



## **Female Leadership Families and Their Social Problems in the War Affected Area of Puthukkudiyiruppu Divisional Secretariat Division in Mullaitivu District of Sri Lanka**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The main objectives of the study are to study the social issues faced in female leadership families and find out the causes for the formation of female-led families. Primary and secondary data have been utilized in this study. To collect primary data 205 households had selected by way of the stratified random sampling method. Questionnaires, key informants interview, and focus group discussion have been adopted. Several social issues have been identified, which was in the hold of the battle for three decades. After the war, to study the status of basic needs such as food, accommodation, education, health, social protection, transport, cultural issues, employment, and income have been reviewed. Death of husband, living apart, disappearance, and being unmarried and living alone is being the main causes of the formation of female-led families. Their livelihood and life could be improved by creating employment opportunities, strengthening and empowering the economy, formation of leadership, provision of psychosocial reinforcement, encouraging remarriage, and maintenance of elderly family-led females, ensuring safety among female-led families.*

**Keywords: Female led families, Social issues, Widows, Social Protection**

### **1. Introduction:**

Women's participation is found to be an important one in economic development. In early days, only a few women engaged in these activities as self-involvement in learning and engaging in employment by women was found to have been denied one, due to reasons such as female slavery and social issues. But, since women right, women development and women's freedom have gained importance nowadays, progress is also seen in women's activities. In Sri Lanka, 1.2 million families (23% of families) are female-led ones (Household and Income Expenditure Survey-2013). There are 58121 female-led families in Northern Province alone (United Nations, 2015). Sri Lanka's civil war has rendered several hundreds of women to widows and made them compulsorily to accept the state of female leadership. The number of female-led families has increased as never seen before, for reasons such as loss of lives, destructions and made missing due to the internal civil war took place for three decades in the North and East of Sri

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Lanka. It is observed that female-led families are seen socially and economically being weak and facing several problems. Therefore, this study about them becomes important.

Puthukudiyiruppu Divisional Secretariat Division (DSD) is located in Vanni electorate in Mullaitheevu District in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka (Fig.1). There are 5187 female-led families in Mullaitheevu District. Out of 2045, female-led families are in the DSD of Puthukudiyiruppu (Planning Branch, 2018). This area has been identified to have the enormous number of female-led families since this DSD was in the clutch of the battle for a long period and the territory of the intense fight during the last battle. The reasons for the state of acceptance of female-led families are being divorced, living apart, death of husband, and being unmarried and living alone. There is compulsion in the female-led families to accept the whole responsibility of the family. In the circumstances, these family women battle to fulfill their life requirements. They face challenges about education, income, rights and economic opportunities. Leadership women face many struggles to be good family leaders in their families and good workers at their places of work (Sujatha,2016). In Sri Lanka poor women especially leadership women or elderly women are facing many challenges and struggling for their family economy and existence. Main challenges are being increased cost of living, women being utilized for low skill payment work and inequality in payment at work opportunity. Generally, poverty is more seen in families of female-led families in developing countries (International Labour Organization, 2016). Low education level and being pushed to work for the sake of their children are being the reasons for their continuous poverty of leadership women (Asian Development Bank, 1999).

