

GENDER, EMPLOYMENT AND HIGHER EDUCATION THEME: TRENDS IN EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS OF ARTS GRADUATES BY GENDER

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ABSTRACT

At present, female enrollment for higher education is steadily increasing and contemporary it is about 80% for Arts discipline. An analogy to this, female labour force participation is also grown enormously. There may be a disparity in the occupations sort out by female compared to their male counterparts. The objective of this study is to identify the variations in pursuing employment and the employment characteristics namely sector of employment, monthly salary and type of job by gender. A mail survey was conducted in the year 2016 on a random sample of Arts graduates from all Sri Lankan state universities who had graduated in 2012 to identify the changes in their employment over time. Employment status and employment characteristics at each month after graduation were determined using the effective date of the degree and the employment history records of these graduates. Initially, the percent employed among male graduates was higher compared to females until three months after graduation, and then the percent employed among females increased drastically. Compared to males females are in favour of getting a permanent job, better occupation positions and a better salary. Furthermore, the majority were employed as development officers in public sector followed by teaching irrespective of gender.

Keywords: Gender, Employment and Employment Characteristics

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, the literacy rate, percent enrolled in secondary education and also the labour force participation rate of females have increased compared to the twentieth century. But notably, the labour force participation of females differs considerably across education levels. The proportion of females engaged in the labour market steadily increases with the level of education. Female enrollment in university education has also increased considerably in the recent years, and at present, the highest enrollment (nearly 80%) is in the Arts discipline while the smallest is for the Engineering discipline (about 20%) in Sri Lanka. This is significant since one-third of the graduates in Sri Lankan universities are from the Arts discipline. Arts degrees are not career oriented degrees and it is the norm that these degrees do not make for strong career prospects. Because unlike Medicine, Engineering and vocational degrees which have explicit career outcomes, arts degrees are focused on enhancing student's knowledge and critical thinking in a variety of areas such as literature, history, fine art, economics, philosophy. Since their career direction is unclear it is vital

to study in depth about them to understand the real situation of the Arts graduates' employment.

According to the census carried out in 2012 for all graduates in Sri Lanka, the majority of the Arts graduates are a less privileged group from rural areas with less educated parents compared to others (Ramanayake et al., 2013). Their study further revealed that the employment rate of the Arts graduates is the lowest compared to other disciplines at the time of the graduation. Therefore, it is worthwhile to investigate whether these Arts graduates are capable of entering into the labour force quickly and also whether there is a disparity in the occupations sort out by them compared to their male counterparts. Thus, it is vital to investigate the gender disparities in the sector of employment, monthly salary, type of employment and the job positions.

The objective of this study is to identify the disparities in pursuing an employment and the employment characteristics by gender. The next section describes the past studies related to the topic. Then it explains the methodology of the study while the fourth section discusses the results. Finally, the conclusions

drawn are summarized opening the floor for suggested future work.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Even though there are a lot of studies about gender and employment only a limited number of comprehensive studies are about the gender and graduate employment in Sri Lanka. Gunathilake et al. (2010) discussed a survey of school to work transitions for social science university graduates of the University of Colombo. According to the findings, only over half of the graduates surveyed had found a job after four years of graduation. Female graduates have a low likelihood of being employed in the private sector. Furthermore, this study revealed that Sri Lankan graduates seem to prefer working in the public sector over the private sector. Perera and Perera (2009), depicted a higher unemployment rate among the female labour force compared to the male labour force in Sri Lanka. Jayathunge (2016) found that individual characteristics, household characteristics and residential area are important factors associated with the labour force participation decision of educated females who have at least passed GCE O/L. Individual female characteristics such as age, marital

status, education level, English literacy, household characteristics such as income, relationship to household head, and occupation status of household head and resident in the rural area are the significant determinants of the educated women labour force participation. However, these studies are unable to capture the situation and the whole picture of Sri Lankan Arts graduates since the data considered by them are not selected by a random process.

The transition from higher education to the world of work is also an important aspect of employment. Jayamanne and Ramanayake (2017) discussed the waiting time for the first employment. According to Kaplan Meier curves by gender, the differences between the two curves are almost nonexistent at the beginning and the end. However, from four to 22 months after graduation, the unemployment rate of females has dropped faster than that of males. Further, from the Accelerated Failure Model, it was revealed that the median waiting time for males is 1.4 times higher than that of females. This revealed that there is somewhat of a change in the labour participation rate of female graduates.

