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Economic demographic characteristics of poor female-headed households in Sri Lanka

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Introduction:

Sri Lankan women have relatively better status than women in many other developing countries but have yet to achieve gender equality. Therefore, policy makers should observe different economic demographic characteristics of low-income female-headed households (FHHs). Many of these women have been thrust into the role of breadwinner with little knowledge of income-earning methods and few coping skills. It is seen that many development programmes had a different impact on women and men, and that the interface of socio economic status and gender has increased the vulnerability of women in low-income families to adverse trends in development. The females are more vulnerable than males and households headed by women are viewed as being at grater economic disadvantage than male-headed households (MHHs). Because males generally have some social benefits with higher earning than females, and because females face time constraints imposed by having to fulfill both domestic and market works responsibilities, their access to social and health services are often restricted.

In the global context, it is frequently asserted that 70% of the world's poor are women (UNDP, 1997). As noted in the World Development Report 2000/2001 (World Bank, 2001), by year 2000, the world population was over 6 billion. Among them, 2.8 billion could not achieve an income of two dollars per day and 1.2 billion could not achieve an income of at least one dollar per day. Geographical distribution of the world population shows that 2%, amounting to 127 million persons, lived in Central Asia, and another 22% amounting to 1353 million persons, lived in South Asian countries. However, majority of the people in South Asia (44%) could not achieve an income of more than one dollar per day.

Compared with the other regions, the highest proportion of Female-headed Households (FHHs) is in South Asia. (De Silva, 2003). Around one-fifth (20.4%) of the

households in Sri Lanka are female-headed (Department of Census and Statistics, 2000). FHH have been singled out in development policy research as one of the key groups to which poverty amelioration effects should be aimed. On the other hand, Sri Lanka stands out in the poverty league with more than one-fourth of its population in 1996/97 (25.8% in Consumer Finance and Socio Economic Survey) and 25.3% in 1999/2000 (Sri Lanka Integrated Survey) estimated to live below the poverty line. Furthermore, Sri Lanka ranks highest in the world for its suicide rate of 55.46 people per 100,000 people. The rate of suicides among females is also highest in the world with almost 19 out of every 100,000 females committing suicide (1986 data). Suicide is the most common cause of death in the age group 15-25 years. In rural areas, pesticide poisoning is the most common method of committing suicide.

Moreover, when one US dollar per person per day is considered as poverty line (adjusted for purchasing power parity), only about 7% of the Sri Lankan population is poor whilst when the poverty line is increased to US $ 2 a day, the proportion of poor population increased to 45%. This indicates that more than one–fourth of the population receives income inadequate to meet their basic needs. Identification of the poor or the definition of poverty is rather complex since the dimensions of poverty are multi-faceted. Poverty is not just an inadequacy of income to meet basic needs or the inability to spend. In most cases, it is associated with numerous characteristics like lack of assets, landlessness, unemployment or underemployment, illiteracy, malnutrition, high infant mortality, large family size, low productivity, low position in the social hierarchy, less access to publicly provided goods, poor infrastructure facilities and extreme vulnerability to natural calamities, disease and social conflicts (Siddhisena and Jayathilaka, 2003). The poverty status by household level varies due to some of the above factors and those factors are different between male and female-headed households. It has become increasingly important as a demographic phenomenon as well as a socio economic issue in Sri Lanka.

Data and Methodology:

The study is based on an analysis of a recent household survey in Sri Lanka, viz., Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES). HIES was conducted by the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) from January to December 2002 in all provinces in the country excluding Northern and Eastern Provinces (due to the unavailability of a proper sampling frame and civil disturbance conditions in those areas). It covered 16,924 households (71,293 population) and had used a two-stage stratified random sample design.

The study used a cross sectional approach to examine the demographic characteristics of poor FHHs. It used special techniques of filled radar diagrams to highlight the characteristics of poor FHHs. In the filled radar diagram, there can be several layers filled with different layer colors. When we put those layers into one diagram, then relatively higher parts of the bottom layer colors could be seen. This is easy to distinguish from a picture rather than from tables.

The study used the national poverty line based on the cost of basic needs (CBN) method to select the poor. Persons living in the households whose real per capita monthly total consumption expenditure is below Rs.1423 in year 2002 are considered as poor by this method.

Results and Analysis

A. Sample distribution and background characteristics of Female-headed Households (FHHs) and Male-headed Households (MHHs)

The size of the sample and distribution of female and male-headed households in the survey is presented in Table 1. Among the households, 20.7% (3,496) was FHHs. The distribution of the sample by sector reveals that 73.8% (12,487) of surveyed households was from the rural sector, 19.2% (3241) from urban sector and 7.1% (1196) from estate sector. The highest number of FHHs (72.1% or 2,519) and the highest number of MHHs (74.2% or 9,968) were recorded in rural sector. Estate sector has the

lowest number of FHHs (6.0% or 210) and MHHs (7.3% or 986). However, the row wise comparison indicates highest FHHs comes from urban sector (23.7%) and highest MHHs come from estate sector (82.4%). In addition, lowest FHHs and lowest MHHs were recorded in estate sector (17.6%) and urban sector (76.3%) respectively.

