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One of the major objectives of establishing the Free Trade Zone in Sri Lanka was to promote export-oriented industrialization by investment of private foreign capital, in the context of increasing unemployment in the country. The Sri Lanka Free Trade Zone is yet another example in Asia of the international division of labour with the re-location of labour-intensive processes where a readily available young educated, docile cheap female, reserve army is available for international capital, whilst the costs of social reproduction of the labour force, are met by the host country.

The focus of the study is on the employment of women workers in the Katunayake Free Trade Zone. The study examines the social profile of women workers, their working conditions, living conditions and the economic benefits. The study is based on interviews with 50 women workers from 5 factories in the Free Trade Zone. They were interviewed at their 'Boarding Houses' due to inaccessibility at the work place.

It was revealed that 78% of the respondents had either passed GCE(OL) or GCE(AL) Examination, out of which 32% had passed AL with one to three credits. 8% among these had obtained two to three credits in AL Science. Many of those who passed AL Examination had aspired to become teachers and Bank clerks; two with AL Science had wanted to become a doctor and an engineer. It was also found that there was high exploitation in terms of wages and production demands and that inspite of all negative aspects, women workers had no alternative but take up FTZ work, even as a temporary measure, because of the need to support their economically and socially deprived families in the context of the lack of occupational options.

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