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## **Pushed out and Pulled in: Sri Lankan Women Arts Graduates' Employment in the Public Sector<sup>1</sup>**

*Aloka T. Kumarage*

The Sri Lankan public sector is known to have an over-concentration of women with arts graduates also known to have higher rates of employment in this same sector. With wages in the public sector relatively low compared to the private sector, this over-concentration of women in the sector has become a leading factor in gender inequality and the wage gap in Sri Lanka. In addition, the highest levels of unemployment in Sri Lanka are recorded among women with university degrees (Sri Lanka Labor Force Survey, 2011), with most women degree holders known to be arts graduates (University Grants Commission, 2012). The combined effect of these demographics makes women arts graduates in Sri Lanka one of the most vulnerable groups among Sri Lankan graduates. Problematizing the gap between genders in university education and employment patterns, this paper explores labour market trends specific to women arts graduates in Sri Lanka. Specifically, this paper is centred on understanding the nature of employment restrictions for Sri Lankan women arts graduates by examining the factors that lead to women's under-employment in the private sector relative to the public sector.

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Indices and measurements created to measure a country's development imply that a minimal gender gap in society is desirable for development. The gender gap for many aspects in Sri Lanka is not as large when compared to most developing nations (ADB, 2008; Cameron, Dowling & Worswick, 2001). One standardised measurement that reflects inequality in achievements between women and men in three dimensions (reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market) is the Gender Inequality Index (UNDP, 2013). UNDP (2013) reports indicate that the Gender Inequality Index for Sri Lanka is 0.402. This is significantly better than the 0.610 of their closest neighbor India and the South Asian average of 0.568.

This minimal gender gap in Sri Lanka is known to be prevalent in education enrollment rates (Gunewardena 2006). Of those who sit for the G.C.E Advanced Level, a little over half (56.7%) are women. The same can be seen in university enrollments where 54% of those who enroll are women (ADB, 2008). However, these figures disguise the fact that not all disciplines have an equal female-male enrollment. A larger proportion (66%) of the Advanced Level arts stream students are women. This gap is further increased among those who enter the arts faculty in university where 70% are women. Correspondingly, there is a large underrepresentation of women in the engineering and information technology faculties (ADB, 2008). The number of arts graduates appears to increase each year, and in 2013, the number of arts undergraduates admitted to state universities was 7,995 out of which 6,456 (81%) were women (University Grants Commission, 2013). This results in a large number of arts graduates, mostly women, entering the labour market each year.

It is also reported that the problem of unemployment is most acute among women who are educated (G.C.E Advanced Level and above) (Sri Lanka Labor Force Survey, 2011). The larger theoretical understanding is that educating women has higher economic returns when compared to educating men (Cameron, Dowling & Worswick, 2001; Malhotra & DeGraff, 1997). However, this premise does not appear to hold true for Sri Lankan women graduates where a woman with a university degree is only 17% more likely to be employed than a woman with no formal education. In addition, it appears that in Sri Lanka, employment of women is increasing, in spite of plummeting post-secondary education (Arunatilake & Jayawardena, 2010). This is a considerably lower figure in comparison to the average of 49% in other nations (Cameron, Dowling & Worswick, 2001). These low figures point to not only the high unemployment rates among women degree holders but also underemployment, including the limitation of jobs in lower paying institutions.

General perceptions among policy makers and private sector employers is that women arts graduates prefer public sector jobs over private sector jobs even if it means that they would remain unemployed for long periods, and this is often despite having other job opportunities available to them. This preference appears problematic due to the limited number of jobs available and lower wages in the public sector. The various reasons for this difference in preference, especially the sociocultural aspects, have not been clearly identified in Sri Lanka. In this paper, an attempt has been made to identify and categorise these reasons as push and pull factors. Impact of the factors on preference was measured by conducting a survey among arts graduates employed in the public sector.

Many factors are often influential in the job preference of women arts graduates, making it difficult to identify the effect of one over another. However, identifying and separating these factors as forces that either repulse them out of the private sector or attract them toward the public sector is useful in order to identify necessary policy rectifications that might address larger gender inequalities. 'Push factors' have been defined as negative considerations (Shultz, Morton & Weckerle, 1998) that induce women graduates to avoid the private sector. The push factors as

identified in the literature review of this study are; (a) discrimination in the private sector, (b) limited access to private sector jobs, (c) lower mobility for women that limits the availability of the private sector, and (d) the lack of skills that are required for the private sector.