Table 1: Distribution of FHHs and MHHs by Sector, Province and Districts

	FHHs			MHHs			Total		
	No.	Column %	Row %	No.	Column %	Row %	No.	Column %	Row %
:mple Size	3496	100.0	20.7	13428	100.0	79.3	16924	100.0	100.0
:ctor									
Urban	767	21.9	23.7	2474	18.4	76.3	3241	19.2	100.0
Rural	2519	72.1	20.2	9968	74.2	79.8	12487	73.8	100.0
Estate	210	6.0	17.6	986	7.3	82.4	1196	7.1	100.0
ovince									
Western	1045	29.9	21.6	3782	28.2	78.4	4827	28.5	100.0
Central	657	18.8	21.6	2388	17.8	78.4	3045	18.0	100.0
Southern	509	14.6	21.9	1819	13.5	78.1	2328	13.8	100.0
North Western	426	12.2	20.8	1625	12.1	79.2	2051	12.1	100.0
North Central	239	6.8	19.6	979	7.3	80.4	1218	7.2	100.0
Uva	256	7.3	17.8	1186	8.8	82.2	1442	8.5	100.0
Sabaragamuwa	364	10.4	18.1	1649	12.3	81.9	2013	11.9	100.0
:strict									
Colombo	441	12.6	21.6	1603	11.9	78.4	2044	12.1	100.0
Gampaha	338	9.7	23.0	1131	8.4	77.0	1469	8.7	100.0
Kalutara	266	7.6	20.2	1048	7.8	79.8	1314	7.8	100.0
Kandy	390	11.2	24.2	1220	9.1	75.8	1610	9.5	100.0
Matale	143	4.1	20.5	556	4.1	79.5	699	4.1	100.0
Nuwara Eliya	124	3.5	16.8	612	4.6	83.2	736	4.3	100.0
Galle	220	6.3	23.0	738	5.5	77.0	958	5.7	100.0
Matara	172	4.9	24.0	545	4.1	76.0	717	4.2	100.0
Hambantota	117	3.3	17.9	536	4.0	82.1	653	3.9	100.0
Kurunegala	293	8.4	21.8	1052	7.8	78.2	1345	7.9	100.0
Puttalam	133	3.8	18.8	573	4.3	81.2	706	4.2	100.0
Anuradhapura	122	3.5	19.1	517	3.9	80.9	639	3.8	100.0
Polonnaruwa	117	3.3	20.2	462	3.4	79.8	579	3.4	100.0
Badulla	175	5.0	19.2	735	5.5	80.8	910	5.4	100.0
Monaragala	81	2.3	15.2	451	3.4	84.8	532	3.1	100.0
Ratnapura	205	5.9	15.6	1110	8.3	84.4	1315	7.8	100.0
Kegalle	159	4.5	22.8	539	4.0	77.2	698	4.1	100.0

Source: Calculated using data from Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2001/2002.

As seen in Table 1, the coverage of sample size of the headship in both female and male are mostly similar. The highest number of FHHs (29.9% or 1,045 households) and the highest MHHs (28.2% or 3,782 households) were from the Western Province whilst the lowest sample size of FHHs (6.8% or 239 households) and the surveyed MHHs (7.3% or 979) were from the North Central Province. Likewise, in the sample distribution by districts, the highest number of FHHs (12.6% or 441 households) and the highest MHHs (11.9% or 1,603 households) were from the Colombo District whilst the lowest sample size of FHHs (2.3% or 81) and the surveyed MHHs (3.4% or 451) were from the Monaragala District. All apparent differences of the sample distribution in both FHHs and MHHs are due to their different sample frame and coverage used.

In HIES survey, the household questionnaire was used to collect demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the sample population. The basic characteristics of age distribution, household size, marital status, ethnicity and religion of the headships are given in Table 2. There are some disparities in the age distribution of female and male-headed households. There is a considerable proportion of surveyed headship under 30 years in both female and male (5.2% in FHHs and 6.5% in MHHs). The highest recorded age group of FHHs is 60 years and above (36.5%). Nevertheless, highest recorded age group of MHHs is 40-49 years (28.9%). The mean age and the median age of the FHHs are 53.8 and 54.0 years respectively. The mean age and the median age of the MHHs are lower than the FHHs (48.0 and 47.0 years respectively). As expected, the distribution by marital status indicates that the majority of FHHs are "Widowed" and MHHs are "Married". However, there are some considerable proportions of FHHs in the categories of "Never Married" (4.7%) and "Separated" (5.1%) when compared with the MHHs. For the MHHs the percentage of "Never Married" and "Separated" categories are very low (1.8% and 0.7% respectively).

Ethnicity and religion distribution of surveyed households indicate that the majority are Sinhalese and Buddhist. The distribution of ethnicity and religion is almost identical in both FHHs and MHHs. In the FHHs, the average household size is lower due to the absence of a male head. Distribution by household size also confirmed which household head had the highest number of household members. Average household size in FHHs is 3.68 and in MHHs it is 4.35.The households having only one member (only the head of the household without any other family member) is relatively higher for the FHHs (9.4%) than the MHHs (2.4%). This suggests that household heads who live alone are higher in FHHs.

Table 2: Main Characteristics of the FHHs and MHHs

| Characteristics	FHHs (%) N=3496	MHHs (%) N=13428
Age Distribution		
Less than 10	0.0	0.0
10 – 19	0.2	0.1
20 – 29	5.0	6.4
30 – 39	12.8	21.8
40 – 49	19.5	28.9
50 – 59	26.1	22.8
60 +	36.5	20.0
Mean Age	53.8 (SD = 14.7)	48.0 (SD = 13.4)
Median Age	54.0	47.0
Marital Status		
Never Married	4.7	1.8
Married	31.8	94.3
Widowed	57.1	3.1
Divorced	1.4	0.1
Separated	5.1	0.7
Ethnicity		
Sinhalese	83.5	84.0
Sri Lankan Tamil	5.1	4.4
Indian Tamil	4.1	5.0
Sri Lankan Moor	6.5	6.1
Other (Malay + Burgher + Other)	0.7	0.3
Religion		
Buddhist	78.0	79.3
Hindu	7.8	7.9
Islam	6.8	6.4
Roman Catholic/ other Christian	7.4	6.4
Other	0.0	0.0
Household Size		
1	9.4	2.7
2 – 3	42.1	27.6
4 – 5	34.6	49.3
>5	14.0	20.4
Average household size	3.68	4.35

Source: Calculated using data from Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2001/2002.

B. Identifying the poor and non-poor households and their distribution

In general, head of the household is identified as the person responsible for most household decisions. Nevertheless, most surveys, including the HIES identify female-headed households as households where no husband or no adult male is present for a longer period. Generally, the definition of a head of the household reflects the stereotype of a person in authority and the bread winner. However, households could be divided into two groups based on their headship. To identify the poor and non-poor groups of households, this study used Rs 1423.00 as the poverty line.

Department of Census and Statistics had used poverty line based on the Food-Energy-Intake method but now uses the method of CBN to derive the official poverty line in Sri Lanka. Based on that derivation of poverty line, this study identifies four different household populations. These groups are poor FHHs, non-poor FHHs, poor MHHs and non-poor MHHs for the analysis (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Classification of the Households
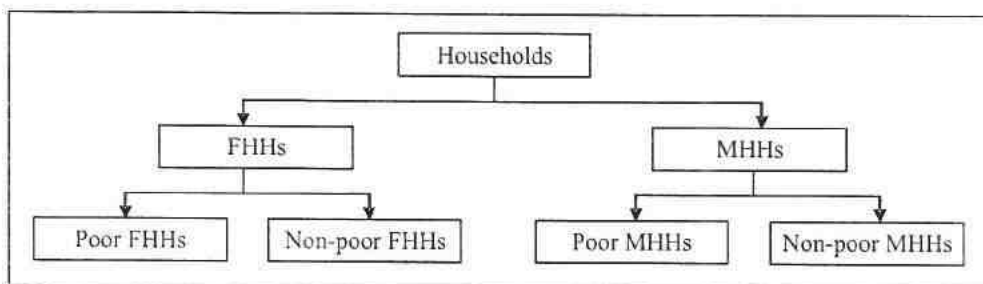
The distribution of the poor and non-poor household population is presented in Table 3. It shows 25.7% of the population as poor living below the poverty line. Further, 24.1% of the FHHs and 26.0% of the MHHs are poor. When compared to poor MHHs, the proportion of the poor FHHs are low. Proportion of the poor FHHs and MHHs is calculated in each sector, province and district. The highest proportion of the FHHs (40.3%) and MHHs (34.3%) are from the estate sector. Urban poor population is

