

## A Comparative Study of Structural and Functional Changes of Female-Headed Households in Rural Areas in Sri Lanka

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Household is a basic unit of the social organization in order to well-function of the society. Although household has been considered as a universal of all social institutions, it can be identified that modern household has undergone significant transformations in its structure in the modern society. Female-Headed Households (FHHs) is a new structural form of household and this type of household has become a significant phenomenon in both developed and developing countries. According to the most recent *Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES)* 2016, out of 5.4 million households in Sri Lanka, 1.4 million households or 25.8 percent of the households were female-headed. Many changes can happen after women assuming headship of the household both in structure and functions. Household structure refers to size and shape of household and it is assumed that household has certain functional prerequisites to fulfill for survival and further operation effectively. These functions can be elaborated into various factors such as economic functions, decision making and authority, responsibilities of children, social and cultural functions. Thus, the main objective of this study was to study the present and past situation before and after woman assuming the headship of the household - transformations occurred in their household structure and in functions comparatively. The empirical study was conducted in five *Grama Niladari* Divisions of *Galgamuwa* divisional secretariat division which conveyed a marked increase of *FHHs* in Sri Lanka. Data were collected from a hundred *FHHs* through purposive sampling method based on the list of *FHHs* in *Galgamuwa* divisional secretariat division. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used as primary data collection techniques based on the survey and case study methods. Majority of women (74%) have mentioned that changes have occurred in their household structure after assuming headship. Widowhood, separation and divorce have mainly caused to change their household structures. Adding them to parents' household, adding parents to their households, changing guardianship of children, getting their children married and separated from reproductive family, children have died, and children have become ordained were major structural changes in *FHHs*. Changes in livelihood activities, decision making, and authority, social and cultural functions could be identified through the study in particularly in economic function and authority of the household to make decisions. Power and authority are attributed in most patriarchal societies to women mainly due to disappearing of male person of the household. Thus, it could identify that this is not a result of mobilization or empowerment and women have no choice other than making decisions on her own household after assuming headship. Most importantly, majority of female heads (98%) have reported that their present living condition is negative after assuming the head of the household when comparing with the past. Many external reasons such as economic burden, struggle to survive, instability and unsustainability of livelihood, responsibilities of children and household, inadequate social security have influenced mainly to the negative responses of *FHHs* regarding changes after assuming headship of the household.

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