Workplace discrimination is often a subtle factor that discourages certain social groups from entering or succeeding in certain occupations or organisations. Discrimination can occur in overt or covert ways at many stages of employment, particularly in hiring practices, wages and promotions. An economic analysis by O'Donnell, Jayawardana and Jayakody (2012) reveals that women workers in particular, experience considerable gender pay gaps in Sri Lanka, especially in the private sector. Thus, it would make the private sector with higher gender pay gaps a less attractive option for women employees.

Little research exists on discriminatory hiring practices in Sri Lanka but statistical evidence points to an absence of women in the private sector, particularly arts graduates. In the sample gathered for this study 73% of women arts graduates were employed in the public sector, a disproportionately large group in comparison to men and other degree holders. Statistics suggest that women in Sri Lanka account for only 20% of all senior officials and managers (Department of Census and Statistics, 2009). On the basis of this statistic, Fernando and Cohen (2011) argue that there are barriers to women's advancement in Sri Lankan organisations, especially since there do not appear to be a shortage in Sri Lankan women's skill sets or ambition. It is instead explained through the disadvantageous position women have when working in 'deeply gendered organisations, structured around the interests, lifestyles and social norms of their male colleagues' (Fernando & Cohen, 2011).

Discriminatory practices women face are more prevalent in the private sector in comparison to the public sector where the nature of work required for advancement, and workplace adaptability is of a gendered nature. Private sector employees in Sri Lanka have reported heavy workloads, long working hours and participation in many non-work related activities at the workplace as mandatory to advancement in their career. In the public sector, these requirements are around respect and compliance to supervisors in order to win their favour (Fernando & Cohen, 2011).

As in most other developed nations, such forms of covert discrimination arise from discriminatory work dynamics. Green (2003) explains that institutional structures and hierarchies that are flatter lend themselves to more discriminatory practices towards women. In Sri Lanka where, in comparison to the public sector, the private sector has a flatter hierarchy, advancement is only possible if employees are able make use of flexible and long work hours, and participate in activities that are largely accepted within male social groups. Therefore the private sector work ethic is less adaptable for those who have more responsibilities outside of work and women who do not wish to take part in male dominated activities. Cultural norms in Sri Lanka largely dictate that most household responsibilities including caring for children and elderly parents belong to women and thus, requirements for advancing in the private sector would directly affect women more than it would affect men.

Access to jobs in Sri Lanka is obtained in different ways: newspaper advertisements, government tenders and personal connections. In Sri Lanka, Amarasuriya (2010) citing a study by Mayer and Salih points that 64% of jobholders were recruited through the recommendations of friends and relatives during their school to work transition. Access to jobs in the private sector is more dependent on personal connections (Amarasuriya, 2010), whereas in the public sector it is more through newspaper advertisements and tender procedures. As such for any employee to have access to private sector jobs, it is almost a pre-requisite that they have access to powerful networks within the organisation.

Networks formed by women are not central to the organisation and are thus not very influential. These networks tend to provide less work-related help compared to the networks formed by men even after securing a position within the firm. This results in the occupation of labour market positions that have richer resources by males (Lin, 2000). As a result, women experience more career instability than men, again working out to women and their networks having lesser social resources to draw on. McDonald, Lin and Ao (2009) explain that segregated social networks trap and isolate women from information and influence which could otherwise help them advance their careers and access particular jobs.

The social structural circumstances are therefore critical for understanding the situation in the labour market, and it is not just the presence of contacts that matter but also the diffusion of information.

“Social network composition affects the kinds of jobs that people obtain through informal job matching—that is, hiring through job referrals and personal contacts. In general, women tend to learn about job opportunities from other women and men from other men. Therefore, women who use informal job search methods and female personal contacts to obtain jobs are more likely to find employment in female-dominated workplaces” (McDonald, Lin, Ao, 2009).

Thus the prevailing situation is also somewhat responsible for propagating the lack of access to private sector jobs for women arts graduates in Sri Lanka, and will continue in the genderisation of the public and private sectors.

Relocation for work or long daily commutes to work is common, but benefits of time and financial costs for such are not necessarily the same for all. In terms of commuting, research proves that for women in particular, a shorter commute allows better returns on earnings and more time for their household responsibilities (Madden, 1981). For women with children, the average commute distance decreases further and both residences and employment becomes more suburbanised (Madden, 1981).