This number is calculated by the DCS and the official poverty line for March 2006 is Rs. 1886.00 at current price.

relatively low. Uva, Sabaragamuwa and North Western provinces have recorded the highest proportion of the poor. The distribution of poor FHHs and poor MHHs are almost identical. However, the district-wise comparison of the poor FHHs and poor MHHs indicate that the distribution is not identical. The highest proportion of poor FHHs were recorded in Ratnapura (38.2%) followed by Badulla (35.9%), Puttalam (35.2%), Kegalle (33.4%) and Kurunegala (32.6%) districts. But, the highest proportion of poor MHHs were from Monaragala (47.1%). Second highest proportion of poor MHHs were from Badulla (43.3%) followed by Hambantota (36.9%), Ratnapura (36.2%) and Puttalam (34.8%). This clearly indicates that there is a district-wise variation in the distribution of poor FHHs and MHHs.

Table 3: Distribution of poor and non-poor FHHs and MHHs by sector, province and district

Province	FHHs (%)		MHHs (%)		Total (%)	
	Poor	Non-poor	Poor	Non-poor	Poor	Non-poor
Poor and non-poor status	24.1	75.9	26.0	74.0	25.7	74.3
Sector						
Urban	9.9	90.1	9.2	90.8	9.4	90.6
Rural	27.8	72.2	29.6	70.4	29.3	70.7
Estate	40.3	59.7	34.3	65.7	35.2	64.8
Province						
Western	12.9	87.1	10.5	89.5	11.0	89.0
Central	22.2	77.8	28.3	71.7	27.1	72.9
Southern	28.8	71.2	30.8	69.2	30.4	69.6
North Western	33.4	66.6	32.6	67.4	32.7	67.3
North Central	27.3	72.7	22.8	77.2	23.5	76.5
Uva	38.4	61.6	44.8	55.2	43.9	56.1
Sabaragamuwa	36.1	63.9	35.0	65.0	35.1	64.9
District						
Colombo	9.4	90.6	5.0	95.0	5.9	94.1
Gampaha	11.8	88.2	10.5	89.5	10.8	89.2
Kalutara	20.6	79.4	19.0	81.0	19.3	80.7
Kandy	21.1	78.9	26.1	73.9	25.1	74.9
Matale	31.1	68.9	33.4	66.6	33.0	67.0
Nuwara Eliya	15.7	84.3	28.1	71.9	26.4	73.6
Galle	29.6	70.4	25.3	74.7	26.1	73.9

Province	FHHs(%)		MHHs(%)		Total(%)	
	Poor	Non-poor	Poor	Non-poor	Poor	Non-poor
Matara	32.4	67.6	32.4	67.6	32.4	67.6
Hambantota	21.6	78.4	36.9	63.1	34.6	65.4
Kurunegala	32.6	67.4	31.3	68.7	31.6	68.4
Puttalam	35.2	64.8	34.8	65.2	34.9	65.1
Anuradhapura	30.2	69.8	19.6	80.4	21.3	78.7
Polonnaruwa	24.7	75.3	26.2	73.8	25.9	74.1
Badulla	35.9	64.1	43.3	56.7	42.2	57.8
Monaragala	44.3	55.7	47.1	52.9	46.8	53.2
Ratnapura	38.2	61.8	36.2	63.8	36.5	63.5
Kegalle	33.3	66.7	32.3	67.7	32.5	67.5
Total (N)						

Source: Calculated using data from Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2001/2002.

Moreover, Figure 2 gives the snap shot of the distribution of poor and non-poor FHHs and MHHs. Kegalle, Ratnapura, Anuradhapura, Puttalam, Kurunegala, Galle, Kalutara, Gampaha and Colombo districts recorded a relatively higher proportion of poor FHHs than poor MHHs. Higher proportion of non-poor FHHs were recorded in Monaragala, Badulla, Polonnaruwa, Hambantota, Nuwara Eliya, Matale and Kandy districts in comparison to non-poor MHHs.

Figure 2: Distribution of the poor and non-poor FHHs and MHHs
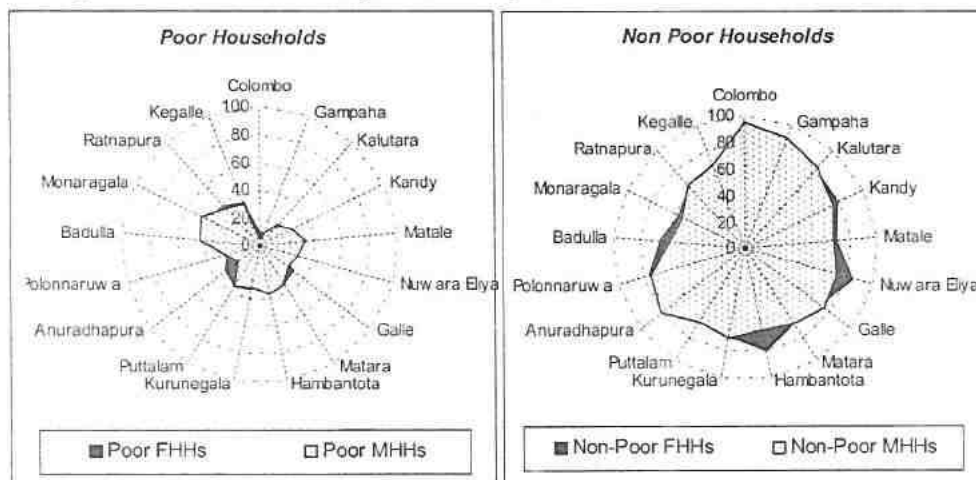
C. Economic demographic characteristics of the FHHs and MHHs by poor and non-poor

The HIES calculated some background information of the household population. The basic economic demographic characteristics of poor and non-poor households are given in Table 4. It is interesting to note that, more females in the FHHs (58.5%) are poor than females in MHHs (48.5%), whilst the proportion of non-poor females in the FHHs (63.0%) is much larger than the non-poor females in the MHHs (48.6%).

