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# A Quantitative Study of Women in Sri Lanka's Export Processing Zones: Capital accumulation and Social Investment

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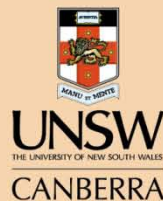
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## **Introduction**

Certainly very strong evidence of gender-based subordination and subjugation was evident during the research process, as was the negative impact of patriarchy at national, factory and community levels. However, the research also found that many women were resisting these forces and doing so through the complex process of capital accumulation and its transformation into social capital. In short, women were working to a strategy, for a pre-determined period, to achieve goals associated with capital accumulation and to ensure the economic 'safety' of their families. We found that the majority of women sampled came from very poor rural villages where abject poverty had forced them to seek employment in an Export Processing Zone (EPZ). In turn after a few years of employment the women planned to return home and in so doing would bring with them capital, a new confidence and new ways to assert roles for women in rural Sri Lanka. They 'had a plan', it was not *ad hoc*, nor was it simple exploitation we were witnessing, it was too complex to make these claims. The data presented in this paper will begin to unravel some of these complexities. The research did not explore in the experiences of women after they returned to their villages and married, this was not an aim of our research, but one that warrants further research.

Despite a plethora of literature to the contrary we found evidence of empowerment among the women sampled and the data certainly backed this up. The data indicated clearly that women were instruments of change and resilience and in the act of surviving the rigors of long working hours and harsh conditions were able to convert their income and experiences into sustainable change (economic and social capital). They major ways they did this was to embrace new experiences and working techniques associated with export-oriented manufacturing and in turn 'begin to bring this new knowledge' back to their villages, in the form of capital investment in small business or new ideas. In short they had learned how to attain economic empowerment as a result of exposure to western-oriented and formal employment. Importantly their incomes were on average higher than other family members and the women sampled saved and remitted significant amounts of money each month, so much so that this 'capital' was potentially a life changing phenomena for the women and their families. The women sampled in our research were, in general, active agents in their own empowerment and in turn that of their families. They had a strategy and by default would inevitably return to their home village 'full of potential' once they had finished working in an EPZ.

## **Literature**

In 2004-2005 we conducted a study of 370 factory women working in Sri Lanka's EPZs to trace the impact of formal employment on women's status and to provide new understanding into the way in which women's empowerment is conceptualised (Hancock, 2005, p 7 & Hancock, 2006b, p 221). The main findings were that factory women faced significant societal and community disempowerment as a result of their roles as workers (Hancock, 2008, p 184). However, despite the hardships of factory work and societal subjugation, many

Sri Lankan women showed resilience and were able to overcome the obstacles to empowerment as a result of factory work (Hancock 2006a, 230). The idea of a follow up study was funded by AusAID and the results are presented in this paper. To focus on EPZs and women in our original study proved timely as they (EPZs) have become a much debated topic and increasingly adopted as policy and macro-economic initiatives by developing nations.

Engman, Onodera & Pinali (2007) argue that EPZs are standard policy responses by governments who are attempting to move their economy from import substitution to an export-oriented one with a focus on manufacturing. They show clearly the massive growth of EPZs from 79 in 25 countries in 1975 to over 3500 in 130 countries in 2006 (p8). The development of EPZs has been part of a global phenomenon that has pushed to the limits the tenets of privatisation, neo-liberalism and economic rationalism, as well as involving significant deregulation (Esbenshade, 2008, p 462). EPZs offer tax incentives, infrastructure, security and subsidies as well as less stringent labour laws (Engman, Onodera & Pinali, 2007). In Sri Lanka, EPZs have grown from 1 in 1975 to 11 by 2008 at the same time employment in EPZs has grown from 35,000 in 1985 to 104, 237 by 2003 (Engman, Onodera & Pinali, 2007, p 30) and by 2010 to over 120,000 (BOI, 2010). By 2010 more that 69,000 of these workers were young Sri Lankan women (BOI, 2010). However, Engman *et al* highlight one of the most important aspects that entice investors to EPZs, which is an abundance of cheap and docile workers. This notion of workers in EPZs, being docile and cheap in legion in the literature, and has traction in some cases. Lynch (2007) for example studied EPZs and noted the dominance of terms such as ‘nimble fingers and docile workers’ in the literature, especially in relation to women. However, similar to the arguments in this paper, Lynch warns against homogenising women workers in EPZs as passive victims of globalisation. Of interest was her focus on Sri Lankan EPZs where she also found that women workers faced enormous societal and village level scrutiny and humiliation, but those she worked amongst seemed resilient, a finding not at odds with our arguments.