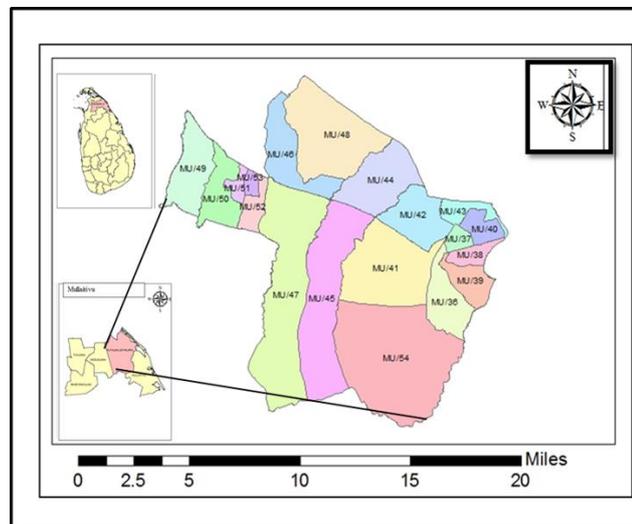


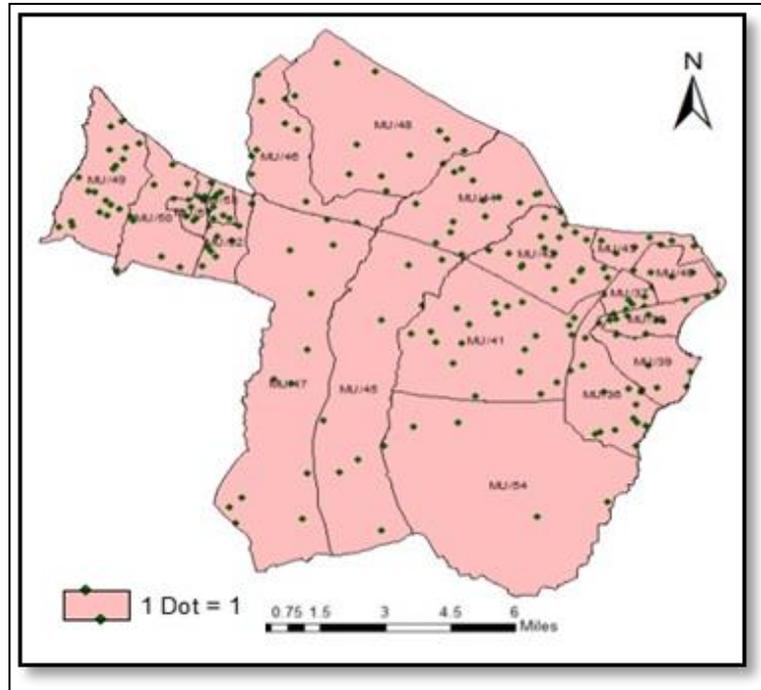
Fig.1 Location of Study Area

The main objective of this study is to identify the female-led families, find out causes for the formation of female-led families, distinguish the social issues faced due to female leadership and propose recommendations for social issues of female-led families. It is the main duty of the society to cite the distressful female-led families evolved through compulsions to other women to become self-confident and be as fore-example and to lead them in progressive way constructively useful to the society. Hence it is essential to review their social and economic issues and provide them the best solution.

## 2. Materials and Method:

The study has been carried out by collecting primary and secondary data to find out the social issues concerning the female-led families in Puthukudiyiruppu DSD. There are 19 Grama Niladhari divisions in Puthukudiyiruppu DSD. There are 2045 female-led families seen existing here. In this 205 families were selected based on stratified random sampling method and primary data was collected through a questionnaire (Fig-2), interview and observation method. Further, details were obtained by meeting Social Service Officers, women Officers, Divisional Secretariat offices, Grama Nilatharies and Rural Development Officers of Puthukudiyiruppu division and the Village leaders of that area. The information has been collected and utilized in this study by visiting residences of the female-

led families in Puthukudiyiruppu DSD to understand their social and economic issues. Direct data and information was obtained incorporating the mentality, likes and dislikes, and self-concepts of the selected people. Further, information was collected by way of focus group discussion from Puthukudiyiruppu Divisional Secretariat, Rural Development Societies and important persons of the villages.



**Fig-2: Sample Location**

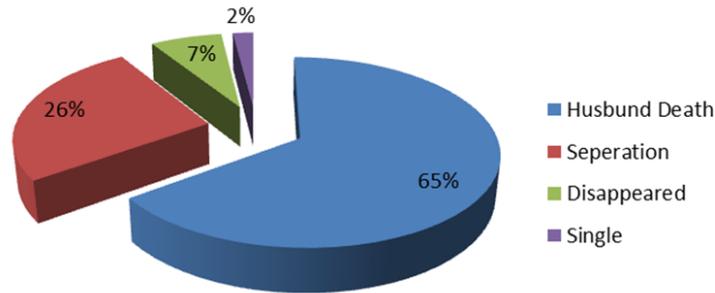
Secondary data used, was obtained from statistical manual and resource summary from Mullaitivu District Secretariat and Puthukudiyiruppu DSD. Further, details pertaining to the female-led families obtained from 19 Grama Niladhari divisions of the DSD with regard to formation of female-led families, their employment, socio-economic status, age of women, number of family members, literacy, medical-health, income & savings, and communication facilities was collected and analyzed with the aid of SPSS software and the results have been illustrated through Tables and appropriate diagram. The spatial patterns of the sample location of female-led families are shown in figure-1 which prepared by using ARG GIS 10.2 software.