Studies show that relocation is beneficial for married men but harmful to the career of married women, where it results in inconsistent employment and declining earnings for the women. For men, on the other hand, family migration is associated with higher earnings (Shauman & Noonan, 2007). These outcomes are intensified with higher education levels. Highly educated men reap larger monetary benefits from relocation compared to women's earning potential, and that even after a year from migration, local labour market conditions have no influence on her work outcomes (Shauman & Noonan, 2007). As understood through the literature, women, particularly educated women, or those with children have less to benefit from relocation or longer commutes for work. Thus, there is often a tendency to work close to home due to their low mobility. In Sri Lanka, most private sector jobs are available only in the larger city centres whereas public sector jobs are more dispersed. Sri Lankan women would therefore be limited to the public sector due to the combined effect of fewer private sector jobs outside of the city and their reduced mobility or less incentive for relocation.

There is more competition and less job security in the private sector, therefore workers are compelled to perform well and succeed. Failing to do so will result in loss of their job. Success in the graduate labour market would often be identified as being employed in jobs that appropriately utilise the skills and knowledge developed by the graduate during the course of their university studies. Bridgstock (2009) expects that the university education allows adequate preparation to first transition into the world of work and then maintain the graduates employability through course

work that “involves activities such as clarification of personal aims and abilities, understanding the requirements of the labour market and the ability to actively engage in the career building process” (Bridgstock, 2009, p.35).

Understanding employability from the employers’ point of view seems to mean readiness for work. That is the possession of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and commercial understanding that will enable new graduates to make productive contributions to organisational objectives soon after commencing employment (Mason, Williams & Cranmer, 2009; Bridgstock, 2009). Studies list skills necessary for enhancing employability of graduates as communication, numeracy, computer literacy, ‘learning how to learn’ at a higher level, literacy, problem-solving skills, team-working skills and understanding of the world of work (Mason et al., 2009) all of which they assert should be learned while in the university. Bridgstock (2009) also adds that the combination of career management skills and self-management skills are important and the development of such skills need to begin early and should additionally be assessed as a mandatory component of university education. While almost all types of employment would require these skills, those entering the Sri Lankan private sector seem to need these more because of the difference in the nature of work involved (English oriented, heavy reliance on IT and use of more cutting edge techniques), and the increase of competition in the labour market (less job security and the need to be ahead and up to date).

Even though some skills can only be acquired after starting employment, it is possible to improve the acquisition of these skills through methods followed in degree education settings. Studies show that the exposure of students to employer priorities and the way decision-making takes place at work have positive effects on the future matches between graduates and their employers (Mason et al., 2009). In contrast, it is possible to assume that the lack of such exposure or the acquisition of such skills required by employers in the private sector would pose a challenge for arts graduates from Sri Lankan universities in particular, making private sector work less attractive. This effect is believed to affect women more than men due to social gender norms that shape self-assessment of skills (Correll, 2001). For instance, women often assess their own skills lower than men do due to social norms that lead them to believe so, while a skill-based test would often reveal otherwise. This self-evaluation, once played out within the work environment leads to disadvantageous outcomes for women that view themselves inadequate for the job.

Pull factors are typically positive considerations (Shultz, Morton & Weckerle, 1998) that attract women female arts graduates toward public sector employment. The pull factors as identified in the literature review of this study are; (a) higher job satisfaction in the public sector, (b) more social benefits in the public sector, (c) better work-life balance and (d) higher levels of safety in the public sector.

Not everything about employment is about financial benefits; rather it can be about job satisfaction, non-monetary rewards such as special benefits and facilities at the workplace, and the enjoyment of doing work that gives a sense of accomplishment. Clark, Kristensen and Westergaard-Nielsen (2009) identify two types of job satisfaction, sensitivity to status and signal.

Scholars point out the association of a difference in status when engaging in the public sector vs. private sector, which exists across a wide spectrum of occupations, irrespective of cultural context or industry as a main factor in job satisfaction. Public and private sector employees tend to perceive and evaluate their jobs differently. Studies show that private sector employees place greater value on economic gains and ranked feeling “in” on things and sympathetic help on personal problems higher in importance than public sector workers. On the contrary, public sector employees perceive job security and the value of the job or the meaningfulness of the work

as being more important (Karl & Sutton, 1998). Sharma & Bajpai (2010) have also found that employees in public sector organisations have a greater degree of organisational commitment in comparison to private sector employees and that job satisfaction also tends to increase with higher organisational commitment.

