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Socio-cultural constraints to women's participation in the rural informal sector activities in Sri Lanka

The pattern of women's involvement in economic activities both within the household and outside is conditioned by a set of inter-related structural factors. In this context, rapidly expanding informal sector in Sri Lanka has potential to generate income for rural women because, most informal sector activities.

Data were collected by the means of survey, case studies and in-depth interviews in three main communities in Matale District. This study shows that women's low participation in the rural informal activities is determined by (a) their 'status group consciousness' based on the caste, kindred (=pavula) and gentry (=pelantiya) which are considered as closed groups and status groups in rural Sinhala community and (b) type of their household, whether it is nuclear or extended.

The study showed that even if the informal sector activities are not directly related to traditional caste-based occupations, status group consciousness influence women's decision in labour force participation. Furthermore, the participation is higher among women from nuclear families than from extended families. Finally, the study agrees that whatever influences made by push factors and pull factors, the socio-cultural constraints determine rural women's participation in wage work.