1. Demographic characteristics

Age Distribution

As shown in Table 4, the poor are younger (mean age is 27.0 and median 22) than the non-poor (mean 31.2 and median 29) for MHHs, whilst for FHHs the poor are older than the non-poor (the mean and median age of the poor are 29.6 and 24 respectively as against 32.8 and 29 respectively for the non-poor). Moreover, 45.5% of the poor were found to be below 20 years of age for the MHHs whilst this was 40.5% for the FHHs. The proportion of the poor in the age group 10-19 is considerably higher (24.5 and 25.7%) in both FHHs and MHHs than that of the non-poor FHHs and MHHs. Conversely, the proportion of older persons aged 60 and above is relatively lower among the poor in both FHHs and MHHs (11.9% and 6.9% respectively) when compared with the non-poor FHHs and MHHs (13.7% and 9.7% respectively). The poor population of older persons aged 60 and above in FHHs is relatively higher than the poor population in the MHHs. The above discussion further emphasizes that among the poor, a considerable proportion is young as well as elderly. Compared to poor MHHs, the higher proportion of elderly ages are in poor FHHs. (Table 4).

Table 4: Demographic and social characteristics of the FHHs and MHHs

| Demographic and Social Characteristics	FHHs %		MHHs %	
	Poor	Non-Poor	Poor	Non-Poor
Sex				
Male	41.2	37.0	51.5	51.4
Female	58.8	63.0	48.5	48.6
Total (N)	3103	9757	15185	43245
Age Group				
Less than 10	16.0	13.8	19.8	15.3
10 – 19	24.5	17.0	25.7	18.6
20 – 29	18.2	19.4	13.9	16.5
30 – 39	12.2	15.2	13.7	15.0
40 – 49	9.2	10.7	12.5	14.3
50 – 59	8.0	10.2	7.6	10.7
60 +	11.9	13.7	6.9	9.7
Total (N)	3103	9757	15185	43245
Mean	29.6 (SD = 21.0)	32.8 (SD =20.9)	27.0 (SD = 19.3)	31.2 (SD = 19.9)
Median	24.0	29.0	22.0	29.0
Marital Status*				
Never Married	46.5	42.3	42.1	35.5
Married	29.3	33.3	54.4	60.7
Widowed	20.9	21.0	2.8	3.1
Divorced	0.7	1.0	0.2	0.1
Separated	2.6	2.4	0.6	0.5
Total (N)	2607	8415	12177	36634
Education Level*				
No Schooling	11.8	5.8	8.2	3.5
Less than 6	34.8	22.1	38.4	23.3
Grade 6 – 9	43.4	41.3	43.6	41.7
G.C.E. (O/L)	5.6	13.8	5.6	13.7
G.C.E. (A/L)	4.3	15.1	3.9	15.5
Higher	0.2	1.9	0.2	2.4
Total(N)	2607	8415	12177	36634
Usual Activities*				
Employed	39.7	42.2	39.5	44.6
Unemployed	11.6	9.4	10.8	8.9
Student	20.3	16.8	25.0	19.2
Household Work	16.4	20.5	17.1	19.2
Retired/Unable to Work	10.4	10.4	6.9	7.2
Other	1.5	0.7	0.8	0.8

Note: * Data based on age 10+
Source: Calculated using data from Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2001/2002.

Age sex distribution

The demographic characteristics of the poor group could be clearly understood when the age-sex distribution of the poor is compared with the non-poor. Age sex pyramid provides a visual insight to the relative sizes of older and younger cohorts. The major changes in the age sex pyramid of population towards more mature age groups occurs with older age population and could also be understood as a shift in the relationships within a family between the younger and the older generations.

As revealed from the age-sex pyramids shown in Figure 3, shape of the age-sex pyramids differ for both male and female-headed households. MHHs age-sex distribution is more close to the pyramid shape. But among the MHHs the population below 50 years of age in the non-poor group is more barrel shape than the poor MHHs population. As shown in the age-sex pyramid for FHHs the distribution of male and females are completely different from the pyramid. The proportion of male distribution in FHHs is identical to proportion of male in MHHs. Both the poor groups have higher proportion of younger people. This clearly suggests that the fertility is high among the poor groups. Nevertheless there is an equal proportion distribution of females in FHHs. Moreover, as the pyramids show, males are more in the age groups 10-25 and female in age 60 and above, among the FHHs when compared with the MHHs. This indicates that the FHHs may have more burdens (economic dependency) than the non-poor with the young people of poor groups being unable to enter into the labour market.

Figure 3: Age – Sex Distribution of poor and non-poor MHHs & FHHs
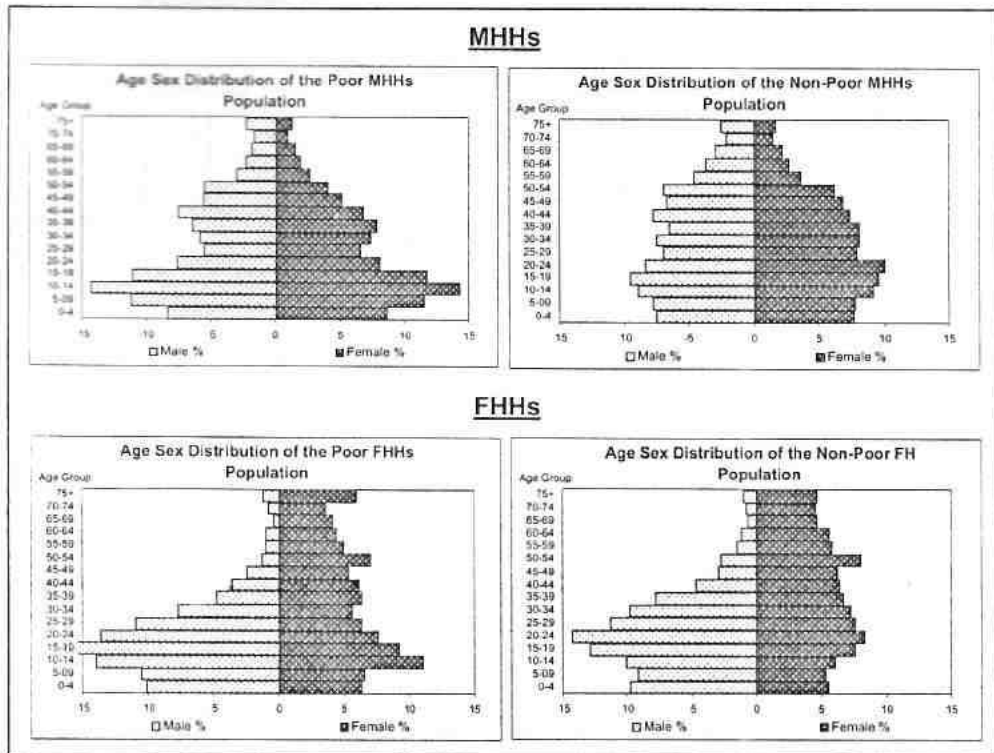
Source: Calculated using data from Household Income and ExpenditureSurvey 2001/2002.