Differences in signal are associated with the security the employee has regarding their earnings. While some workers are intrinsically positive and satisfied, and are perhaps not particularly sensitive to status, there are other workers who are less happy and do care about where they stand in the earnings distribution. Clark et al. (2009) explain that satisfied workers (these workers are not status-sensitive) choose organisations where employees' earnings are high while dissatisfied workers choose firms where average earnings are lower. These findings support the idea that employees who feel the entire organisation is doing well are signalled to have the promise of a good future. It is speculated that Sri Lankan women may broadly fit into this second category. Additionally, in the largely patriarchal Sri Lankan society where women are often not the primary income earner of a household, they may view their employment as a satisfactory outlet, more so than an economic opportunity. Thus job satisfaction becomes an important influence in predetermining women's preference for the public sector.

One of the main differences between behaviour of men and women especially at the workplace is believed to be men's functional orientation and women's relational orientation in accomplishing tasks. Women in particular, value social benefits at the workplace (Chen, Mao & Hsieh, 2012) and appear to be drawn towards occupations that enable many interactions with colleagues, customers (including students, clients) such as teaching and nursing that allow natural relationships with others at the workplace. In workplace relationships, this difference translates into men tending to seek out relationships that provide a functional aspect of getting a job done while women are more likely to seek out relationships that allow social and emotional support in times of stress (Morrison, 2009). Since workplace relationships directly influence the work and career of men through functional purposes such as building larger networks, and exchange of information they are thus highly correlated with job satisfaction (Morrison, 2009). Morrison (2009) asserts that this is different for women where women's workplace friendships will be more affected by negative or stressful situations than men's.

One possible explanation for Morrison's (2009) finding that women's friendships at work were not consistently associated with an increase in satisfaction, is that when women become dissatisfied with their jobs they may make more friends; leaning on their colleagues for social, emotional and instrumental support. Even though women's workplace relationships do not lead to higher job satisfaction, studies show that they do increase organisational commitment and cohesion. It is plausible that Morrison's analysis is relevant to the Sri Lankan labour force where most women are drawn towards the ability to develop relationships in the public sector thus resulting in higher organisational commitment and subsequently a clustering of many women in the public sector.

Role ambiguity and being ill informed may also reduce an employee's effectiveness, resulting in the burdening of co-workers or causing resentment and inhibiting the development of workplace friendships. Previous studies have demonstrated that role ambiguity causes a host of job-related problems (Chen et al., 2012; Sias, 2005). It is possible that the public sector has clearer job definitions and roles for workers, thereby reducing conflict among colleagues and allowing the formation of friendships. However, the private sector in Sri Lanka is a highly competitive setting, where an employee with role ambiguity may perceive a lack of mutual assistance and job information sharing among employees because co-workers would like to maintain their individual

advantages. Competition among employees would thus moderate the relationship between job ambiguity and workplace friendship (Chen et al., 2012) resulting in a work environment hostile towards facilitating relationships.

In the cultural context of Sri Lanka, women typically bear more responsibility in day-to-day household activities. Having additional responsibilities at home would therefore often place constraints on the options available for women in the labour force, as they strive to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Work location, work hours, and ambiguity level of work role are found to influence the ability to keep up with work demands as well as provide for family needs. Fernando & Cohen (2011) have found that Sri Lankan women regardless of the employment sector find it difficult to devote additional hours to work because of domestic commitments and therefore continue to face challenges in developing their careers within organisational contexts.

Hakim (2006) suggests that in order to accommodate formal employment with family responsibilities, women gravitate towards jobs that are local, can be done part-time or for short periods, and to jobs with fixed hours of work that can be fitted around family life. Women who want family-friendly flexible work hours usually require short and predictable hours as well. In contrast, men work towards management jobs, accepting long hours and more overtime in return for higher earnings. Pressure is placed on the work-family balance by the ambiguity of the work-role, but its effect is not predictable, for example flexible working arrangements for some workers allow them to achieve a better balance while for some it increases the tension. As such, some organisations proactively try to help their employees engage in better time management practices to reduce the work-family tension (Michel, Mitchelson, Pichler & Cullen, 2010). Short, fixed work hours, defined work roles, proximity to home along with family friendly policies like parental leave seem key ingredients for a healthy work-life balance for women. The public sector in Sri Lanka seems to fit most of these prerequisites because evidence suggests that work hours are more fixed and shorter in comparison to the private sector. Also for the requirement of being located close to home, public sector jobs seem like a more plausible choice for those who wish to work outside of the main city hubs, since larger, private sector employers are located mainly in city centres.

