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### **Trends in female participation in university education in Sri Lanka, 1990-2010**

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University education in Sri Lanka has been expanded during the last two decades. The objective of this study was to understand the trends of female participation rates in different subject streams in Sri Lankan universities for two decades from 1990 to 2010. Published data by the University Grants Commission were used in the analysis.

The total number of students admitted for all degree programs increased from 9,000 in 1990 to 22,000 in 2010. The share of female students admitted to undergraduates programs has increased from 48% to 60% during the period. Percentage of females who qualified for university education increased from 60% to 64% over the same period. This indicates that females have become the main beneficiaries of this expansion and the proportion of female students who elects to stay away has decreased. Reasons for more females entering the universities may include enhanced social and economic standards, globalization, and international pressure for more inclusive policies. As a result of high female intake, the gender parity index for tertiary education in the country has increased to 1.4 which is the highest in the South Asian Region which reflects their growing expectations and positive attitudes for higher education rather than males.

The proportion of female students in Faculties of Arts has increased from 52% in 1990 to 75% in 2010. The gender parity indices for the Faculties of Management, Medicine and Science are almost the same at about 1.1 showing that gender ratios are similar for these faculties. The female participation in medicine is 58% while it is 23% for engineering. Findings also reveal that there are several areas where no substantial female participation can be seen. These areas include mathematics and related fields. Enhanced access to undergraduate education by females has not yet translated into post graduate education in the Country. Also, the female composition among the university academic staff is still at a lower level of about 42% although an increasing trend over the period is shown. The findings also indicate that the lowering expectations of males will be a major issue in future if the same trend continue.