Chakravarty (2007) studied the Indian garment manufacturing sector and found the same pervasive discourse around women workers – they are perceived as docile with oriental submissiveness attracting foreign investors in droves to take advantage of such a work force, especially one that is unlikely to unionise or strike. However, Chakravarty (2007, p, 457) found that the in her study women had just won a hard fought battle against family and village patriarchy to be able to go out and work in formal employment, a massive cultural leap, and therefore were not ready to take the next step and unionise or agitate as coping with patriarchy at village and societal levels was difficult enough. Again these findings have great traction with ours, Sri Lankan EPZ workers face continual and very public scrutiny and commonly humiliating discourse and public humiliation, coping with this and working long hours was more than enough for our respondents.

Rainapriya (1995, p 33) argues that women working in Sri Lanka’s EPZs are ‘exploited’. The author argues women workers are forced to work overtime and are working in unsafe conditions and intimidated by the police if they complain. Hewamanne (2003 & 2006) argues that Sri Lanka EPZ workers deliberately ‘mis-behave’ and dress in a manner that offends strict national attitudes. Hewamanne also argues that these women create a ‘national’ anxiety because they are living away from that protection of family and their new life is associated with ‘free living western women’. Samarsinghe and Ismail (1999) also argue that as Sri Lankan women move to the EPZ from rural villages they face enormous distress and psychological harm, mainly because they are going against centuries of Sinhala patriarchal culture and at the same time leaving themselves open to public shame. This shame stems

from the fact that women are alone, working in an EPZ and for all intents and purposes, independent. Finally, de Alwis (2002) focused on rural women moving to the city, specifically to EPZs in Sri Lanka. de Alwis argues that the development of EPZs in Sri Lanka coincided with the development of an exploitative attitude toward the young rural women who migrated to work in them. Further, they faced national attitudes and discourse that sought to protect the women from the corrupting influence of Western lifestyles. Of significance in this paper is that de Alwis (p 695) found that many of the women were the main breadwinners in their families as a result of formal employment and were a major asset to the economy, but despite this they continue to be publicly humiliated. While the findings of the above researchers are relevant and have traction, our research intended to go beyond these issues and sample a larger group to be able to make better and more informed judgements based on an investigation of the nuances of social and economic capital. While we acknowledge the issues women face, the aims of our research were to 'go beyond' the obvious and oft cited narratives associated with women in EPZs. These findings are presented below.

Patriarchy, whilst strong in Sri Lanka, is not an all encompassing phenomenon as found in other nations. It is common for Sri Lankan women to own and inherit property, and they have equal rights under law and have long exhibited very good health and education indicators. However, patriarchy exists there and cannot be denied. If viewed through various lenses, Basow (2001) views patriarchy as a system where fathers rule, and where the roles, needs and wants of men overshadow those of women. Basow adds that patriarchy at the family level meant that women's views and needs were ignored and in marriage women lost their identity. While Worell and Johnson (2001, P 426) define patriarchy as "*a systematic valuing and privileging of male gender and masculinity as culturally constructed in most societies. Patriarchy is characterised by gender-based inequalities and the devaluation, exclusion and disempowerment of girls and women*". In Sri Lanka, patriarchy was evident, but it was not easily fitted to these definition above, as once women started working they were viewed as an 'asset' to the family and patriarchy put aside in many cases, at that level at least.

As this paper focuses on social and economic capital, both terms require discussion. Social and economic capital have been most fully explored by Bourdieu, who argued that social, economic and symbolic capital are firmly grounded in the wider concept of cultural capital (Reay, 2004, p 57). Therefore social capital can be defined as the 'glue that holds society together' (Tesoriero, 2010), or that which is created by social processes, usually within and between families and the wider community, economic capital is simply earned or inherited through processes related to the individual and the economy (Bourdieu, 1985, cited in Reay, 2004). The notion that economic capital could be turned into social capital was considered by Bourdieu (1986, cited in Reay, 2004), where he argues that the process was possible but required complex systems to be negotiated for this to occur. In the case of this research, women had to negotiate patriarchal systems, which we view as part of the economic system, to transform economic capital into social capital (see discussion below).

## Methodology

The Research Assistants were fluent in English and Sinhalese and received intensive training and guidance from the Principal Investigator, CENWOR Research Director and Project Manager. The respondents were randomly selected by the Research Assistants and were sourced from the countless boarding houses that surround the EPZs, as well as from non-government organisations. To be eligible for selection women had to have worked in an EPZ for at least one year prior to data collection. Data collection and analysis took place between late 2007 to late 2010.