### 3. Results and discussions

#### 3.1. Status of female-led families:

It is found that the number of female-led families living in Puthukudiyiruppu DSD is 2045. Out of this 1616 women have taken leadership due to death of their family head, and 341 women due to separation from their husbands, 26 women unmarried and living single and 62 women due to the disappearance of their husbands due to the past civil war. 150 female-led families live in Grama Niladhari divisions of Puthukudiyiruppu West, Puthukudiyiruppu East, Udayarkaddu South, Visuvamadhu West, and 100 female-led families in Grama Niladhari divisions of Vallipunam, Iranaipalai, Kompavil, and Visvamadhu East, and less than 100 female-led families live in other Grama Niladhari divisions. There are some factors for the formation of female-led families in the research area. In that respect family leadership has been accepted by women, due to the reason of 50 percent of deaths due to war, 41 percent due to natural death, 5 percent due to accidental deaths, and 04 percent due to suicides. Further, 26 percent of women have gained leadership due to separation from their husbands, and 07 percent due to the disappearance of their husbands during the war. Furthermore, 02 percent of women have seen an unmarried and living single. Women have accepted leadership due to the above reasons. Out of the female-led families in the study area, 26 percent of leadership women are being separated from their husbands (Fig.3).

**Fig. 3: Causes for Formation of Female Lead Families**



The reasons for the state of living separately are being, their husbands' second marriage, wives being harassed by husbands with words and acts due to usage of addictive alcohol, drugs, lack of understanding between husbands and wives, disconnection of contact after going abroad, and the reason of state of separation due to dowry issues. Out of them, 83 percent of women are seen not divorced, 17 percent were divorced. Out of the 06 percent are between the age of 20-30, 27 percent are between 31-40, 34 percent are between 41-50, and 33 percent are above the age of 51 are living separated from their husband. One of the reasons for the state of teenagers led families is due to early marriages having been done, to safeguard the children from partaking in the battle.

### 3.2. Social Issues

The study area is the one which was affected during the last battle of 2009. Therefore, Houses made of bricks have been provided to all female-led families having children, through a housing scheme. However, elderly women living alone have only been provided with sheeted houses. These houses are stuck around with chit board with the state of being affected during rainy, wind and cyclone, are in the state of impairment. Houses thatched with sheets do not seem to be suitable for elderly persons. 89 percent of people have brick made houses while 21 percent of them have temporary houses. Brick made houses have been provided through non-governmental organizations. Since the fund provided was inadequate to fully complete the houses, 80 percent of the houses are being a floor not done, doors and windows not fixed and in the state of unsafe.

#### i) Basic Facilities:

Food is an important one of man's essential need. In the study area, 21 percent of people are seen having meals twice a day and 79 percent have meals thrice a day. There is an unfortunate state of inability to fulfill even the essential need of food for a man. And, all others having meals thrice a day cannot be said eating nutritious food. Water is essential for all activities of human. If we look at the source of obtaining water, 52 percent families obtain water from sand wells which were not properly built, 22 percent from built wells, 22 percent from nearby wells, 02 percent from common wells and 02 percent from water supply service. It is a difficult thing to obtain water for all the needs from nearby wells and common wells. The drinking water obtained is said to be very good by 05 percent of households, fairly good by 85 percent and poor quality by 10 percent. There are more possibilities for developing many diseases due to drinking impure water. If we look at the availability of clothing, 30 percent of people can get their clothes while 70 percent of them live with inadequate clothing.