Preference theory which explains and predicts women's choices between formal work and family work theorises that once genuine choices are open to them, women choose between three different lifestyles: 'home-centred', 'work-centred' and 'adaptive' (Hakim, 2006). 'Home-centred' women choose to focus on family and not enter the labour market, while 'work-centred' women are focused on competitive activities in the public sphere resulting in work-family conflicts or choosing not to have a family. 'Adaptive' women prefer to combine employment and family work without giving a fixed priority to either. In some countries and in certain occupations where part-time jobs are still rare, women must choose other types of jobs if they prefer to work. For example seasonal jobs, temporary work, or school-term-time jobs all offer a better work-family balance than the typical full-time job. This is especially important if commuting is also involved (Hakim, 2006). Drawing on Hakim's (2006) classifications of women's work choices to the Sri Lankan context, it appears that the private sector work ethic would only be accommodative of 'work-centred' women because of long work hours, nature of work needed for advancement, and less adaptive leave policies. Thus it forces all other women whose work-choices are 'family-centred' or 'adaptive' to the public sector where it is perceived as being favourable to maintain a healthier work-family balance.

Existing literature on safety at the workplace discusses a wide range of issues. These are often related to physical, sexual harassment at the workplace, work related injuries, hazardous substances, noise, and misuse of private information. This study focuses on physical and sexual

harassment as being the main threat to safety in the workplace. While other issues are applicable to work-conditions in Sri Lanka, the researcher has assumed that those other factors were not as influential in relation to the preference of either public or private sector jobs, and that the presence of such factors would be negligible at workplaces that arts graduates typically work. In order to limit the effect of workplace harassment on job preference, this paper discusses only work structure and environment factors that lead to safety issues.

Women are seen to face more threats to safety at work than men (Zapf, Escartín, Einarsen, Hoel & Vartia, 2011). This study therefore, tests the relevance of this theory to Sri Lankan women and establishes differences between public and private sector workplaces. In addition to general safety at the workplace, work related policies that might make women more vulnerable in public were also considered. For example, due to existing social norms and gender politics it is sometimes deemed unsafe for women to travel alone after dark in certain locations. Work location and work hours are also therefore important indicators as to whether employment promotes the safety and wellbeing of women employees.

Preliminary research revealed that the currently available data relevant to Sri Lankan graduate employees was insufficient, and thus required a primary data collection. Therefore for this study, data was gathered through surveys conducted among graduate employees in Sri Lanka. Due to study constraints, a single city centre, Kandy, was selected for administering the surveys. Kandy was chosen as a more suitable urban centre over Colombo, the larger and the more socio-economically complex urban hub of Sri Lanka, for several reasons. Reasons apart from logistical feasibility were that the sample from Kandy would include both rural and urban employees providing a more comprehensive cross-section of socio-cultural backgrounds in the sample. The researcher also assumed that the proximity of the University of Peradeniya would be helpful to this study as there will be a significant number of graduate employees in Kandy.

Once the study area was decided, a number of public and private sector institutions where graduates might typically work were chosen. A snowball sampling technique was used to identify both workplaces as well as graduate employees. Although this study attempts to identify job preferences of women, many graduate employees in these institutions were requested to fill out a questionnaire irrespective of gender. The questionnaire contained questions designed to give insight on what socio-cultural reasons influenced their job preferences.

The data collection that took place in July-August 2011, which resulted in the collection of 245 questionnaires, falling slightly short of the predetermined target sample size of 300 responses. A summary of the sample characteristics is included in Table 1. 65.3% of the sample comprised of female respondents. 48.6% respondents were arts graduate employees and 66.5% of the sample, were employed in the public sector.

**Table 1**

	Women		Men		Total
	Arts	Non-arts	Arts	Non-arts	
Public	61	48	28	21	158
Private	22	24	6	27	79
Total	83	72	34	48	237*
	155		82		

\*Excludes 8 responses with missing demographic information



The questionnaire was made available in three languages. The questionnaire length was one double sided page and consisted of several close-ended questions organised into three sections; general information, information on the respondent's current job and information on the respondent's work environment.