Respondents were approached to complete the two-page survey or participate in a focus group, in safe locations in community areas and care was taken not to interfere with their work or family duties. The women were informed that their results would be anonymous and confidential and would not link them to any village or factory. Ethics approval was granted by Edith Cowan's Ethics Committee in late 2007. 6 of the 11 EPZs were chosen as part of the sample as they represented the geographic and demographic nuances of the nation. For example, the largest urban EPZ was sampled, Katunayake, as was the smallest and most isolated EPZ, Koggala (see Table 1). Women were chosen randomly and of the entire population of 65, 598 women, 2304 completed the questionnaire and form the basis of this research paper.

The questionnaire was designed to provide insights into the ways in which young women may be empowered or indeed disempowered as a result of their work. The first part of the questionnaire was quantitative and focused on demographic data such as age, marital status, and education level. Other questions focused on work profile such as type of factory, job title, hours worked and promotion, as well as information on salaries and savings. The women were also asked whether they had experienced verbal, physical or sexual harassment at work, and whether they had experienced public humiliation for being an EPZ worker. The data was analysed using SPSS Statistics 17.0 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). A number of trained female Sri Lankan Research Assistants facilitated the data collection in Sri Lanka.

## Findings

There were 2304 questionnaires completed by women working across six EPZs (Katunayake, Biyagama, Koggala, Wathupitiwela, Pallakele, and Seethawake<sup>1</sup>) and all quantitative data for 2304 women was analysed using SPSS Version 17.0. The detailed sampling frame is presented in Table 1 and the sample demographics in Table 2.

Analysis revealed that 74.8% of women were 25 years or younger, with the average respondent aged 24.02 years. Only 10.3% of women were aged 26-30, leaving only 14.9% aged 31 and over. This indicates a relatively young female workforce across the EPZs. Analysis found that 79.4% of women were unmarried and 19.3% were married, the remaining

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<sup>1</sup> Seethawake is technically an Industrial Park not an EPZ. Industrial Parks are similar to EPZs in Sri Lanka, though they have lesser status in terms of government support.



1.3% of women were either in a de-facto relationship (n = 3), divorced (n = 15), widowed (n = 6), or separated (n = 4).

**Table 1: Number of participants by EPZ compared to all women in EPZs.**

EPZ	Number of Women	Percentage of Total Sample	Total Women in EPZ / % of Total
<b>Katunayake</b>	901	39.1%	27,198 (3.31%)
<b>Biyagama</b>	500	21.7%	9,685 (5.16%)
<b>Koggala</b>	199	8.6%	8,169 (2.43%)
<b>Wathupitiwela</b>	204	8.9%	4,628 (4.41%)
<b>Pallakele</b>	100	4.3%	4,551 (2.20%)
<b>Seethawake</b>	400	17.4%	11,367 (3.52%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	2304	100.0%	65,598 (3.51%)

Source: 2007 – 2009 questionnaires & BOI (2010).

The women across all EPZs were well educated with 98.4% having an O-level or above education. A further 38.2% had completed A-level education, with 1.1% (n = 25) women engaged or having completed tertiary studies. Of the entire sample of 2304, only 1.6% (n = 36) of women had failed to complete O-level education. To make mother-daughter comparisons, women were asked about their mother's level of education. A total 89 (3.9%) of mothers were removed from analysis as women indicated they did not know their education status. Overall only 62.5% of mothers had completed O-level education; with 7.1% having completed A-level education (only 8 mothers in total had completed tertiary education). Overall 37.5% of mothers had incomplete O-level education, with 9.2% of these mothers having no formal education at all (3.4% of overall sample). A chi-square analysis comparing education levels indicated a significantly higher level of education of the women in comparison to their mothers  $\chi^2(24, n = 2206) = 112.07, p < .001$ .

**Table 2: Respondents by age group, marital status and education level.**

Demographic Characteristic	Percentage of Respondents (n)			
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	Unmarried		
	79.4 (1,829)	20.6 (475)		
<b>Respondent's Education</b>	O-levels	A-levels		
	60.3 (1387)	37.1 (854)		
<b>Mothers Education (n =89 removed due to "Don't know")</b>	O-levels	A-levels	Tertiary	Incomplete O-levels
	55.4 (1223)	6.7 (148)	1.1 (25)	1.6 (36)
			Tertiary	Incomplete O-levels
			0.4 (8)	37.6 (829)

