

Women in urban slums: with special reference to two urban slums in Gampaha district in Sri Lanka

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Urbanization exerts a profound impact on societies, particularly in developing nations, giving rise to a multitude of socio-economic and political challenges, especially among vulnerable sectors within these societies. The current research aims to address a pertinent research question: "How do the social and physical characteristics influence the lives of women residing in urban slums?" Further, the study sets out to achieve two primary objectives: (a) to examine the socio-economic status of women living in slums in Sri Lanka and (b) to explore the livelihood experiences of women in these slum. Employing a qualitative research methodology, the study specifically focused on two slums, namely Peliyagodawatta and Peliyagoda Gagabada East, within the Gampaha district, utilizing a purposive sampling approach. A total of 80 in-depth interviews were conducted by the researchers. The study reveals that the majority of Tamil women who migrated and got married demonstrate a greater degree of economic independence compared to their Sinhala and Muslim counterparts within these informal settlements. However, despite this economic autonomy, it becomes apparent that poverty-driven gender biases persist within marital relationships. Notably, the study identifies that the highest degree of dowry autonomy is observed among married Sinhala women. Furthermore, the findings highlight the significant role of internalized patriarchal norms in shaping gender roles among slum-dwelling women. The study also brings to light the prevailing issues of food and sanitation insecurities faced by women in these urban slums. Moreover, the research underscores the importance of social capital as an enabler for active participation of the female population in local-level politics. Overall, it is imperative for stakeholders to identify and implement equitable solutions to effectively address the challenges faced by urban slum-dwelling women in Sri Lanka.

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