The top part of the pyramid shows there is a higher proportion of females in ages 60 years and above in FHHs than in the MHHs. Also, the apex of the pyramid tends to be more for the poor group (aged 75+) for FHHs than the non-poor FHHs and MHHs, indicating that a higher dependency for the older groups exists for the poor FHHs than for the non-poor FHHs and MHHs (Figure 3). And the radar plot in Figure 4 shows a higher population in ages between 15-19 and aged 75 and above is in poor FHHs. This again suggests that a higher dependency for the older groups and age 15-19 exist in the poor FHHs.

Figure 4: Age distribution of poor and non-poor female and male-headed households

Poor Households

Non Poor Households
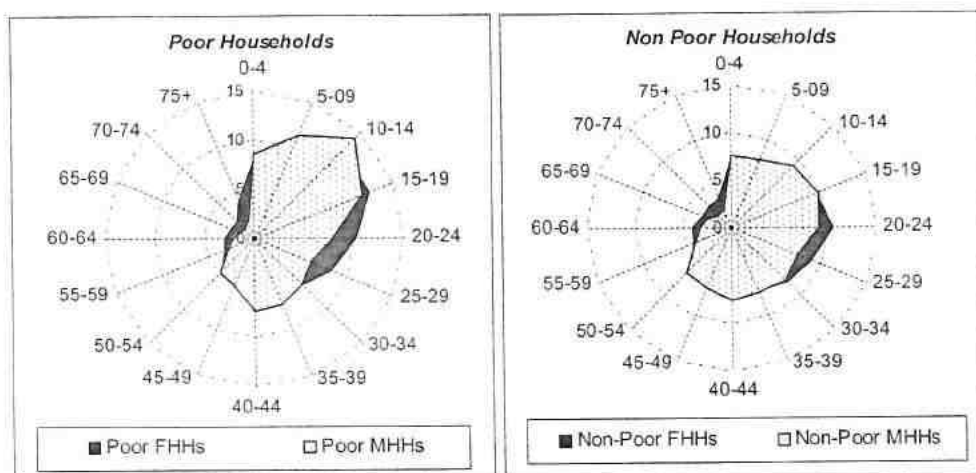
Dependents

The number of income earning members, especially in relation to the number of dependents can be an important factor affecting poverty. The weight of dependency in a household is high with a relatively small number of income earners supporting a large number of dependents. There is a stronger likelihood that such a household will be poor. The distribution of younger and older dependence ratios are demonstrated in Figure 5 and it shows that the poor households tend to have a larger proportion of dependents than non-poor. Especially considering the younger dependency ratios, highest younger dependency ratio is reported from poor MHHs (56.1%) followed by poor FHHs (45.0%). Where the poor FHHs and poor MHHs are concerned, highest older dependency ratio comes from poor FHHs (14.1%). This indicates a higher dependency of the older people living among the group of poor FHHs. Hence, poor FHHs may have more burdens (economic dependency) than the other households due to the inability to work of older people. The high younger dependency ratio in the poor households also point out that those households has high fertility and the high economic dependency due to the inability to enter into labour market.

Figure 5: Older and younger dependency ratios by households
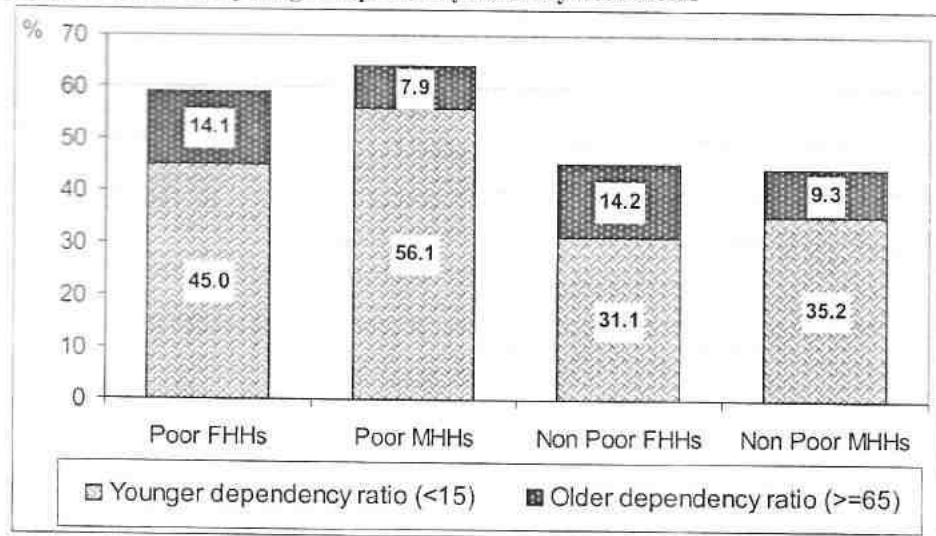
Marital status

In the traditional societies, head of the household is usually male. Women assume headship only in the absence of a suitable male, such as death of the male head, separation, divorce, migration or long term absence or in the case of unmarried women, the death of her father or brother. The marital status of the poor and non-poor households is presented in Table 4. It confirms the expectation that a considerable proportion of female heads of the households are widows. The popularity of the marital institution is confirmed, with the overwhelming majority of male heads of household, both poor and non-poor, being married. When comparing poor and non-poor population in female and male-headed households distribution by marital status, the highest number of poor population (46.5%) is in the never married category whereas non-poor consists of 42% in that category according to the FHHs. However, according to the MHHs data, the majority of the poor is in the married category (54.4%) followed by never married (42.1%). In general, a considerable proportion of the poor is never married in both households and FHHs proportion is relatively higher then the MHHs. Also, the proportion of widowed population in FHHs are very much higher (close to 21%) than the MHHs (close to 3%). This difference is statistically significant at p<0.01 level and thus it suggests that the marital status of poor and

non-poor of FHHs are relatively different from the marital status of poor and non-poor MHHs. It is clear that the highest proportion of unmarried population is in the poor FHHs and a considerably higher proportion of widowed population is also in the poor FHHs. (Figure 6). In Sri Lanka, the marital bond is both popular and relatively stable. Only a small proportion of individuals remain unmarried and the incidences of separation and divorce are low. Thus, substantial proportion of female heads of household is widowed.