Source: 2007 – 2009 questionnaires

The women were asked several questions regarding their work. When asked which type of factory they worked in (see Table 3), 81.5% of respondents indicated they worked in garment factories, followed by haberdashery (3.8%), toys (2.5%) and textiles (2.4%). The average amount of years worked in any EPZ was 3.10 years, with well over half of all women (69.7%) had only been working in the EPZs for 1-3 years, with a further 18.8% having worked 4-5 years. Overall only 11.5% of women had worked 6 or more years in the EPZs, with only 65 women (2.7%) working 10 or more years and only 5 women (0.2%) were working 20 or more years. An analysis of job type found that 79.0% of women were employed in low-to-medium level jobs including machine operator, packer and cutter. A further 14.6% of women were employed in trainee or starter level positions, with only 5.3% (n = 117) in management positions and 1.0% (n = 23) considered skilled workers. Only 1 woman with incomplete O-level education was in a management position (she had been working in the EPZ for 10 years), with 97.6% of managers having O-level education or above. Furthermore the highest percentage of trainee level workers was seen in women with incomplete O-level education (30.6%), with the highest level of managers coming from women with A-level education (7.7%) or tertiary education (20.0%). Thus it is evident that women with higher education levels are more likely to be employed in a management position than women who are less educated. This is supported by a chi-square analysis that found higher education was associated with higher job level  $\chi^2 (12, n = 2301) = 52.41, p < .001$ .

**Table 3: Type of factory worked in.**

Type of Factory	Frequency	%
<b>Garment</b>	1878	81.5
<b>Textile</b>	55	2.4
<b>Shoes</b>	33	1.4
<b>Machinery</b>	46	2.0
<b>Computer Electronics</b>	17	0.7
<b>Jewellery</b>	41	1.8
<b>Cigars/Cigarettes</b>	34	1.5
<b>Haberdashery</b>	88	3.8
<b>Fishing</b>	24	1.0
<b>Toys</b>	58	2.5
<b>Food</b>	24	1.0
<b>Other</b>	6	0.3

Source: 2007 – 2009 questionnaires

As Shown in Table 3, 83.9% of respondents worked in garment or textile factories. These types of factories have attracted negative public attention and have been reported in the media and research as being a major threat to the “moral fibre” of Sri Lankan women (Hewamanne, 2003; Hancock, 2006a).

Long hours of work for factory women have been reported in the literature above. Hours of work and promotion data are presented in Table 4. On average, women worked 45.73 hours per week before overtime with the minimum hours being 30 and the maximum being 88. Over three quarters of the sample (80.4%) reported working overtime, with an average of 9.62 hours or overtime worked per week. Overall women worked 55.35 hours per week; earning an additional 2125.77LKR per month by working overtime (the maximum additional income earned via overtime was 13,482LKR).

Comparing these hours to the Sri Lankan national average (Sri Lanka Department of Census, 2008 & 2009), significant results are apparent. Nationally in 2008, 32.2% of the female labour force worked 40-49 hours per week and 18.9% worked 50+ hours per week. This is in comparison to the current sample where women worked 55.35 hours per week on average, 19.4% of women worked 40-49 hours per week, 65.5% of women worked 50-59 hours per week and 15.1% of women worked 60+ hours per week (see Table 4). To put these statistics in a more cohesive statement, our data showed that 100% of women worked 40+ hours, 80.6% of women worked 50+ hours per week and 15.1% of women working 60+ hours per week.

A one sample t-test with hours per week set at a conservative 45 (indicating the Sri Lankan national average for women), indicated that women across the EPZs worked significantly more hours than the national average  $t(2302) = 63.61, p < .001$ . This finding is significant and while the national Labour Force Survey focused on the entire female labour force, its results are relevant to our study as they show the EPZ women in Sri Lanka worked vastly longer hours than national averages, which is an area of concern.

When asked if they had ever been promoted at work, 14.2% of women reported being promoted (see Table 4). Of the 14.2% (n = 332) only 31.3% of these reported being promoted to a managerial, supervisory or leadership position, with the remaining simply being promoted into other low to medium level roles or getting a rise in pay. These low promotion results are not unexpected as only a small portion of women have worked in the EPZ for 6 or more years, though it does show some evidence of promotion.

