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In Sri Lanka, only 7.7% of working-age females are engaged in formal employment with decent wages and decent working hours, a recent IPS study revealed.

The country's persistent challenge of low female labour force participation is compounded by a multitude of unique barriers to improving women's access to decent work. Due to the heavier household and caregiving responsibilities falling on women, they face challenges when participating in the labour force and securing decent work. Sri Lanka's labour market is characterised by several gender-specific challenges. Dr Nisha Arunatilake, Director of Research at IPS, notes that employers consider women's additional household and caregiving responsibilities when hiring workers, affecting the demand for female workers. Furthermore, 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. Another main issue in Sri Lanka is the limited availability of decent jobs, especially outside the Western province.

Dr Arunatilake said, "about 30% of the jobs in these areas are in the agriculture sector," which mostly comprises vulnerable jobs with low income. This, combined with employers' preference for recruiting males, further restricts women's access to decent work opportunities. For females, the percentage is 7.7%, lower than the male percentage of 8.3%.

The study also emphasised that access to decent work improves when women are English literate and have higher levels of education. Additionally, households with male members in formal work increase prospects for women to enter decent work.

Unfortunately, the presence of school-going children decreases their chances of decent work, as women shoulder increased responsibility for their children's education. Outdated labour laws still retain provisions that are discriminatory to women.

The lack of female representation in decision-making committees further compounds the challenges faced by women seeking decent work.

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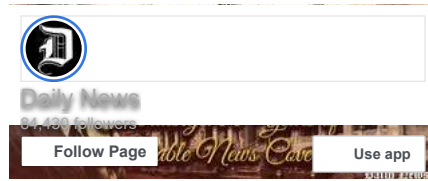
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