

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES CONFRONTING WOMEN IN THE FISHING COMMUNITY: A CASE OF NINTAVUR DIVISIONAL SECRETARIAT, SRI LANKA

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Abstract

The key objective of this paper is to identify key challenges facing by women in the fishing community in Nintavur Divisional Secretariat, Sri Lanka. As it is basically combine qualitative and quantitative methods, the data have been collected from primary and secondary sources. According to the analysis of the data, the study found that the women facing numerous problems, such as, lack of employment, low income, poverty, dependence, social exclusion, dowry, matrimonial alliance and educational problem which are very directly experiencing by the women. On the other hand, the use of alcohol and smoking habits of men fishers, directly and indirectly affect the economy, health and the livelihood of women and children consequently. This research has been conducted in a limited background and restricted with coastal fishing families. Thus, this study need to be extended in future in order to find further challenged and identify new facts about the same community.

Keywords: Poverty, dependency, alcohol, small-scale industry, dowry, pre-mature marriage.

Introduction

Generally, the fishing communities are for the population and the sector contributes about 2 percent to GDP [3]. The fisheries sector of Sri Lanka consists of three main subsectors, namely coastal; offshore and deep sea; and inland and aquaculture. These three subsectors employ around 250 000 active fishers and another 100 000 in support services [4]. This workforce represents a population of some one million people. In the Sri Lankan context, especially in Nintavur Divisional Secretariat area, there are 738 families depending on fishing industry. There are six fish landing centers functioning at Nintavur, and this industry covers 3690 fishing population [5]. The agriculture, fishing, business and farming have found as key income source of the people in Nintavur division, rather than the government servants and foreign employment respectively. Among these workers, women of fishing community have numerous problems in their household and community.

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In this backdrop, this paper aims to understand the key issues faced by women in the fishing community in Nintavur Divisional Secretariat area of Ampara district, Sri Lanka, even though fishing industry having many opportunities to get more income and other assistance for their survival.

Objective

The key objective of this study is to identify key challenges facing by women in the fishing areas in Nintavur Divisional Secretariat, Sri Lanka.

Methodology

This study campaigns qualitative and quantitative methods. However, it carried out mainly through a qualitative field research by using primary and secondary data collection techniques. The data have been collected through structured-interview with key informants, a focus group discussion and questionnaire survey. 50 questionnaires dispersed based on the simple random sampling method. Interview focused, particularly, to understand social and economic conditions of the fishing families and problems faced by the women in the study area.

Research Area

Nintavur is situated in Ampara district of Eastern Sri Lanka. It bounded on the North by Vettaru (River) on the South by Kaliodai River, on the East by Indian Ocean and on the west by Paddy Fields. It has 25 Grama Niladhary divisions. It is an area of 40.031sqkm [6]. Fishing is the main stay and occupation of this village. Apart from fishing, people engaged in agricultural and small industries as their basic source of livelihood. Considerable amount of government sector employees also available in this village. Further, there are Muslims and Tamils living with harmony in this area. But, this research based only Muslim Community.

Results and Discussion

According to the data analysis, it can be listed out the key problems faced by women of fishing community in the study area consequently.

Lack of sufficient income

The fishing community in the study area is basically depends on small-scale fishing industry and they make valuable contribution to the human's food supply. But, the level of income of fisheries is comparatively low in everywhere, especially in the research area due to many reasons. In Nintavur D.S division, the income ratio of fishing community is categorized in various heights as follows.

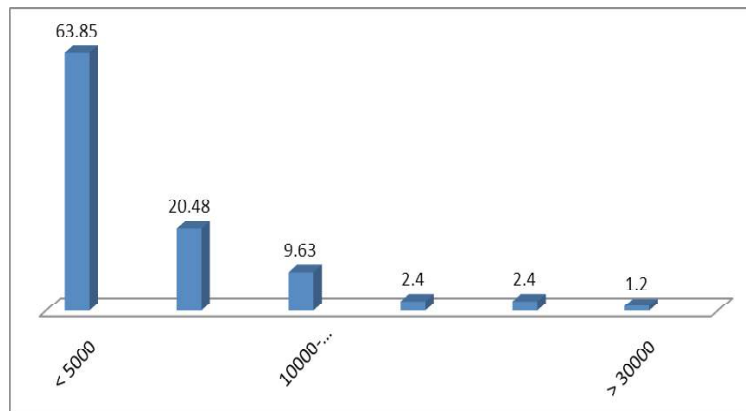


Chart 1.1

Income level of fishing community in Nintavur D.S division

n=42 Questionnaire survey 2017

According to the above chart 1.1, the majority of fishing family (63.85%) those who gained monthly income from Rs. 1000 to Rs. 5000. It is the fact that they are unable to meet very basic necessities of their life. Therefore, some fishers are doing part time works such as agriculture, business, small-scale handicrafts and weight laborer. But, the large numbers of fishers do not have any opportunity to involve in the part time jobs, and they fully believe fishing as their source of survival. Thus, women directly and indirectly affected by this economic crisis, and women compel to involve in any types of employment, even though they are more vulnerable group in the study community.

Poverty & Social Exclusion

According to interview, their only income source is fishing. There no another alternative source to manage income level. Thus this community depend on fishery. In case few of women making food items and run smaller grocery shops, even though they associated with fishing industry in a larger source in the sea. Indeed lack of capital and resource they cannot involve with another occupation or business. Thus the situation of extreme poverty or seasonal poverty lead them to involve in fishing. The following chart (1.2) highlights the poverty level of the fishing families and the poverty reduction program (Samurdhi) which covers them in order to fulfill their food and other subsidies.