**Table 4: Weekly hours of work and promotion status.**

<i>Work Characteristic</i>	<b>Percent of Respondents (n)</b>			
	<b>Less than 40</b>	<b>40-49</b>	<b>50-59</b>	<b>60+</b>
<b>Hours of work per week including overtime</b>	<b>0.0 (0)</b>	<b>19.4 (447)</b>	<b>65.5 (1509)</b>	<b>15.1 (348)</b>
<b>Overtime Worked</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>		
	<b>80.4 (1853)</b>	<b>19.3 (444)</b>		
<b>Promotion</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>		
	<b>14.2 (327)</b>	<b>85.8 (1969)</b>		

Source: 2007 – 2009 questionnaires

There was also a significant relationship between education level of women and reports of promotion,  $\chi^2 (72, n = 327) = 160.40, p < .001$ . This analysis indicated that 98.47% of women who reported promotion had completed O-level education at a minimum. Only 5 women with incomplete O-level education reported promotion, with further analysis revealing these women had worked an average of 9.6 years in EPZs and had an average of 36.6 years. Further analysis of years worked and promotion revealed that only 12.56% (n = 256) of women who had worked 5 years or less (n = 2038) reported promotion, compared to 28.67% (n = 76) of women who had worked 6 years or more (n = 265) reporting promotion. Further analysis revealed that 47.37% of women who had worked 6 years or more were promoted into managerial or supervisor positions compared to 25.56% of women who had worked 5 years or less.

The average monthly (basic) salary of women was 7837.55LKR (SD = 1247.91) excluding overtime (equivalent to \$71.92 AUD in October 2010). The average salary after overtime was 10459.15LKR (SD = 1917.05) a month (based n = 1853 women who worked overtime), which was equivalent to \$95.97 AUD in October 2010). These salaries were constant and reliable; however salaries ranged significantly with the maximum earned before overtime 18000.00LKR and the minimum 4300.00LKR and the maximum earned including overtime 24182.00LKR and the minimum 6280.00LKR. As can be seen by Table 5, average monthly

salaries did vary and Pearson's correlation revealed this variance was positively related to age (r = .13, p < .01) and number of years worked (r = .27, p < .01). This indicated that women's

salary increased with both age and number of years worked with each variable accounting for 1.69% and 7.51% of the variance in salary respectively. Salary was also compared across job title and marital status via one-way ANOVA's. Results indicated that higher job status led to significantly higher salary,  $F(3, 2299) = 77.33, p < .001$  with trainees ( $M = 7459.73\text{LKR}$ ) earning significantly less than both low-to-medium workers ( $M = 7795.92\text{LKR}$ ) and managers ( $M = 9107.07\text{LKR}$ ). Also, as expected, managers earned significantly more than low-to-medium level workers.

**Table 5: Average monthly salary without overtime.**

Salary Scale LKR	Number of Respondents
4000 – 6000	26
6000 – 7000	389
7000 – 8000	900
8000 – 9000	685
9000 – 10000	193
10000 – 11000	51
11000 – 12000	13
12000-13000	35
13000 – 18000	12

Source: 2007 – 2009 questionnaires

Comparisons were also made between the sampled women's income and the Sri Lanka National Income Receiver's Income based on individuals who earned an income during the 2006/2007 Census (Sri Lanka Department of Census, 2008). The mean population income in the Receiver's Income was 14457.00LKR per month in 2007, with the median income being 8,693.00LKR. A one sample t-test indicated the sampled women's monthly income before overtime ( $M = 7834.51\text{LKR}$ , Median = 7720.00LKR) was significantly lower,  $t(2303) = -253.09, p < .001$ , than the mean monthly Sri Lankan population income. A further one sample t-test indicated that the sample women's monthly income, including overtime income ( $M = 9957.23\text{LKR}$ , Median = 9940.00LKR) was significantly lower,  $t(2304) = -101.79, p < .001$ , than the mean population income, indicating women earned 31.13% less than the national Census average. Thus women across the sampled EPZs are working significantly more hours than the national population average, whilst earning significantly less income. It is also important to consider that the incomes reported on the census combine both male and female workers. Conservative estimates assume that Sri Lankan males earned 20-28% more than their female counterparts; therefore the female national income average would likely be slightly lower than the data reported above (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2009).