Many issues are seen about the children in female-led families of the study area. Since the children in the female-led families have lost their fathers in their young age they seem to not knowing their fathers. Maintenance procurable at a young age from both parents is being obtained only from the mother. The responsibility of providing food and education facilities falls to the mother. Hence, it is observed that these women are struggling to meet the education expenses of their children. They are also struggling concerning the marriage of girls of the female-led family children. The dowry issue which is seen more nowadays has affected the lives of many women. This impact is

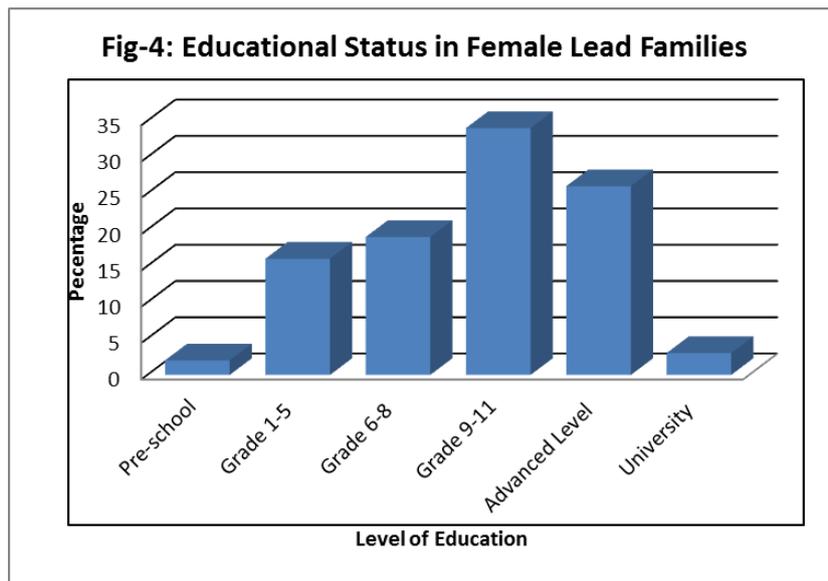
more seen in female-led families, because, since the economy is being a big issue here, acquiring property becomes an impossible thing.

**ii) Education Level:**

The education level of the children is important in female-led families. Their literacy could help to raise the standard of these families. When looking at the education level of the children of the female-led families of the study area, it is seen that preschool going is at 02 percent, grade 1-5 is at 16 percent, grade 6-8 is at 19 percent, grade 9-11 is at 34 percent, higher level is at 26 percent, and University and higher studies at 3 percent. The number of children studying secondary and higher standards is seen higher than that of primary education. They do not get adequate funds to buy learning equipment or go to study centers. When looking at the education level of the head woman of the family, it is seen that, women studied grade 1-5 is at 33 percent, grade 6-8 is at 27 percent, grade 9-11 is at 35 percent, up to GCE Advanced level is at 04 percent and learned higher education (University) at 01 percent (Fig. 4). In these many of them have studied only school education. It is also seen that they are low in vocational training experience and were not educated to suit employment opportunities. Due to this, they face difficulties in obtaining employment opportunities.

**iii) Social Protection:**

Security is an important issue in the study area. Increase of antisocial activities such as illicit liquor (Kasippu), usage of drugs, Cannabis (Ganja), increased violence and child abuses are seen to have increased. It is a very difficult thing for a female-led family to live without the support of a male in this area. Young aged leadership women and elderly leadership women having grown up unmarried girls have to face security issues at various angles. 97 percent of the women subjected to interview have mentioned that women who have no male support get many bad names in society.



Moreover, young women going for work to distant places leave their children alone at homes. There is no protection for them. There is a state of danger caused by others or by poisonous creatures. 49 percent of people state that they get security in the society while 51 percent state they do not. Moreover, they have mentioned that violence and undesirable activities take place in public places. Houses are in an insecure state with lack of secure fencing system and lack of doors and windows. Therefore, the security of the female-led families in this divisional secretariat has become questionable. They are compelled to convert themselves into main wage earner without any training or experience in a situation of their husband's sudden death. Many of them are not familiar with the outside world and unaware of many things such as they do not know as to how to earn income for food and clothes, how to make transactions in the market, how to get the assistance given by the government.