There are a few studies about the global aspects of higher education. Vuorinen-Lampila (2016) focused on gender segregation in higher education and working life of Finnish higher education graduates in Business and Technology fields. The data were gathered via a questionnaire three years after their graduation. The respondents were asked about their employment situation at the time of their graduation and after three years. At the time of graduation, more than two third was employed and there was a difference in employment rate by gender. Female graduates were more likely to have been unemployed than male graduates. Further males found employment in the private sector more often than female graduates. Also, males were more likely to have a managerial post, whereas females were more frequently clerical or shop-floor employees. All these differences were in favour of male graduates. Yousefy and Baratali (2011) discussed the Iranian women's employment and their tendency to have an active social working life is related to their level of higher education. They concluded that the women with degrees at higher educational levels enjoyed better job positions. Further, there is

a significant relationship between education fields and women's employment which most the women have a job in a humanity field and they have the lowest jobs in engineering fields. All these studies only capture a few parts of the objectives. However, all of these studies revealed only the employment status after a few years of graduation, not as a continuous monitoring. Hence to achieve the objective of the study following methodology was followed.

3. METHODOLOGY

A mail survey was conducted in the year 2016 on a random sample of Arts graduates from all Sri Lankan universities who had graduated in 2012 to identify the changes in their employment over time. The 2012 graduates were taken since three years after graduation was regarded as a period long enough to examine the permanent placement of graduates in working life. A stratified sampling scheme was used to obtain the sample from the target population where the universities were chosen as the strata. In all 986 questionnaires were mailed. After many attempts, a 48% response rate was obtained. Employment status and employment characteristics at each month after

graduation were determined using the effective date of the degree and the employment history records of these graduates.

$$W_i = \text{Emp Date}_1 - \text{effective date} \quad \text{for } i = 1$$

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Emp Date}_i \\ & - \text{Resignation date}_{i-1} \quad \text{for } i \\ & = 2 \text{ to } 5 \end{aligned}$$

Where W_i is the waiting time for the i^{th} employment, Emp Date_i is the date of the i^{th} employment, *effective date* is the effective date of the degree and $\text{Resignation date}_{i-1}$ is the date of the resignation of the $(i-1)^{\text{th}}$ employment,

$$D_i = \text{Resignation date}_i - \text{Emp Date}_i \quad \text{for } i = 1 \text{ to } 5$$

Where D_i is the duration of the i^{th} employment. left_i is the left i^{th} job variable which has a response of “yes” or “No”. EmpAny also has the response of “yes” and “No” which describes whether the graduate has employed at any point of time after graduation.

Employment status of a graduate EmpStaus_t at month t can be determined using the following algorithm.

For $t=1$ to 45 repeat following steps

1) IF (W_1 is blank and $\text{EmpAny}=\text{“Yes”}$) then

$\text{EmpStaus}_t = \text{“*”}$ for all t and exit, else go to step 2

2) IF (W_1 is blank and $\text{EmpAny}=\text{“No”}$) then $\text{EmpStaus}_t = \text{“Unemp”}$ for all t and exit, else go to step 3

3) IF ($t < W_1$) then $\text{EmpStaus}_t = \text{“Unemp”}$ and $t=t+1$ and go to step 3, else go to step 4

4) IF($\text{left}_1 = \text{“No”}$ or $t < W_1 + D_1$) then $\text{EmpStaus}_t = \text{“Emp1”}$ and $t=t+1$ and go to step 3, else go to step 5

5) IF($t < W_1 + D_1 + W_2$) then $\text{EmpStaus}_t = \text{“Unemp1”}$ and $t=t+1$ and go to step 3, else go to step 6

6) IF($\text{left}_2 = \text{“No”}$ or $t < W_1 + D_1 + W_2 + D_2$) then $\text{EmpStaus}_t = \text{“Emp2”}$ and $t=t+1$ and go to step 3, else go to step 7

