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**Gender-based discrimination of rural women in Sri Lanka: Prevalence and experiences among women in the Anuradhapura District**

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Although gender discrimination in Sri Lanka is less intense compared to other South Asian countries, rural Sri Lankan women are believed to be more affected than urban women by gender-based discrimination as social and cultural influences operate stronger in rural areas compared to urban areas. The objective of this descriptive cross-sectional study conducted in four randomly selected rural villages in the Anuradhapura district was to describe (1) rural women's perceptions and experiences regarding gender-based discriminatory practices within and outside their families in rural Sri Lanka and (2) correlates of such discriminations. Women aged 18 years or more in each of eighty clusters (randomly selected from the four villages using a street map) were interviewed using a pre-tested interviewer-administered questionnaire.

The mean and median ages of the 742 respondents were 39.6 years (SD 14.1 years) and 38 years (mode 30 years), respectively. Many women perceived that both the married women and unmarried girls in rural Sri Lanka are discriminated in many domains. All women had experienced some form of gender-based discrimination during their life, either before or after marriage. The proportion of women who experienced discrimination varied in different domains, namely, education (62.8%), employment (46.6%), being a family burden (54.7%), health care provision (21.9%), and political independence (31.5%). Twenty six percent, 20.8%, and 8.4% respectively, had experienced comparatively more physical, psychological and sexual abuse within their families. Valuing females' opinions in decision making were 51.8%, 384 51.4%, and 58.2%, respectively for family, financial affairs, and social networking. Thirty eight percent of women had been either abused or harassed in public places. A variety of factors were significantly associated with different forms of discriminatory practices experienced by women.

Gender-based discriminations are widespread in rural Sri Lanka and are associated with a variety of social and cultural correlates. Addressing these factors needs to be embedded in all interventions which targets to empower women with necessary knowledge, attitudes, and skills to overcome barriers to equity.