Figure 6: Marital status of poor and non-poor female and male-headed households
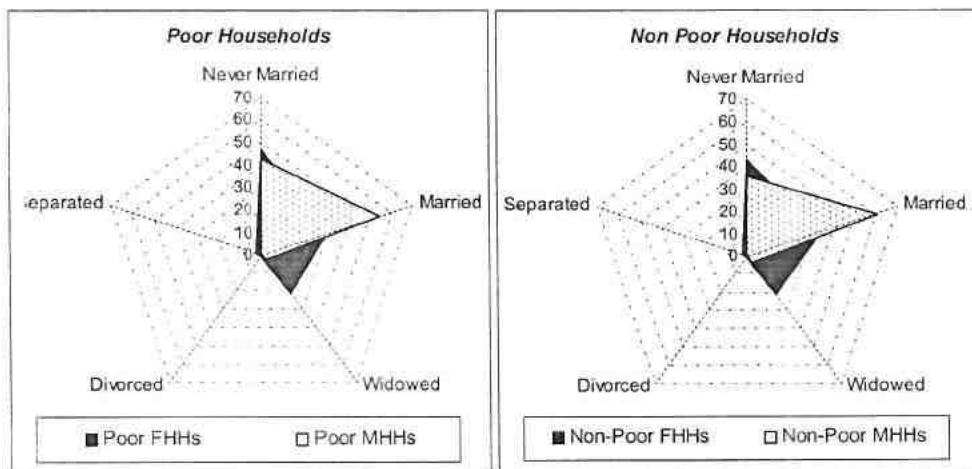
Social Characteristics

Level of Education

The benefit of education in improving the quality of life of people, increasing the productivity of their labour, enhancing earnings, reducing mortality and morbidity, raising fertility control, and leading to higher overall welfare, are well known. (Haveman and Wolfe, 1894; Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985). As far as the level of education in these households is concerned (age 10 and above), it is apparent that the persons in poor households are relatively less educated than those in non-poor households.

As evident from Table 4, the majority of the poor have followed through primary education, i.e., grade less than 6, (46.6% for FHHs and MHHs) as compared with the non-poor. Further, as far as the attainment of secondary and higher educational levels are concerned poor persons are fewer than the non-poor. For instance, in both FHHs and MHHs the proportion of poor with higher education is 0.2% whereas that of the non-poor it is around 2%. These differences of educational attainments in other categories are also noticeable (e.g., G.C.E. (O/L and A/L)). This difference is statistically significant at p<0.01 level and thus it suggests that the poor are relatively less educated than the non-poor.

As far as the never attended the schools of FHHs and MHHs are concerned, it is apparent a higher proportion of no schooling populations in the poor FHHs (11.8%). This figure is higher when compared to poor MHHs (8.2%) (Figure 7). Therefore, this evidence states that population in the poor FHHs has a relatively less chances to attend school. The lower educational attainment means that health and fertility related behaviour, the quality of life of individuals, and the social wellbeing of households in terms of non market goods and services, are all likely to be weaker.

Figure 7: Education level of the female and male-headed households
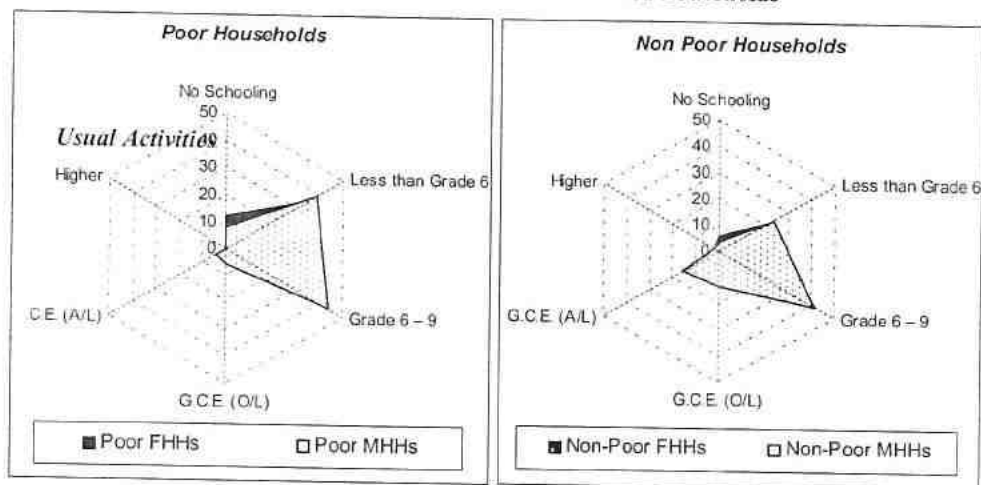
Where the usual activities are concerned, employed, unemployed, student, household work, retired/unable to work and other categories reveals that unemployment and retired (or unable to work, either due to age, ill-health or physical disability) population is high in the FHHs. highest unemployment proportion (11.6%) is recorded in poor FHHs. The retired or unable to work population in the poor FHHs is relatively higher than in the poor MHHs (Figure 11).

Figure 1: Usual activities of the female and male-headed households
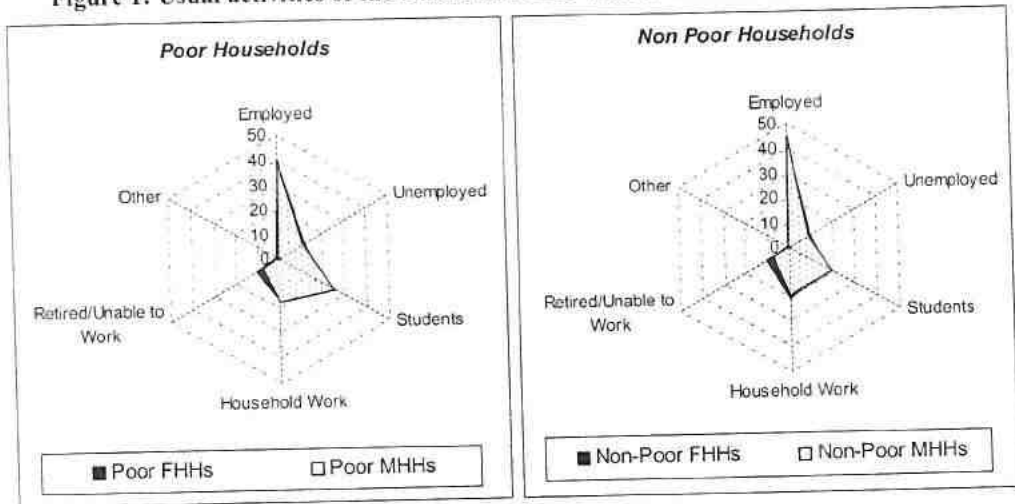
3. Economic characteristic

