

Exploring Constraints on Women's Participation in Gem Trading Sector in Rathnapura District of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This study explores the underlying causes of women's limited participation in the gem trading sector with a special focus on the Rathnapura District of Sri Lanka. Despite Rathnapura District's global reputation as a hub for gem trading, the increasing women involvement of Women in other economic sectors, their participation in this industry remains disproportionately low. This study aims to identify the institutional, sociocultural, and financial obstacles that prevent women from entering in this traditionally male-dominated sector. Employing a qualitative and exploratory research design, data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with ten women working in registered lapidaries selected via snowball sampling. Thematic analysis was used to capture the participants' nuanced perspectives and lived experiences. The results reveal that women's participation is constrained by ingrained gender norms, childcare and family responsibilities, limited mobility, insecurity, and views that gem trading is dangerous or inappropriate for women. Furthermore, limited access to markets, business networks, financial resources, and the absence of female role models reinforce their exclusion from entrepreneurial roles. Institutional shortcomings such as inadequate gender-sensitive policies, insufficient training opportunities, and weak tax protections further exacerbate these challenges. The results highlight the necessity of targeted interventions and policy changes to promote inclusive participation in the gem sector.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, gem industry, gender barriers, Sri Lanka, women's participation