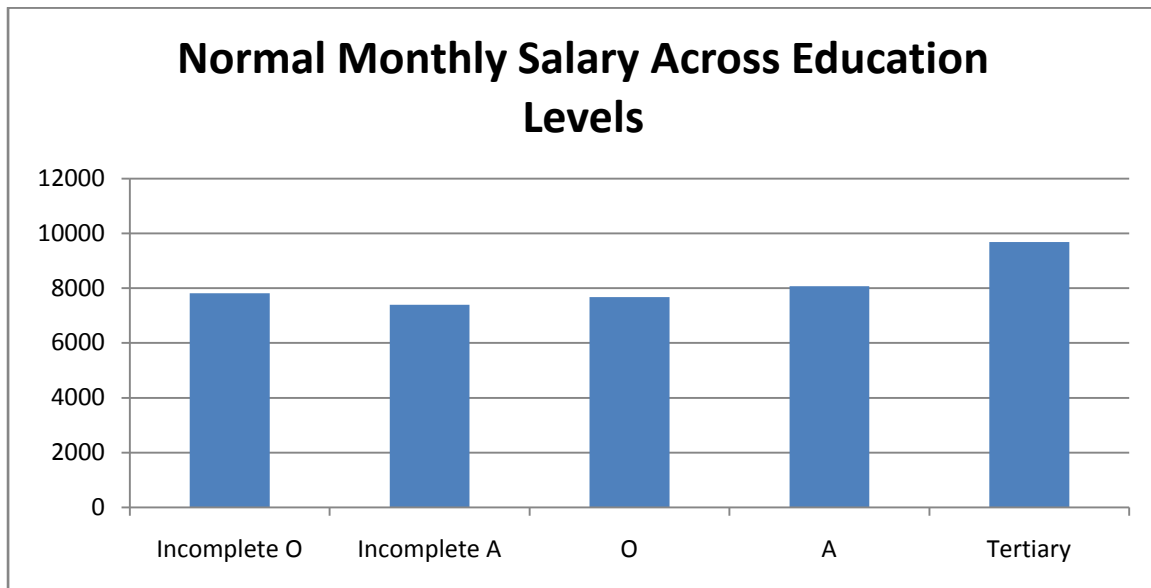
To make comparisons with salaries earned by their parents, the women were asked about their parent's salaries as well as their contribution to the family income. On average women across the sampled EPZs earned 44% of the total family income. Looking further we found

that 3% (n = 70) women earned 100% of the total family income and only 11.6% (n = 267) women earned 20% or less of the total family income. It was also interesting to note that 24% of fathers and 66% of mothers made no financial contribution to the family. These are interesting results highlighting the importance of women's wages to family income. From these data alone, we can conclude that the women sampled are important financially to their families and community, however this economic power does not automatically translate into social empowerment.

On average, the women sampled earned significantly higher salaries than their parents. Of mothers, 34% did not earn any income and a further 32% only contributed to household income through seasonal or ad hoc salaries or produce, with only 14.4% of mothers earning 5000LKR or more each month. A paired samples t-test indicated that the women in our sample (M = 9980.88LKR) earned significantly more money than their mothers (M = 1703.52LKR),  $t(2231) = 95.58$ ,  $p < .001$ . In terms of comparison with fathers, 6.9% (n = 127) of fathers earned no income. The average father's income excluding those fathers who were deceased was 7489.75LKR, with 30.3% of fathers earning 10000LKR or more per month, with 12.4% earning 15000LKR or more per month and finally only 18.9% of fathers earned 3000LKR or less per month. A paired samples t-test indicated that women earned significantly more money than their fathers,  $t(1843) = 17.79$ ,  $p < .001$ .