Labour force participation

The employment status can have a direct bearing on the income level of the household. In particular, the less employed can serve to reduce the income and consumption level of the household considerably. Table 5 shows the labour force status of the poor and non-poor households. Over half (50.4%) of the population was recorded from labour force (both employed and unemployed). The proportion of unemployed among the poor is more than that of the non-poor in both female and male-headed households. However, the poor FHHs have the highest proportion of unemployed (11.6%) when compared to the other three categories. The unemployment rate is considerably higher among the poor households (21.6%) and the highest unemployment rate (22.6) was recorded from poor FHHs. This shows that there is a relationship between unemployment and poverty and that the relationship is more pronounced among the poor FHHs.

Table 5: Labour force status of FHHs and MHHs

	FHHs %		MHHs %		Total %	
	Poor	Non-Poor	Poor	Non-Poor	Poor	Non-Poor
Employed	39.7	42.2	39.5	44.6	39.5	44.2
Unemployed	11.6	9.4	10.8	8.9	10.9	9.0
Not in labour force	48.7	48.4	49.7	46.5	49.6	46.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(2607)	(8415)	(12177)	(36634)	(14784)	(45049)
Unemployment rate	22.6	18.2	21.5	16.6	21.6	16.9

Source: Calculated using data from Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2001/2002.

Occupational distribution by poverty

The occupation can closely relate to the poverty status of the household. Generally, household members who are in lower levels of occupational categories with poor earning prospects are in danger of falling into poverty. The major occupational categories are presented in Table 6. As seen in the data, the proportion of poor that are engaged in white collar jobs such as the professional, technical and managerial fields are significantly higher among the non-poor when compared with poor. The majority of the poor people are working in elementary occupations followed by other occupational categories. The category of elementary occupation includes agriculture and other primary production activities. Among the categories of elementary occupations, highest proportion of people who are living in poor FHHs come as labourers in mining, construction, manufacturing and transport related occupations. There is a the higher proportion of poor FHH population workers in building construction, hand packing and other manufacturing related occupations.

Table 6: Occupational distribution of FHHs and MHHs **

Occupation and Industrial distribution *	FHHs %		MHHs %	
	Poor	Non-Poor	Poor	Non-Poor
Occupation				
Legislators, senior officials and managers	0.28	1.93	0.15	3.42
Professionals	1.11	10.78	0.70	10.28
Technicians and associate professionals	0.84	6.46	1.01	8.50
Clerks	1.11	9.67	1.23	7.60
Service workers and shop and market sales workers	3.62	6.63	3.19	6.42
Skilled agricultural and fishery workers	2.37	0.81	1.32	0.96
Craft and related workers	16.85	15.36	15.50	15.21
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	5.29	8.64	4.72	8.44
Elementary occupations	67.83	38.43	71.88	37.82
Armed forces	0.70	1.07	0.21	1.30
Not stated	0.00	0.21	0.00	0.03
Stated as any type of occupation	0.00	0.00	0.09	0.02
Total(N)	718	2337	3264	10670
Elementary occupations				
Sales and services elementary occupations	10.49	22.41	4.94	19.19
Agricultural, fishery and related labourers	41.98	37.79	50.17	40.42
Labourers in mining, construction, manufacturing and transport	47.53	39.80	44.88	40.39
Total(N)	486	897	2346	4028
Labourers in mining, construction, manufacturing and transport				
Mining and construction labourers				
Mining and related labourers	3.45	8.09	8.80	7.30
Construction and maintenance labourers: roads, dams and similar constructions	10.34	8.09	11.60	8.99
Building construction labourers	50.00	33.82	50.80	41.76
Manufacturing labourers				
Assembling labourers	3.45	7.35	4.80	9.18
Hand packers and other manufacturing labourers	31.03	42.65	23.20	32.40
Transport labourers				
Freight handlers, Hand and pedal drivers, drivers, operators of animal drawn vehicles and machinery	1.72	0.00	0.80	0.37
Total(N)		136	250	534

Note: * Data based on the people who are in paid employment/s during last four weeks (2004)
** Differences are statistically significant at α=0.01 level (Pearson's Chi-Square).
Source: Calculated using data from Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2001/2002.

As seen in the data, a higher proportion of poor FHHs is engaged in rough and low-income earning jobs. The differences in occupation distribution of the poor and non-poor is statistically significant at p<0.01 level, which indicates obviously that the poor tend to have a low income compared with the non-poor. Moreover, these economic activities of the poor are associated with their low level of education. Poverty is concentrated where the household members work in badly paid low levels of occupation. Households in which the members are employed in an occupation of above categories have a very high probability of being poor and it relates to the persistence of poverty.

Income and Expenditure Levels

Conceptually, the expenditure capacity of the households depends on the income. Poverty is defined in terms of low consumption expenditure with the low levels of household income. Given the close relationship between poverty, income and expenditure, an analysis of the income levels and income sources of households could be useful. Non-poor households enjoy substantially higher labour earning than the poor households. Table 7 clearly indicates these facts with the distribution of total household monthly income and per capita household monthly income among these four groups.

It is apparent that the group of lower income (particularly less than Rs. 6,500/=) is proportionately higher in poor groups. Particularly in the FHHs, the gap between the income of the poor and the non-poor is lesser than in the MHHs (Table 7). In the poor FHHs, the mean and the median household income of the poor are Rs. 5977.50 and Rs. 5200.00 respectively and these income figures are 41% (from Rs. 14469.90) and 51% (from Rs. 10200.00) for the non-poor FHHs respectively. Income differences between the poor and the non-poor female and male HHs are highly significant at p<.01 level.