This study identifies sociocultural factors that influence job preferences for women arts graduates in Sri Lanka. A logistic regression model was deemed most suitable for this study, as it will allow the computation of the effect of each factor in determining the odds of being employed in the private sector. Since this study only distinguishes between two possible outcomes, public sector employment and private sector employment, a binary logistical regression model was used for data analysis.

A major portion of the information gathered from the questionnaire responses was qualitative. As such it was necessary to code such data into quantifiable measures for statistical analysis. The data was processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The dependent variable, sector of employment, consists of two possible outcomes where public sector employment was coded 0 and private sector was coded 1. The coefficients calculated would thus be used to measure the odds of being employed in the private sector.

The first model includes variables that were hypothesised to be push factors that discouraged women arts graduates out of the private sector. The independent variables were therefore access to jobs, discrimination, mobility and skills. The second model included variables that were hypothesised to be pull factors that encouraged women arts graduates into the public sector. The independent variables were therefore, job satisfaction, social benefits, work-life balance and safety.

The independent variables used for conducting a binary logistic analysis were computed using indices that were comprehensive measures combining the component measures. The independent variables used for regression are discussed below.

Access to jobs in Sri Lanka is often believed to be most effective if obtained through personal connections or favours from influential people. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to pick a category that would best describe how they found their current job: either through a personal connection, advertisement in a newspaper or other. All responses that indicated jobs obtained through a personal connection were coded 1 while those indicating as through advertisements and other were coded 0. The basic hypothesis was that the lack of networks which allow access to private sector jobs was influential in the restriction of the women's job market.

The next assumption was that lesser discrimination against women in the public sector made it more attractive to women employees. Discrimination was measured within two contexts: self-perceived levels of discrimination against the respondent in wages and promotions and the employees' satisfaction level of the opportunities received for pay rises or promotions. These were measured by two Likert scale questions and were used to create a discrimination index ranging from 1 to 4, with 1 being defined as least self-reported discrimination and 4 defined as most discrimination.

Mobility was measured using two variables: whether the respondent had relocated their residence for his/her current job and whether the respondent lives away from immediate family (is boarded). A mobility index ranging from 0-2 was calculated combining these two measures with 0 defined as low mobility and 2 as being high mobility.

For this study, respondents were asked to state their perceived degree of soft skill suitability for their current job. The type of soft skills implied by the data gathered pertains to communication, leadership, computer literacy and multi-tasking skills. The responses were coded 1 through 4 with

1 being those least confident about their competency in the soft skills required and 4 being the most.

The non-monetary rewards in this study were measured using a 4-point Likert scale. Respondents stated the degree to which they agreed their work was meaningful and gave them a sense of accomplishment. Responses coded 1 were strongly disagreeable and 4 were strongly agreeable to the fact that their work is meaningful and gives a sense of accomplishment.

The work environment often involves interaction with other individuals. The study tested whether the nature of the work or the workplace being more suitable to forming friendships, was more attractive to females than males. Two Likert scale questions were used to measure the perceived extent of social interaction taking place in the respondent's workplace. Using a 4-point scale, the respondent stated to which degree (a) his/her closest friends were at the workplace and (b) the workplace setup was suitable for cultivating friendships. An index ranging from 1 to 4 was created using the two measurements with 1 as being least suitable for building relationships and 4 as most suitable.

Certain aspects of public sector jobs are assumed to be more suitable for balancing the other role most women employees fill as a caregiver of children, elderly parents and other dependents. The responses to questions on the (a) amount and flexibility of work hours, (b) policies on maternity leave and child care support, (c) leave available and (d) need for excess effort, working overtime for advancement were compared between sectors to test for any significant differences. An index was created using the responses to these four questions, which reflects the general self-reported satisfaction level employees have in regards to maintaining a healthy work-life balance with their current job. The index ranges from 1 through 4 with 1 being least satisfied and 4 being most satisfied.

Of the three questions used to measure the respondent's perception of safety within the workplace, only two were used for analysis as one question appeared to have been poorly answered (the researcher suspects that the question was misunderstood). The two questions used, had the respondents state to which degree they agreed or disagreed that their (a) workplace location was suitable for safe travel and (b) work times were suitable for safe travel. A safety index ranging from 1 to 4 was created, with 1 being a workplace that is least safe and 4 being very safe.

The comparison of means of the measurements by gender as seen in Table 2 shows some differences that point to an overall disparity between men and women in each of the variables.