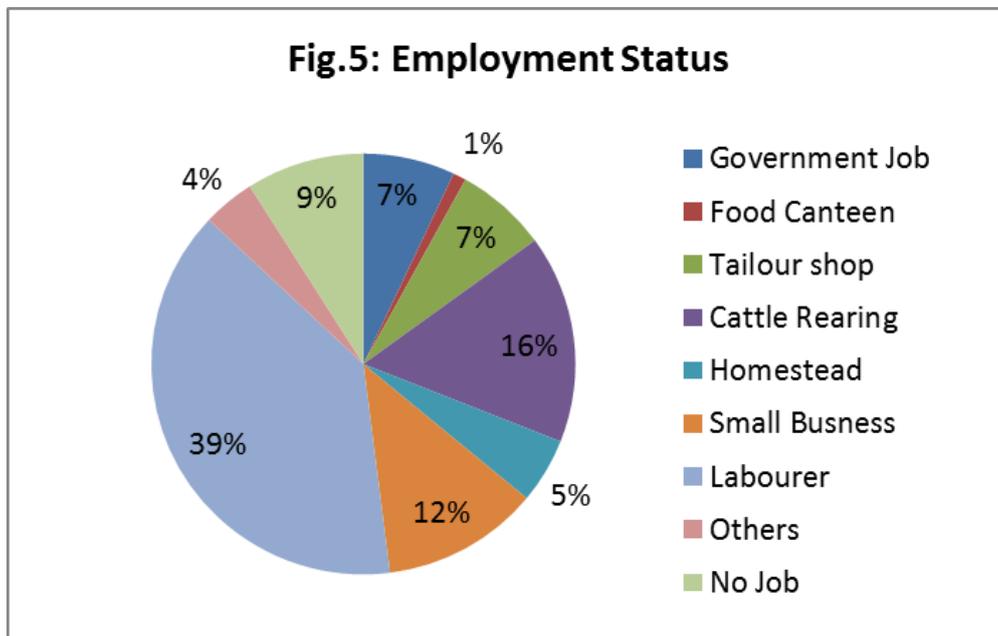
**iv) Health Facilities:**

The role of female-led families naturally creates mental related burdens. For the only reason for the husband’s death, they are pushed to the compulsion of accepting a new life away from society and the life they already lived. It was found through this study that, most of these women are being mentally affected. They are subjected to direct physical and mental effect since they face issues to perform their daily activities thus increasing mental stress as the physical activities are related to the mind. Also, they are seen physically and mentally weak due to lack of rest, mental peace, and unavailability of balanced diet and nutrition.

They fulfill their basic needs by involving in physical labor, straining themselves for the sake of children and their family. Women have faced various constraints due to the past war of 2009. They have faced severe impacts about physical, mental and economical aspects. Laborers experiencing inadequate pay and severe workload. The family led women to fail to pay attention to their body while exerting for the sake of their families, with the only interest in the welfare of their children. Therefore, they are seen to be malnutrition. Also, these women are seen to be in a state of the tendency to physically weakening. Due to this, they fall sick easily. Older elderly people are suffering during their period of illness in loneliness without any income and without anyone to care for. Some people are seen having chest pain and heart ailments due to working hard and high blood pressure due to worrying in loneliness. Hospital facilities are also seen low here. Transportation facilities are also poor. The street system is seen badly deteriorated. Due to this, they experience hardships to go to the hospital.

**v) Employment and Income:**

Female-led families experience various economic related issues. The income of these families is seen at a low level. They have to undertake hard work to earn a low income. They are not in a position to compensate for the cost of living with the daily income received from labor jobs. In the study area it is seen that, labor job doing is at 38 percent, cattle breeders at 16 percent, small scale businessmen at 12 percent, government employees at 07 percent, tailoring work at 07 percent, home gardening and agriculture at 05 percent, food manufacturers at 01 percent, other workers at 04 percent and jobless at 09 percent (Fig.5). Those who are unable to work are seen dependent and living with the support of others.