7) IF($t < W_1 + D_1 + W_2 + D_2 + W_3$) then $\text{EmpStaus}_t = \text{“Unemp2”}$ and $t=t+1$ and go to step 3, else go to step 8

8) IF($\text{left}_3 = \text{“No”}$ or $t < W_1 + D_1 + W_2 + D_2 + W_3 + D_3$) then $\text{EmpStaus}_t = \text{“Emp3”}$ and $t=t+1$ and go to step 3, else go to step 9

9) IF($t < W_1 + D_1 + W_2 + D_2 + W_3 + D_3 + W_4$) then $\text{EmpStaus}_t = \text{“Unemp3”}$ and $t=t+1$ and go to step 3, else go to step 10

10) IF($left_3 = \text{“No”}$ or $t < W_1 + D_1 + W_2 + D_2 + W_3 + D_3 + W_4 + D_4$) then $EmpStatus_t = \text{“Emp4”}$ and $t = t + 1$ and go to step 3, else go to step 11

11) IF($t < W_1 + D_1 + W_2 + D_2 + W_3 + D_3 + W_4 + D_4 + W_5$) then $EmpStatus_t = \text{“Unemp4”}$ and $t = t + 1$ and go to step 3, else go to step 12

12) IF($left_4 = \text{“No”}$ or $t < W_1 + D_1 + W_2 + D_2 + W_3 + D_3 + W_4 + D_4 + W_5 + D_5$) then $EmpStatus_t = \text{“Emp5”}$ and $t = t + 1$ and go to step 3

After obtaining employment status for all graduates using the above algorithm, employment percentage was obtained by getting the count of “Emp_i” for $i = 1$ to 5. The sector of employment and type of the employment were determined using the job number.

4. ANALYSIS

Among the 469 graduates who responded, 79% were female

graduates. At the time of the survey, even though most these graduates had at least 45 months to find employment, at the time of data collections, 3% female graduates were unemployed compared to 2% male graduates.

As depicted in Figure 1, initially the percent employed among male graduates was higher compared to females until 3 months after graduation. But the percent employed among females increased drastically compared to males afterwards until it reached 81% in 21 months' time. Only a slight difference between the two groups can be seen after that. Furthermore, the gender difference in employment status was depicted in every university except University of Peradeniya and Ruhuna. However, the male percent employment is higher only in South Eastern University throughout the 45 months compared to female percent employed.

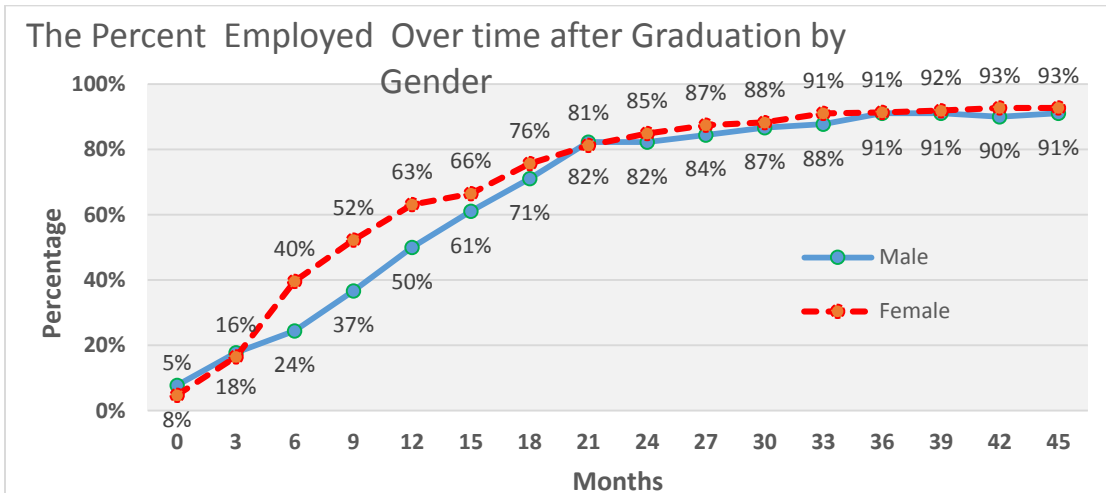


Figure1: Percent Employed Over Time after Graduation by Gender

Next, the gender differences in employment characteristics were measured. As depicted in Figure 2, irrespective of gender, almost all Arts graduates have acquired jobs in

government sector eventually. The females were more likely to be in the public sector at any given time during the study period compared to males.

