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# IPS study exposes obstacles faced by Lankan women in pursuit of decent work

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- Only 7.7% of working-age females engaged in formal employment with fair wages and reasonable working hours

The pursuit of decent work for women remains a significant challenge in Sri Lanka, with only 7.7 percent of working-age females engaged in formal employment, with fair wages and reasonable working hours, a study by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) showed.

This persistent issue is further exacerbated by a host of unique barriers, preventing women from accessing quality employment opportunities. IPS Director Research Dr. Nisha Arunatilake noted that employers consider women's additional household and caregiving responsibilities when hiring workers, affecting the demand for female workers.

Sri Lankan legislation places higher costs on employers when hiring females, including maternity leave and added security expenses. Even when women are recruited, they face constraints and disadvantages in opportunities for promotions and career development, owing to their household duties. According to the IPS, a critical issue is the limited availability of decent jobs for women, particularly outside the Western province, where about 30 percent of jobs are in the agriculture sector. These jobs are often low-paying and less stable, further limiting women's access to quality employment.

The IPS pointed out that access to decent work has improved for women who are English literate and possess higher levels of education, while the households with male members in formal employment create better prospects for women.

However, the responsibility of educating school-going children often restricts women's chances of securing decent work. The study further noted that outdated labour laws that discriminate against women remain a challenge, compounded by the lack of female representation in decision-making committees.

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