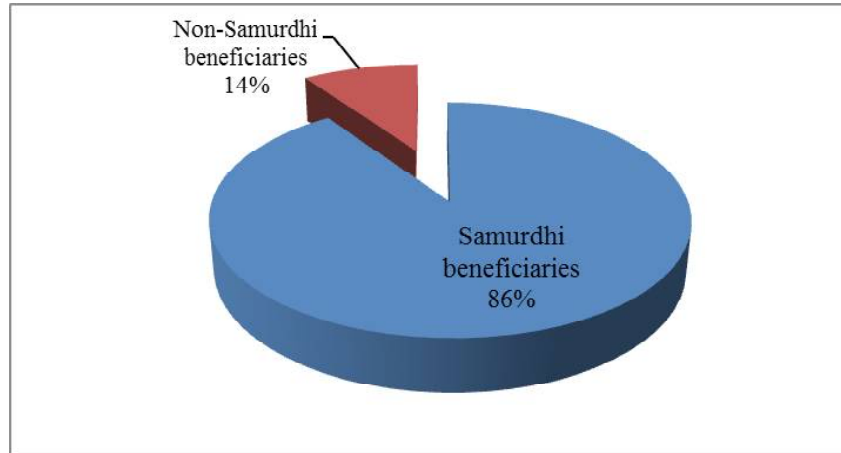


Chart 1.2

Samurdhi Beneficiaries among Fishing Families

Source: Samurdhi division, Divisional Secretariat, Nintavur, 2016

There are approximately 86% of fishing families receive Samurdhi benefits which is one of the assistances provided by the government to reduce their economic burden in a micro level. But, due to this poverty issue, the fishing community faces another problem of dependence.

Dependency:-

There are so many factors identified by the researcher from the research area. In context of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) dependency is the main factor in this community. Commonly women are depending on bread winners for all sort of needs like decision making, economic and alternative employments. But, in some cases 8% percentage of are doing their self-employments like; selling food items (Hoppers, String hoppers etc.). A few women (5%) run the smaller grocery shops with their husband.

Alcoholism & Smoking

According to interview, majority of men addicted to alcoholism and smoking. The average expenditure for smoking is Rs. 150.00 per day. However, majority of families had monthly income between Rs.1000 – Rs.5000 per month. Even though their getting Samurthi fund because of their poor condition. In fact their economic level not enough to maintain their basic needs, but male members of family spent near to Rs. 4500 for consuming cigarette. At the same time, their poverty, marginality, helplessness, lack of knowledge on health lead to addict smoking habit and alcohol use among fisheries, it lead to financial crisis for the family. Therefore women struggling to manage costs for their daily life including food and other basic subsidies. Because of this situation women borrowing money from informal sectors and they have been apply micro loan for this financial crisis, which lead them for depth and financial burdens continuously.

Pre- Mature Marriage

Pre-mature marriage is most common problem among this fishery community. According to focus group discussion, they believe pre – mature marriage is the solution for dowry. Because their whole life traveling with poverty, if someone come forward to getting married their daughter without dowry, parents may assess the costs and benefits that can be relieved through marriage. In the context of literacy rate is low among parents as well as children. There is only one school, it also limited to grade 1 – 5. If they need to continue their education, they should travel 3km every day for continue their studies in other schools located in the semi-urban areas. This is an important factor for school dropout. Constantly, the low literacy transmission happens generation to generation. This factor also influenced in increasing pre-mature marriage in the study community.

Problem of Dowry and Matrimonial Alliances

Dowry system is practicing by this communities broadly. According to the interview had with them, they pointed out that “when they prepare their daughter for wedding, the dowry has been a main element in this community. If they plan a marriage contact, they need to give dowry to bridegroom’s family. Because, the dowry normally demand by them in various manner like; money, property etc. Sometime, if any bridegroom ready to marry a girl without dowry, the pre-mature marriage autonomously increased in the study area. Therefore parents facing problem for matrimonial alliances for their daughter. Most of the families are facing this kind of problem. Generally, other people in the urbanized or semi-urban areas, do not wish to have marriage relationship with this fishery community. Because of their occupation and are marginalized from main stream of society. Therefore, their marriage alliances directly practice mostly the endogamy among them.

Education

The education level in Nintavur Divisional Secretariat is good, but the education level of fishing community is comparatively low due the low income, economic dependence, and early drop-out as well as environmental factors that contribute to determine the educational progress of children coming from fishing community. After 16 years old, the most of the children willing to go for foreign employment rather than the education and the fishing. In some situation, women foreign employment also encourage in the coastal area due to the poverty and depth. This employment or migration of family-women also creates more social problems and it may create challenges for the education of their children.

Conclusion

The women of fishing family were deprived of many amenities in the selected coastal region of Nintavur Divisional Secretariat. As a result of extreme poverty, dependency, lack of alternative employment opportunities and smoking habits and alcohol practice of male fisheries are identified as key factors for lot of social and economic challenges experiencing by women in the fishing community. So, the social and economic standard of fisheries, particularly, women is very lower compare to women who are living in the mainstream or in the semi urban areas in Nintavur DS division. To mitigate this challenges, some supplementary income have been identified such as, handicraft, pickles, net making and dried fish are especially recognized for women. So, necessary steps should be taken by the government and non-governmental organizations to assist the women of fishing family and, these policies can be adopted by the policy-makers in the rural development plans in the future in order to make their livelihood better.

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