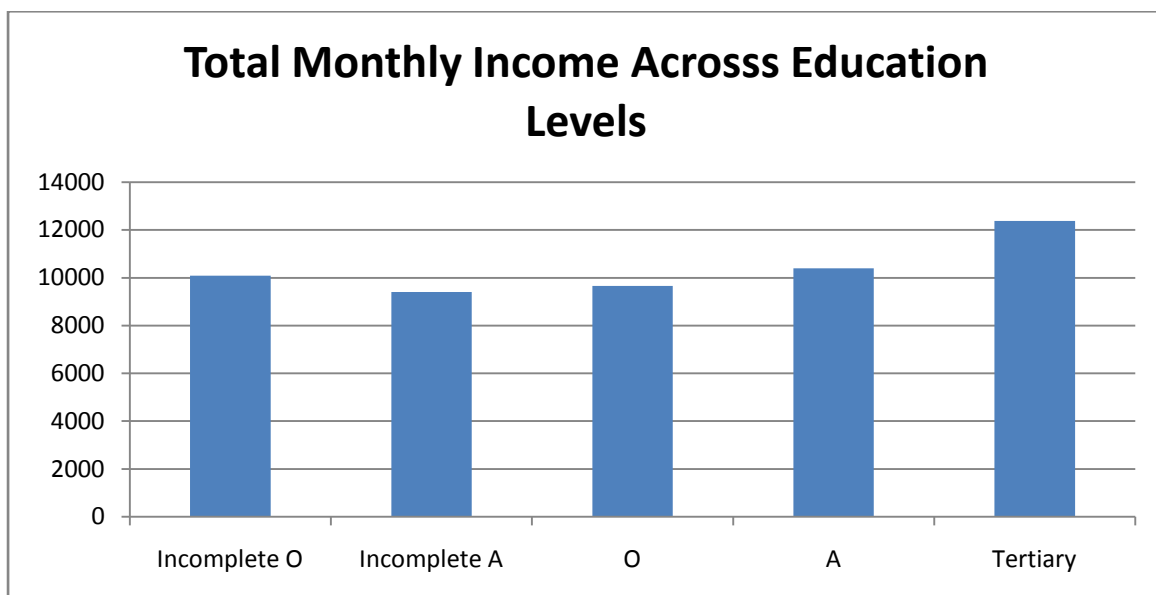
Analysis of total monthly income with overtime was conducted against age and years worked. Results indicated a significant positive correlation between total monthly income with age ( $r = .09$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and also year's worked ( $r = .28$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This indicated that women were paid significantly more as they got older accounting for 0.81% of the variance in total monthly income and were also paid more as they worked more years in the factory, accounting for 7.84% of the variance in total monthly income. Separate one-way ANOVA's were then conducted to compare total (with overtime) and normal (without overtime) salary against education level. Results indicated a positive main effect for normal salary,  $F(4, 2301) = 37.76$ ,  $p < .001$  and total salary,  $F(4, 2301) = 26.49$ ,  $p < .001$  against education. Post hoc tests for normal monthly salary indicated that women with A-level and tertiary education earned significantly more normal income than women with incomplete O-level, O-level or incomplete A-level education. Also women with tertiary education earned significantly more money than women with A-level education. Post hoc tests for total salary produced the same results. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of normal monthly income without overtime by education levels while Figure 2 shows total monthly income by education level. These results indicate that education is a key indicator of increased income among our sample.

**Figure 1: Monthly salary (LKR) without overtime by education level.**



Source: 2007 – 2009 questionnaires

**Figure 2. Monthly income (LKR) including overtime by education level.**



Source: 2007 – 2009 questionnaires

Of women 82.3% saved money in either formal or informal savings schemes, with only 17.7% of women reporting no savings at all. Of women who saved either in a bank or informally (n = 1897) the average amount saved was 3053.52LKR per month. A total of 297 women (12.89%) saved in both informal (*Seettu*) and bank plans, saving an average of 3712.62LKR per month. A paired samples t-test indicated that overall women saved significantly more money in informal savings schemes (1329.31LKR) than bank plans (1185.22LKR),  $t(2303) = -2.34, p < .05$ .

Each month 75.60% of women sent money home to their family. An average of 2646.84LKR was sent home each month, with the maximum being 15000LKR and 24.40% of women sending no money home each month. From this data we again point to the importance of women's wages to family wellbeing. The money sent home was used in positive ways including home renovations, assistance with sibling's education needs, family medical fees and living expenses. Moreover, these remittances proved to be the major focus of the debate on work and empowerment. Data on money sent home to family is just one part of the valuable data we have obtained by the women in our survey on various aspects of factory life in EPZs including demographic information such as type of factory and education levels, employment and salary variables, such as overtime, promotion and hours worked and money saved. This quantitative data has provided an accurate 'picture' of women who work in Sri Lankan EPZs at this point in time.

## **Discussion**

The essence of economic capital in this paper is not simply the salaries earned by the women, which were substantial. Economic capital was also about empowerment and being able to negotiate harsh working conditions and societal patriarchy. In this sense, Bourdieu's (1986, cited in Coradini, 2010) conceptualisation of economic capital has been useful as he argues that reducing economic capital to pure reductionism when considering its transformation to other forms of capital requires greater scrutiny, as economic capital is not simply one dimensional. In terms of this paper, we argue economic capital should be conceptualised through the notion of wages, savings, remittances and resilience and finally empowerment, and through the lens of the daily struggle simply to survive in an EPZ in a developing nation.

The other major issue discussed in this paper was social capital. We argued that women were able to translate economic capital into social capital, but this was achieved at the family level only, predominantly due to resistance by wider societal patriarchy in Sri Lanka. Our conceptualisation of economic capital is more complex than simply an individual's relationship to the economy, we found it to be very complex indeed and in the case of EPZ women, gaining economic capital also led to empowerment, which they were able to transfer to their families in numerous ways listed above. Social capital in this sense was a creation of new financial relationships between family members, especially as the majority of women we sampled were significant earners and had experienced new and 'modern' economic methods that would be useful once they returned to their villages. Social capital also became an important issue because we realised when analysing the data that these women were part of a new social movement in Sri Lanka and one that would impact first at the family level, changing dramatically traditional family organisation, finances, decision-making processes and gender dynamics. Our research was completed at this stage and further research is required to explore whether or not these changes at the family level have been positive or



negative (or a combination of both), and if the social movement we experienced has led to sustained changes at the village level in Sri Lanka.