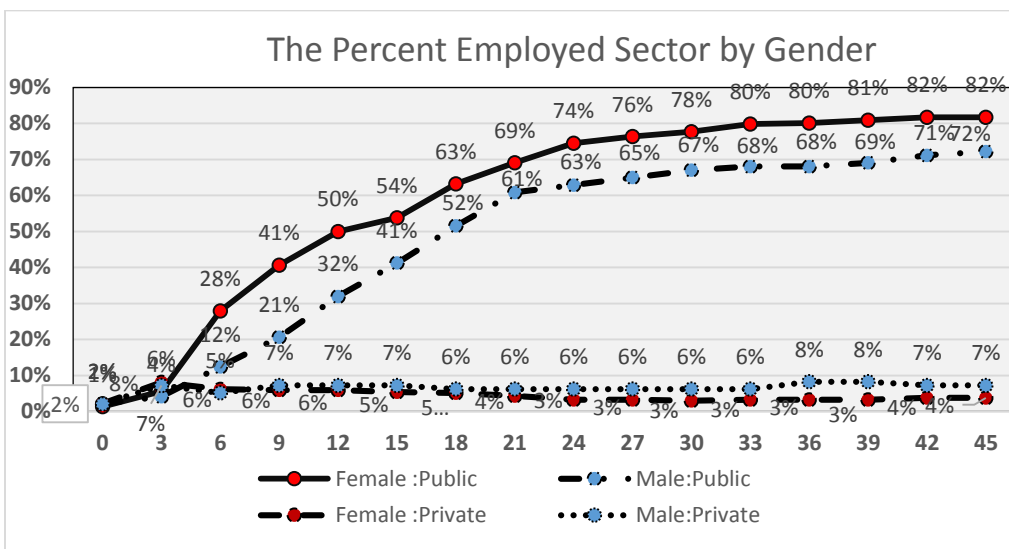


Figure2: The percent sector of employment by Gender over Time

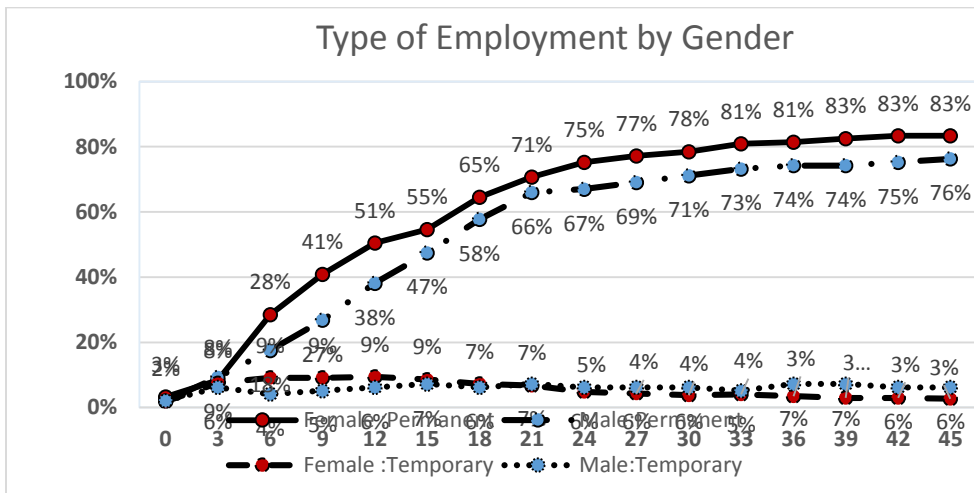


Figure 3: The percent employed in Temporary Jobs by Gender over Time

Similar trends are shown for the type of employment as well. Irrespective of gender majority of the graduates have acquired permanent job eventually. However, about 7% of the male graduates are still employed in temporary positions while only 3% of female graduates doing so. The majority of the temporarily employed graduates are in the private sector.