Women involved in self-employment do not get proper income as they struggle to sell their products. That is, marketing opportunities are low. Therefore, there is a situation to take their products to the town area to sell them. They face many issues when thus transported. Income obtained by female-led families is being not permanent at large. Because of this many families are facing issues related to income. At the same time, they do not have adequate



capital to get over this problem. They cannot raise capital as they also have to bear their family burden all alone. Because of this reason only poverty is prevalent in this area. It is seen that, those who earn less than 5000 rupees are at 21 percent, earn 5000-10000 at 55 percent, earn 10000-15000 at 12 percent, earn 15000-20000 at 03 percent and those who earn above 30000 rupees at 08 percent. Their economic status is seen backward due to reasons such as lack of capital, lack of vocational training, more family members and increased cost of living, although livelihood plans have been provided to them. It is observed that work opportunities for the women of the female-led families are seen low. Low literacy level is also a reason for this. State of dependency is seen in the study area. They are in a situation to depend on society in case of low monthly income and unable to fulfill their livelihood needs. Most of them are being 'Samurthy' recipients and living below the poverty level. Due to this reason, they are forced to depend on the government, non-government organizations, local institutions, and their relatives. When looking based on livelihood assistance, cattle have been provided to 75 percent of people, sewing machines for 10 percent, water pump for 08 percent and assistance for shops given for 07 percent. And, elderly leadership women are in a situation to depend on their children for their needs. Mostly, the leading women and the mother both are seen as the female-led family. Because of this fulfilling, their family needs are seen to be a battle. In this area, most of them are in a situation of dependency for the sake of livelihood, to fulfill their basic needs, and safety. In the study area, 45 percent of people are expecting assistance utilizing cattle, 23 percent vocational training, 17 percent assistance for the education of their children, 10 percent material assistance and 05 percent financial assistance.

They say there will be an opportunity to increase their income if the required assistance is received. Many female-led families are seen who lost their husbands due to the last battle of 2009. Rupees one hundred thousand was paid to them as compensation by the government of Sri Lanka. 30 percent of them have received this compensation. 70 percent of them are yet to receive even though 8 years have passed after the war is over. Female-led families have borrowed loans for their requirements from state and private banks. Most of them have borrowed loans to enhance their facilities and those doing business for the sake of doing their business.

## Conclusion

Female-led families have faced too many socio-economically related issues. They are faced with various issues like problems in acquiring basic facilities, cultural restriction, physical-mental health issues, poverty, engaging in low-income work and unemployment. Solutions have been proposed such as, avoidance of husbands' death as much as possible, providing information about disappeared to reduce mental stress, creation of leadership, loosening of cultural restrictions, maintenance of elderly female leadership women, provision of psycho-social support, encouraging remarriage, increasing earnings by creating employment opportunities, taking action to pay government compensation for those killed in war, encouraging saving habit, provision of solutions to children related issues, ensuring safety, minimizing early marriages, enlightening with regard to basic rights and security, and non-government organizations to come forward to help. While this is being an issue of a main sector of society, it is also being an issue of the future generation who has to live especially. Due to this, all those who have a concern about the society should come forward to view this issue carefully and with concern. Alternatively, viewing this issue with pity should be avoided. Further it is the firm belief that, when the Social organizations, government, and the non-government organizations provide assistance to the leading women to raise their living standard to the possible extent, they could be released from social, economic, psychological and physical impacts strengthen as head erect citizens and changes could be made in the society. Their lives have to be restored.

It is essential to implement the proposals proposed in this study to bring about the hidden attributes such as personality, self-confidence, courage, and willpower of the reviewed female leadership women. Permanent income receivable programs should be implemented and confidence and likeness in life must be created. Dedicated and effective resource persons should come forward to cause special vocational training, education progress and economic progress. Through this, the renaissance in their lives could be made which is in a state of danger. Further strengthening is essential for women development. To convert strengthening into efficiency, ideals such as the expansion of female education, feminism, women liberation, and gender development are essential. In that respect, seminars, workshops, and gatherings must be held because of strengthening at the community level. Through this, lives of women would certainly change into knowledgeable and creative ones.



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