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ENTRY LEVEL BARRIERS FOR FEMALE AGRICULTURAL GRADUATES IN SRI LANKA

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In Sri Lanka, the majority of agricultural graduates who graduate from government universities are females. The issue is, whether they get occupations to match their degree compared to their male counterparts. According to literature, there are human capital differences, gender differences, and prejudice, which hinder females entering and climbing the career ladder in organizations. The main objective of this research was to analyze the entry level barriers for female agricultural graduates, particularly in agricultural firms.

This study was a cross sectional survey, using questionnaires accompanied by informal discussions. The sample consisted of 50 randomly selected female agricultural graduates and 30 final year female agricultural undergraduates. Alongside, interviews were conducted with Human Resource (HR) managers in two leading agribusiness firms in Sri Lanka. Descriptive statistical techniques were used to analyze data using the SPSS software.

More than half of the graduate respondents (54%) were employed in non-agricultural organizations. The respondents employed in private and government agricultural firms were 24% and 22% respectively. Under the human capital differences, the respondents university results did not significantly affect job opportunities, but the professional qualifications had contributed to gain access to more competitive private sector jobs. There was no evidence to prove that there were work-life conflicts specifically affecting female graduates. Considering the gender differences, it was revealed that there was no perceived difference in work commitment, leadership effectiveness and negotiation skills. The HR managers viewed female graduates as more or less similar to their male counterparts with respect to work commitment but less effective in leadership and negotiation skills. Even though the graduate respondents showed highly positive attitudes upon their motivation to lead, 43% of the undergraduate respondents showed negative attitudes. Considering the barriers based on prejudice, gender stereotyping of jobs was apparent at both graduate and undergraduates levels. The vulnerability issues have led females to omit most of the jobs related to agriculture. Surprisingly, social barriers do not show a significant relationship with the selection of job sector. As emphasized by HR managers, gender biased perceptions and evaluation, act against the recruitment of female graduates to the private sector.

In conclusion, while there were no substantial effects from human capital and gender differences, prejudice has created more gender based entry level barriers. While increasing awareness of agricultural firms about the female majority among agricultural graduates, promoting gender equity, and making female undergraduates more competitive through reducing human capital and gender differences would be important.