Since it is difficult to view the changes in the job position and monthly salary of graduates within 45 months after graduation due to a high level of categories, the last employment of the Arts graduates was considered for the below analysis. The job held at the time of the survey was recognized as the last employment.

As depicted in Figure 4, the majority were employed as development officers in public sector followed by teaching irrespective of gender. It could be seen that there is a small percentage of males who are employed in clerical positions even with a degree. It is important to investigate other different characteristics which might have impacted on the last job positions. When considering the university, the majority of female graduates from University of Colombo(48%) and male graduates from Rajarata University(50%) and Sabaragamuwa University(46%) had obtained teaching jobs compared to their opposite sex. Irrespective of the gender, the majority of Sinhala graduates were enrolled as development officers

while Muslims were teachers. However, the last job of Tamil graduates was different by gender. Hence, Tamil females were mostly employed in management positions or unemployed while Tamil males were mostly employed as support staff or other jobs. In the twenty-first century, English literacy skills are vital to acquire a white-collar job. However, most of the Arts graduates had followed their degree in Sinhala and Tamil medium. Thus only the English grade for G.C.E Ordinary level and advanced level is available to measure their English literacy skills. Even though there is no clear distinction in last job positions by their English grade of the ordinary

level, irrespective of the gender only the Arts graduates who had absent or failed the advanced level English had obtained a support staff job as the last employment. It is vital to highlight that the majority of the female graduates who received a good grade (A or B) for advanced level English were employed as Teachers compared to others. Even though there are no differences in job positions for females by the type of the degree (special/general), the majority of the special degree males were development officers while general degree males were equally like to be employed as development officers, teachers or other job categories.

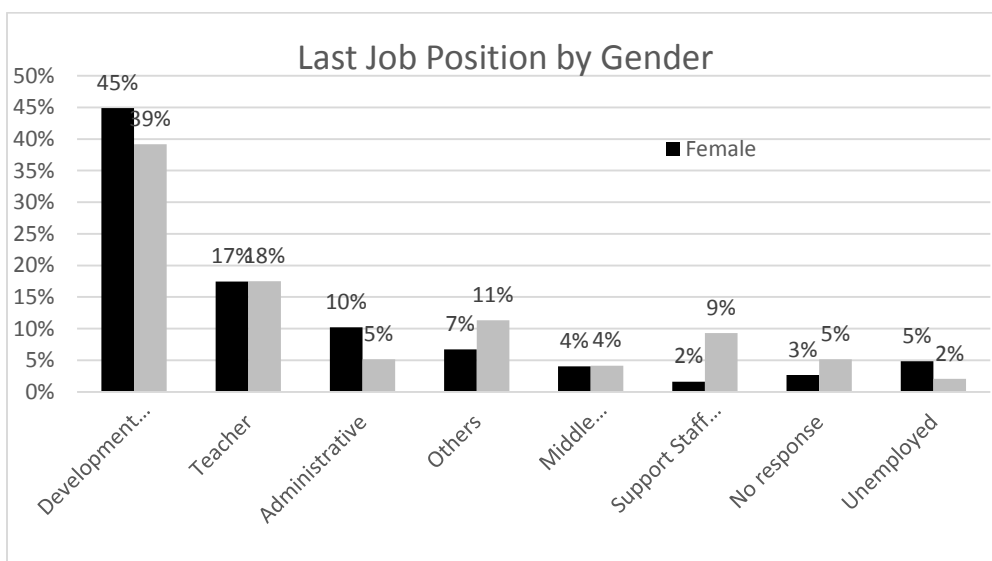


Figure 4: The Final Job Position by Gender

The monthly salary discrepancies of the final job by gender is shown in Figure 5. The monthly salary distributions of males and females are quite similar. Therefore, other characteristics of the graduates were considered to identify the salary discrepancies by gender. The higher salaries were received by females of Sabaragamuwa University, Rajarata University, Eastern University and University of Colombo and males of South Eastern University with respect to their opposite sex. Monthly salary distributions varied across gender and ethnicity as well. Majority of the Muslim males had received higher salaries compared to

others. Furthermore, monthly salary differences can be seen by the English grade received for the advanced level. Female graduates who have obtained good grades for English advanced level tend to get higher salaries compared to others. Monthly salary received by graduates are also different by the class of the degree. Comparatively female general pass graduates had received lower salaries. Even though there are no much differences in monthly salary received by male graduates across the degree type, female general degree holders tend to receive lower salaries compared to special degree holders.

