend of a large working age population, which is projected to be shrieked after 2026, urges optimizing the use of working age population. In this regard, female labour force which encompasses more than 50% of the population has been identified as crucial actors in achieving and sustaining any inclusive growth strategy. Women's social protection at the older age largely depends on current status of employment. Further, it is a cause for concern given the substantial cost in terms of public as well as private money and effort undertaken in order to obtain a university degree. Hence, the abstention from the labour market of a substantial proportion of female work force is a significant waste of valuable investment in human capital with serious implications for both society as a whole and the women themselves. Given this seriousness of the problem, effective policy interventions demand the understanding of the matters that constrain the active participation of female work force in the labour market productively. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate possible reasons of why women in the tertiary level education choose to be outside the labour force. Data were collected from a stratified random sample of 300 final year students in 2014 at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura using a structured questionnaire. Despite a comprehensive descriptive analysis, constructed binary dependent variable on labour force participation to suit the study objective was used in logistic regression, which is the main inferential statistical method in the study. It was found that the probability for undergraduate women to participate in the labour force was affected positively by the magnitude of their work experience and training, availability of household assistance, availability of suitable child care facilities, availability of flexible working hours, mothers education level, and negatively by parents' wealth status, monthly family income, husband's expected earnings and number of children. Regression coefficients on parents' expectations and the faculty appeared with the predicted positive sign were not statistically significant. Results should be replicated to minimize sampling frame limitations. This study suggests suitable policy interventions to facilitate women by providing trainings, quality child care facilities, a secure working environment with flexible working hours and enhancing part time job opportunities. Proactive private-sector leadership can also encourage women's participation by establishing company policies and practices that relieve constraints on women's time, by providing appropriate leave for maternity and childcare.

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