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**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEMALE LABOUR
FORCE PARTICIPATION AND FERTILITY:
A STUDY OF THE FEMALE LABOUR FORCE
IN THE TEA PLANTATION SECTOR IN THE
KANDY DISTRICT (SRI LANKA).**

By

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Thesis

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Abstract

In recent decades much concern has been shown at a global level on female participation in the labour force. Though many research studies have been done at various levels on the subject, very little research has been carried out on the economic perspectives relating to the plantation women's contribution to the labour force. When compared with the other sectors in the Sri Lankan economy relatively more women participate in the labour force in the plantation sector. The participation of plantation women in the work force is determined by various socio-economic and population related factors. Their fertility level plays an important role in such participation. There exists a negative relationship between their fertility levels and participation in work. This has been referred to in previous researches too.

The participation of women in the work force in the plantations has been significantly high. On the other hand, their fertility too has been quite high upto 1993. The fertility of the plantation - based women has been higher than that of others at the national level. However, a considerable decline in the fertility rate of these women has been observed in recent times (EHB, 1999). In this context, it has become very pertinent to examine the causes that contributed to such decline. Also, it is necessary to analyze the inter - relationships between the fertility aspect of plantation women and their participation in labour force.

The purpose of the present study is to identify the changes that have occurred in their participation rate in labour force in relation to their fertility levels. The study also makes an attempt to assess the effects of the above factors on the plantation economy.

The information contained in this study is drawn from two sources: primary and secondary. The supplementary information was gathered through formal interviews by using a questionnaire. Informal discussions were also held to gather additional information. Field observations formed a further source of information.

Kandy District formed the geographical region for this study and plantations located in this district were selected for detailed study. A cluster of 50 estates was earmarked for the research and 17 estates were randomly selected as samples for this purpose. From each selected estate 25 % families were selected at random for detailed study. In all 1080 families were included in this study.

The assistance of 5 trained researchers was obtained to collect relevant data over a period of 5 months (05/01/2000 – 05/03/2001). The data collected were computerized and categorical data analysis (chi-square test) and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were carried out. It was further scrutinized using SPSS, EXCEL package to ensure the significance of the results.

The study revealed a close link between the educational level of women and their choice of employment. When women chose employment within the estate, the relationship between education and employment was not positively related. At the same time, when women chose employment outside the estates, education and employment showed a positive linkage, the reason being that women with some level of education reject estate employment as lacking in dignity. Only 40 percent of those involved in estate sector employment have had job satisfaction. It is thus not surprising that most of the estate women now prefer working outside the estates.

Besides the above, greater attention was also paid in this study to existing linkages between women's participation in labour force and their fertility rates. It was observed that while, factors like women's participation in labourforce, age at marriage, education and income levels, culture etc have had an impact on the fertility rate of women, contraceptive methods too, have had a significant influence on it. The study reveals that there was a positive relationship between fertility rate and the use of contraceptive methods among these women. It was further observed that the economic value attached to children is very high among the estate workers. However, the number of children happens to be significantly low due to widespread use of contraceptive methods.

In the context of these characteristics of the plantation community, it is important that in planning the development of the plantation sector, adequate attention should be paid to the productive and reproductive activities of the women.

Recommendations for improving the living conditions of women and for raising their productivity have been included in this study. Education is an important element in the development of any community. Hence, educational activities should be given an impetus in the plantation sector. Greater awareness should be made on the relevance of education to the development of plantation women.