Table 7: Distribution of total household monthly income of poor and non-poor FHHs and MHHs **

Income Level Rs.	FHHs				MHHs			
	Poor		Non-Poor		Poor		Non-Poor	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Less than 1500	208	6.7	344	3.5	1100	7.2	1365	3.2
1501 – 4000	892	28.7	1084	11.1	4005	26.4	4001	9.3
4001 – 6500	850	27.4	1415	14.5	5074	33.4	6505	15.0
6501 – 9000	628	20.2	1414	14.5	2746	18.1	7272	16.8
9001 – 11500	322	10.4	1296	13.3	1214	8.0	5541	12.8
11501 – 14000	113	3.6	1021	10.5	506	3.3	4146	9.6
14001 – 16500	41	1.3	568	5.8	268	1.8	2849	6.6
16501 – 19000	9	0.3	556	5.7	123	0.8	2285	5.3
19001 – 21500	9	0.3	367	3.8	40	0.3	1740	4.0
21501 – 24000	11	0.4	268	2.7	50	0.3	1440	3.3
24001 – 26500	8	0.3	258	2.6	15	0.1	987	2.3
26500 and above	12	0.4	1167	12.0	46	0.3	5111	11.8
Total	3103	100.0	9758	100.0	15187	100.0	43242	100.0
Mean	5977.5 (SD=3973.4)		14469.9 (SD=19512.1)		5870.3 (SD=4130.1)		14931.5 (SD=29146.4)	
Median	5200.0		10200.0		5161.7		10000.0	
Per capita household monthly income								
Mean	1189.2 (SD=692.2)		3405.6 (SD=4240.0)		1071.3 (SD=733.4)		3298.5 (SD=6256.9)	
Median	1075.0		2420.0		985.7		2230.3	

Note: ** Differences are statistically significant at $\alpha=0.01$ level (Pearson's Chi-Square).
Source: Calculated using data from Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2001/2002.

The distribution of the expenditure level among the FHHs and MHHs, which is in Table 8, clearly indicates that the different levels of expenditure obviously depend on the income of the two groups as discussed above. It is seen that 68.7% of the poor population in the FHHs and 63.1% in the poor MHHs spend less than Rs. 6,500/= monthly while in contrast more than 80% of the non-poor FHHs and more than 90% of the MHHs spend more than Rs. 6,500/= monthly. However, when the poor FHHs are compared with the poor MHHs, the highest proportion of the households spending less than Rs. 6,500/= monthly was recorded from the poor FHHs. The average measures of the mean and the median household monthly expenditure and the per capita household monthly expenditure, further reflect the economic status of the poor (Tables 7 and 8). It is observed that a large proportion of expenditure of the poor is allocated for their consumption of food.

Table 8: Distribution of total household monthly expenditure of FHHs and MHHs with poor and non-poor **

Expenditure level Rs.	FHHs				MHHs			
	Poor		Non-Poor		Poor		Non-Poor	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Less than 1500	53	1.7	6	0.1	27	0.2	3	0.0
1501 - 6500	2079	67.0	1607	16.5	9546	62.9	4227	9.8
6501 – 11500	881	28.4	3089	31.7	5336	35.1	15563	36.0
11501 – 16500	75	2.4	2119	21.7	278	1.8	9527	22.0
16501 – 21500	15	0.5	1019	10.4	0	0.0	5173	12.0
21501 – 26500	0	0.0	595	6.1	0	0.0	2963	6.9
26501 – 31500	0	0.0	473	4.8	0	0.0	1769	4.1
31500 and above	0	0.0	848	8.7	0	0.0	4020	9.3
Total	3103	100.0	9756	100.0	15187	100.0	43245	100.0
Mean	5687.3 (SD=2737.8)		15978.6 (SD=15625.3)		6054.5 (SD=2147.7)		16791.4 (SD=16851.1)	
Median	5295.00		11841.3		5745.7		12190.7	
Per capita household monthly expenditure								
Mean	1097.8 (SD=225.0)		3836.1 (SD=4062.4)		1090.1 (SD=223.7)		3710.7 (SD=3953.2)	
Median	1127.4		2694.0		1119.2		2595.5	

Note ** Differences are statistically significant at $\alpha=0.01$ level (Pearson's Chi-Square).
Source: Calculated using data from Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2001/2002.

It is interesting to note that the expenditure level is higher in the MHHs than in the FHHs. The mean and median level of the expenditures in FHHs is considerably lower than the MHHs. The reason may be of relatively high savings or not having income to spend money.

Summary and Conclusions

The identification of the poor FHHs is presented in this study using the data set of Household income and Expenditure Survey 2001-2002. This study used current Sri Lankan official poverty line in year 2002 which is equal to Rs. 1,423.00 to identify the poor groups for the above survey.

Based on this poverty line, the level of poverty among male and female-headed households is similar but there are regional disparities. Poverty among both households is lower in the urban sector in comparison to the rural and the estate sector. Poverty is high in the Estate sector FHHs. Poverty among FHHs is also high in the Uva, Sabaragamuwa and North Western provinces. Female-headed households in the

districts of Kegalle, Ratnapura, Anuradhapura, Puttalam, Kurunegala, Galle, Kalutara, Gampaha and Colombo have a higher probability of being poor.

The demographic and social characteristics of the poor and the non-poor disclose that poor groups have a higher proportion of younger people as a result of high fertility in the last 15 years. However, the poor FHHs has a higher proportion of people in older age groups and this clearly indicates that poverty is high in the FHHs as a result of high fertility and due to the larger number of young and old dependents.

A substantial proportion of women in both poor and non-poor female-headed households are widows. Death of the husband appears to be the main reason for the assumption of household headship by women.

The education level of the household members is negatively related to poverty. Poor households have less educated members. Further, members in the poor female-headed households tend to be less educated than the members in the poor male-headed households.

The economic characteristics show that the majority of the members in the FHHs are working. However, Poor FHHs has the highest level of unemployment and retired (or unable to work) population, either due to age, ill-health or physical disability. Majority of the poor FHHs are working in low-income and hard work categories such as building construction, hand packing and other low-income manufacturing related occupations.

The evidence shows that male-headed households enjoy a higher level of labour earnings than female-headed households. Whereas the poor FHHs and poor MHHs are concerned, there are no big differences between their levels of income. But income sources may be varying between these two groups. Expenditure level is relatively low in FHHs and the lowest level of expenditure comes from the poor FHHS. This may be for two reasons; one is the high savings and the other is due to not having enough income to achieve basic requirements. If they go in for savings, those households can have high expectation for a better future.

The facts presented in this paper clearly indicate that the government and society of Sri Lanka face the different issue of poverty among FHHs and MHHs. They arise from special mutual reinforcing of economic demographic characteristics. Therefore, we must clearly identify the different economic demographic characteristics of poor FHHs when we try to eliminate poverty from Sri Lanka.

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