Considering the measurement in regard to the use of personal networks, men have reported a mean of 0.25, which is higher than that of the women's mean of 0.17. This indicates that more men have accessed their jobs through personal connections than women. This result is as predicted, where men are more likely to have better access to jobs by having richer resources in the job market, (Lin, 2000; McDonald, Lin and Ao, 2009) in this case, the private sector.

Even though past studies in Sri Lanka indicate that women employees in Sri Lanka were discriminated against (Fernando & Cohen, 2011; O'Donnell, et.al, 2012), this particular study did not show a difference in the self-reported levels of discrimination for men and women where the mean for men (2.60) and women (2.59) were almost the same. Apart from a self-report bias, it is plausible that this result is explained by a minimal overt discrimination against a more educated cohort of women.

**Table 2***Means and SDs by gender (n=245)*

		Men		Women	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>Push Factors</i>					
	Personal Networks	0.25	0.44	0.17	0.38
	Discrimination	2.60	0.76	2.59	0.65
	Mobility	0.57	0.72	0.36	0.66
	Soft Skills	3.20	0.62	3.11	0.52
<i>Pull Factors</i>					
	Job Satisfaction	3.30	0.62	3.20	0.66
	Social Benefits	3.03	0.36	2.92	0.38
	Work-life Balance	2.14	0.57	2.84	0.53
	Safety	2.94	0.55	2.97	0.52

Considering the mobility factor, men have reported as having statistically higher mobility with a mean of 0.57 compared to the women's 0.36. This means that the men in the survey had relocated more compared to women. This again points back to the earlier discussion where it was predicted that men have more flexibility to move and reap dividends compared to women.

Overall, men were found to assess their skills as slightly more adequate for the required job compared with that reported by women. While men reported a mean skill competency level of 3.20, women's was 3.11. Correll's (2001) claim that women self-report less competence therefore, does not seem to hold true for graduate women in Sri Lanka.

When comparing the pull factors reported by the respondents, contrary to the expected results of this study, women reported a lower job satisfaction level than men. Therefore, the sense of accomplishment and engaging in work that seems meaningful was found to be unimportant for women's employment preference of the public sector.

Similarly, the expected higher social benefits for women in the public sector was proved wrong where there was no statistically significant difference between men and women. Thereby, Morrison's (2009) claim that women's friendships at work are not consistently associated with an increase in satisfaction and that when women become dissatisfied with their jobs they may make more friends, does not hold true for graduate employees in Sri Lanka.

The work-life balance reported by the respondents show that the women reported a statistically significant higher level of satisfaction than the men. The mean of the self-reported work-life balance satisfaction for men was 2.14 whereas it was 2.84 for women. While the reasons for the inverted results to what was expected are not easily identifiable, the large difference between genders points to some disparity in regards to a healthy work-life balance.

However safety of the workplace as reported did not show a significant difference between men and women's perceptions, with women perceiving their workplaces as safer by only a slight margin.

The figures in Table 3 represent coefficients that indicate the effect of each variable on the odds of being employed in a certain sector for all the respondents in the survey. Model 1 calculates the push out of the private sector and Model 2 calculates the pull towards the private sector. Table 4 contains results using the same models run for the women respondents' data only.

In Model 1, personal networks were seen as having the largest effect on preference with a coefficient of 3.252, it was also the most significant difference for men and women (Table 3). This indicates that use of a personal connection is therefore the key determiner in private sector employment in Sri Lanka. This phenomenon however is not unique to women because access was not found to be statistically significant, although it still has the largest effect when considering only the women in the sample (Table 4). In this instance, with women reporting that they have less access to connections and in effect to private sector employment (Table 2), the presence of a large and highly significant predictor of public sector employment proves that women lacking personal connections are likely to be in public sector employment.

Although men were observed to have much more mobility than women in the sample (Table 2), the effect of this difference was not largely influential in the push out of the private sector where the coefficient was only 0.082 and not statistically significant. However, since most Sri Lankan private sector employment opportunities are located within the city centres, the lower mobility levels reported by women (Table 2) maybe a finding that explains the concentration of more women in public sector employment that is more decentralised in location, despite being unable to draw any solid conclusions.