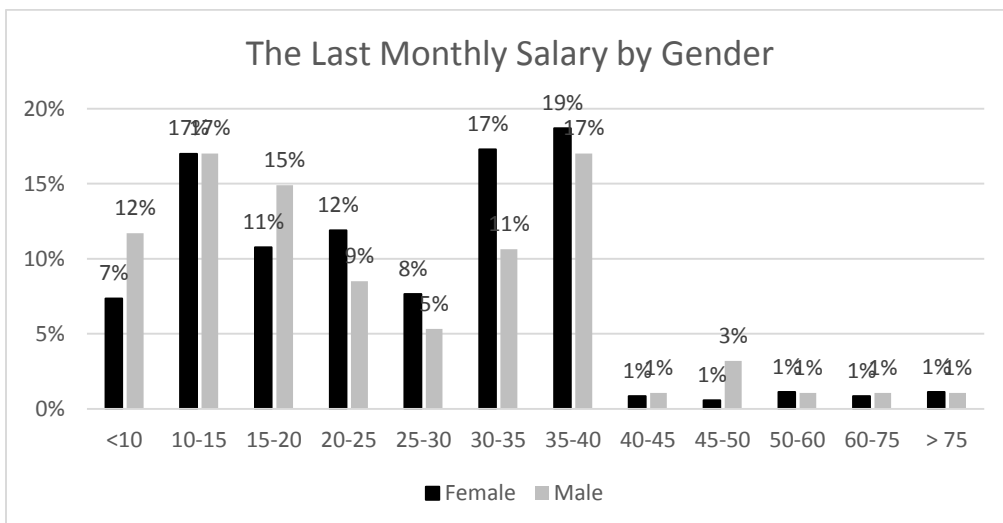


Figure 5: The Final Salary by Gender

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that females are better than male in pursuing employment. Except a few, the majority of Arts graduates are employed after about four years of graduation, which is a great achievement when considering the situations of Gunathilake et al (2010) and Perera and Perera (2009). The rise in educational attainment may have weakened the traditional gender roles, on one hand, and resulted in new norms and values, on the other. This might be an effect of the current economy of the country where it is difficult to have a good life with only a sole income. Thus, women's willingness and ability to enter the labour market has raised the potential earning power of the family and changes their attitudes toward women's traditional roles. However, almost all female graduates preferred to be employed in the public sector employment, because they view the government jobs as stress-free with job security, provide retirement benefits and social benefits which will allow them to balance their family responsibilities. This enables them to be the primary caregiver in a household, which is an accepted social norm in Sri Lanka.

There is a slight deviation in employment characteristics by gender. Compared to males females are in favour of getting a permanent job, better occupation positions and a better salary. Thus women have eventually shown their capabilities and earning power to the male counterparts. These capabilities might have been influenced when the graduates have acquired the skills required for employment such as English literacy skills and subject-specific skills through special degrees. This is extremely a positive trend in the economy of the country. However, creating public sector employment is a burden to the government. Therefore it is essential to determine the actual reason behind preferring public sector employment over the private sector. Is it due to lack of skills to work in the private sector or the traditional image of the government jobs. Irrespective of the reason government should act soon upon by initiating necessary steps to change of society view of the government job. It is good to conduct awareness workshops at the beginning of their university life that provide knowledge about employment opportunities in the private sector and also to showcase the benefits of private over public sector

employment. Through these attempts, it should gradually bring about a change in attitudes among Arts graduates in general about private sector employment. Regardless of these attempts, there is a group that will resist such changes. Therefore, the government should create job opportunities not to win the hearts of voters but to open up opportunities in government agencies to get the maximum service from these graduates based on their specialized areas. Also, it is the responsibility of the ministry of education and the university grant commission to make a change in the curriculum and to introduce new courses or degrees to meet the demand of the industry. In addition to that, the teaching and learning methods should be changed to enhance graduates employability skills together with the knowledge to cope up the change in the economy of the country. These suggestions are based on the comments made by these Arts graduates who participated in the study.

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