## Conclusion

In this conclusion we provide a summary of the quantitative analysis presented above. We deliberately attempt to avoid making summary judgements or broad generalisations as we intend for the reader to draw their own conclusions, or indeed use this data to supplement their qualitative data. 74.8% of women were 25 years or younger, with the average respondent aged 24.02 years. Only 10.3% of women were aged 26-30, leaving only 14.9% aged 31 and over. This indicates a relatively young female workforce across the EPZs. 79.4% of women were unmarried. This data supports the notion of a young, unmarried workforce prevalent in the literature. 81.5% of respondents worked in garment factories, followed by haberdashery (3.8%), toys (2.5%) and textiles (2.4%). The average amount of years worked in any EPZ was 3.10 years. This data also supports common discourse about women dominating the garment and textile sectors in developing nations and only working for a few years.

A one sample t-test with hours per week set at a conservative 45 (indicating the Sri Lankan national average for women in 2009), indicated that women across the EPZs worked significantly more hours than the national average  $t(2302) = 63.61, p < .001$ . This data is reflected in wider literature, however not all data was negative and contradicted the 'sweatshop' arguments that women in EPZs are victims. For example, 14.2% of women reported being promoted (see Table 4) and women with higher education levels are more likely to be employed in a management position than women who are less educated. This is supported by a chi-square analysis that found higher education was associated with higher job level  $\chi^2(12, n = 2301) = 52.41, p < .001$ . This finding was not evident in any of the literature or discourse examined.

There was also a significant relationship between the education level of women and reports of promotion,  $\chi^2(72, n = 327) = 160.40, p < .001$ . This analysis indicated that 98.47% of women who reported promotion had completed O-level education at a minimum. Only 5 women with incomplete O-level education reported promotion, with further analysis revealing these women had worked an average of 9.6 years in EPZs. Further analysis of years worked and promotion revealed that only 12.56% ( $n = 256$ ) of women who had worked 5 years or less ( $n = 2038$ ) reported promotion, compared to 28.67% ( $n = 76$ ) of women who had worked 6 years or more ( $n = 265$ ) reporting promotion. Further analysis revealed that 47.37% of women who had worked 6 years or more were promoted into managerial or supervisor positions compared to 25.56% of women who had worked 5 years or less.

Women's salary increased with both age and number of years worked with each variable accounting for 1.69% and 7.51% of the variance in salary respectively. Salary was also compared across job title and marital status via one-way ANOVA's. Results indicated that higher job status led to significantly higher salary,  $F(3, 2299) = 77.33, p < .001$  with trainees ( $M = 7459.73\text{LKR}$ ) earning significantly less than both low-to-medium workers ( $M =$

7795.92LKR) and managers (M = 9107.07LKR). Also, as expected, managers earned significantly more than low-to-medium level workers. Again this is data not commonly associated with research on women who work in EPZs in developing nations.

On average women across the sampled EPZs earned 44% of the total family income. 3% (n = 70) women earned 100% of the total family income and only 11.6% (n = 267) women earned 20% or less of the total family income. It was also interesting to note that 24% of fathers and 66% of mothers made no financial contribution to the family. These are interesting results highlighting the importance of women's wages to family income. More interesting is that 82.3% regularly saved money in either formal or informal savings schemes, with only 17.7% of women reporting no savings at all. Of women who saved either in a bank or informally (n = 1897) the average amount saved was 3053.52LKR per month.

Each month 75.60% of women sent money home to their family. An average of 2646.84LKR was sent home each month, with the maximum being 15000LKR. From this data we again point to the importance of women's wages to family wellbeing. The money sent home was used in positive ways including home renovations, assistance with sibling's education needs, family medical fees and living expenses, as well as to start small businesses. In essence the processes of capital accumulation is strong in the data, as is the notion that capital earned in the factory was being turned into further social and economic capital at the individual level, but also at the family and village level, as there is no doubt that the savings and remittance patterns we observed were part of a deliberate strategy, not simply the *ad hoc*, 'fumbblings' of a 'an uneducated' and docile workforce exploited by global and national forces.

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