

ABSTRACT.

Households are the basic units in Sri Lankan society, in which female - headed households are on the rise. Most female - heads choose micro enterprises, as a way for the betterment of their livelihood. However, whether employment generated by enterprises has enabled the 'poor' to move out of poverty is not clear. Therefore, the major objective of this study was to find out the interrelationship between enterprise development, female - headship and poverty. It also attempts to understand entrepreneurial cultures to assess the potential of the poor female - heads to overcome poverty and to recommend suitable entrepreneurial attitudes, by which the dependency on state welfare could be reduced.

Since the key research question was to understand how female headship and poverty affect sustainable entrepreneurial development, economic as well as non - economic variables are used to measure the depth and severity of poverty. With little published information available, primary data was gathered from interviews, which was coded later. As the data and information collected were in the form of opinions, interpretations and value judgments, a qualitative approach was preferred over quantitative methods. However, quantitative techniques were applied where appropriate.

In this study, the first part analyses the personal characteristics of the female head. When households were compared, multiple family households with a number of adults who are employed fared well. Whereas, single-family households with minor children found it difficult to avoid poverty. This fact also reflected through the fulfillment of basic needs by sharing the common properties. Since the total income of the household was aggregated due to multiple family households, alternative measures were used to measure the 'gendered nature' of poverty in female - headed households in part II of the study.

Alternative measures thus used revealed that food security was affected by unstable sources of food and the method of payment; emotional well – being of the female – heads was not satisfactory; hygienic behaviour and physical well – being were directly related to income level and the ‘level of commonness’ of the property; healthcare facilities were not adequate or neglected due to lack of awareness. Though emotionally handicapped female – heads reported of threatened personal security due to their vulnerability, social capital gave strength to face it; social rules, values and practices play a major role in determining the labour based entitlements; proper counseling is needed to develop attitudinal changes necessary for entrepreneurship development; neither capital based entitlements nor household based entitlements were enough to push their micro level enterprises to small or medium enterprises; engagement or action choices were limited due to lack of participation; war was sited as specific as well as a general cause for poverty; governance was dismissed as powerless to counteract the process of poverty. With these results, part III dealt with entrepreneurship.

Female – heads face many difficulties in developing their business due to lack of knowledge and skills, lack of financial assistance; labour; inappropriate work places and wrong perceptions about their businesses. These led to stagnant business and no business links.