**Table 3**

Binary Logistic regression of effect on job preference (n=245)

	MODEL 1	MODEL 2
<i>Push Factors</i>		
Personal Networks	3.252*** (0.525)	
Discrimination	-0.322 (0.272)	
Mobility	0.082 (0.262)	
Soft Skills	0.078 (0.344)	
<i>Pull Factors</i>		
Job satisfaction		-0.233 (0.304)
Social Benefits		0.103 (0.429)
Work-life Balance		-0.505* (0.272)
Safety		0.593* (0.347)

The effect of any disparity in skill competence between men and women was found to be minimal in terms of a push out of the private sector with a coefficient of 0.078, which was again not statistically significant (Table 3)<sup>3</sup>. The coefficient at 0.016 is even smaller when considering only the women in the population (Table 4). With the reporting of perceived skill levels being similar between men and women (Table 2) this study thus proves that there is neither a significant self-reported lack of skills nor an influence of the skill requirements on women's preference for the public sector.

In Model 2, among the pull factors considered, the ability to have a healthy work-life balance had the largest and significant effect on the pull towards the public sector with a coefficient of -0.505 (Table 3). Considering only the women in the survey, this was again seen as being significant with a coefficient of -0.767 creating a larger effect on women's work preference (Table 4). With women self-reporting as being more satisfied than men in the work-life balance (Table 2), it further supports the hypothesis that women find the work-life balance as being important and thus validates the role of work-life balance as a negative predictor for private sector employment. Therefore as hypothesised, the private sector begins to appear less desirable for those with more responsibilities outside of work. Hakim's (2006) distinction between 'work-centred' women and 'family-centred' women helps explain that a large proportion of Sri Lankan graduate women, are 'family-centred' and would therefore prefer a work environment suitable for maintaining both family and employment, which is inevitably the public sector.

Perceptions of safety at the workplace were also found to be influential in the draw towards the public sector with a significant coefficient of 0.593 (Table 3), but this was not particular for women (Table 4). With both men and women reporting similar levels of safety (Table 2), workplace safety seems to play an important yet general role in job selection. However, in instances where the combined effects of the public sector workplaces and work hours are reported to be safer, together with the fact that women face more threats to safety at work than men (Zapf et al., 2011) it is possible that the public sector will appear to be a more attractive choice for Sri Lankan women.

**Table 4**

Binary Logistic regression of effect on job preference for women (n=160)

	MODEL 1	MODEL 2
<i>Push Factors</i>		
Access	3.827	
	0.788	
Discrimination	-0.394	
	0.368	
Mobility	-0.060	
	0.360	
Soft Skills	-0.016	
	0.453	
<i>Pull factors</i>		
Job satisfaction		-0.483
		0.333
Social benefits		-0.386
		0.549
Work-life balance		-0.767
		0.404
Safety		-0.048
		0.428

\*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.1

Sri Lanka's gender gap appears to be much less compared to developing countries. However this indicator relating to overall employment and opportunity conditions fail to fully represent the nuances of where female employment and education is concentrated, and where they are not. Furthermore, these disparities lead to varied circumstances for men and women. This is evident in this study where graduate employees despite having seemingly equal employment rates between genders, show nuanced differences when considering the type of job and workplace. The basis for this study was a mismatch in the supply and demand of women arts graduates in the job market, which results in unemployment, underemployment and restrictive job selection.

The analysis based on empirical quantitative data revealed two noteworthy results that explain women arts graduates' preference for the public sector. First, the lack of personal connections that allow access to private sector jobs was found to be the most predominant factor that pushed women arts graduates out of the private sector. Second, the strongest pull towards the public sector was found to be the policies and work ethics that enabled a healthy work-life balance.

In order to correct this problematic skew seen in the labour market it would be necessary to rectify private sector practices which result in the exclusion of women arts graduates. Such rectifications can be made by reducing the emphasis placed on the need for participation in activities outside of normal working hours and duties and allowing for more regular, predictable hours of work for women which will result in the creation of a pull effect to the private sector. Logistical arrangements which allow for better commute times, notably the use of modern concepts such as telecommuting or creating an office transport system or locating secondary offices outside of city centres can result in creating a pull effect associated with not only the work-family balance, but also some of the other minor factors such as work-place safety and relocation considered in this study. In addition, changing the recruitment and advancement practices to reduce the need of personal connections while increasing positive recognition based on quality of work and responsibilities will also help in accommodating this crucial sub-population by reducing the push effect associated with accessing private sector jobs.

The gender gap though impressive in Sri Lanka, hides the true picture of the skew found in the labour market. Women arts graduates in Sri Lanka are a growing population and leaving them reliant on public sector employment as shown in the study can be harmful. Improving private sector employment of this vulnerable yet crucial sub-population remains important to address subtle gender inequalities in Sri Lanka.

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