



# FACILITATING NIGHT WORK FOR WOMEN IN SRI LANKA

From the IPS publication 'WOMEN, WORK AND NIGHT SHIFTS IN NURSING HOMES AND SUPERMARKETS'

Increasing female labour force participation has been a challenge for the country. These challenges are even greater for night-work and shift-work (hence referred to as non-standard work). There is a growing trend in shift and night work in the service sector in Sri Lanka. As labour force participation rates for males are already fairly high, policymakers are increasingly looking towards females to fill the worker requirements for non-standard jobs. The current literature has given limited attention on the specific challenges faced by females looking to work in non-standard jobs.

In this context, based on in-depth face-to-face interviews conducted among a sample of 30 associate professional and semi-skilled women working in the private hospital and supermarket sectors, an IPS study on 'Women, Work and Night Shifts in Nursing Homes and Supermarkets' examined Sri Lankan women's experiences and challenges in non-standard work. The study also analysed existing labour legislation for night work and associated implementation gaps.

### Key Findings

The majority of female employees interviewed in the study both wanted and needed to work. In the absence of standard work opportunities, non-standard work had important benefits for both women themselves and the wider society. It empowered women and also helped them to support their families financially in spheres such as education of children, health needs of parents, and building houses. However, a number of barriers prevented women from fully engaging in non-standard work.

### PUSH FACTORS



### PULL FACTORS



### Challenges at home and on the road

- Marriage and work-life balance, especially when no family support was available.
- Family and societal disapproval, especially in the supermarket sector, where the nature of work is not as appreciated and respected as in the nursing home industry.
- Unreliability and safety concerns of night-time transport when facilities were not provided by employers.
- Gender-based harassment on the road and in public transport, such as cat calling, whistling, and unwanted comments on physical appearance.

### Challenges at work and working conditions

- Long working hours often extending beyond the allocated shift.
- Lack of basic facilities and allocated meal times particularly for nursing home workers, whose patients require round-the-clock care.
- Harassment from customers, including inappropriate remarks and unwelcome physical conduct.

### Recommendations

1. *Addressing risks and inefficiencies associated with travelling to work in the night* by increasing the frequency and reliability of public transport facilities. Further, strict regulations should safeguard women from harassment in public transport and on the road.
2. *Legislation and monitoring mechanisms should be tightened to improve working conditions and facilities* to ensure that workers are not exploited in night/shift work.
3. *Factoring in additional costs involved in working in the night* when determining minimum wages will motivate more women to engage in night work.
4. *Building awareness of workers' rights* via media campaigns on entitlements and legislation will help protect workers from being exploited.
5. *Challenging conventional gender roles from an early age* to empower girls and women to follow their aspirations and to stand up for their rights. Introducing gender awareness and equality at the school level can help reshape attitudes and beliefs of children on women in the work place, as they grow up to be responsible citizens who contribute to society.

*This Policy Insight is based on findings of the IPS study "Women, Work and Night Shifts in Nursing Homes and Supermarkets" by Nisha Arunatilake, Ashani Abayasekara, Chathurga Karunanayake and Dulini Fernando. It can be purchased from the Publications Unit of the IPS.*



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