



Gender Perspective of Decision-Making Power in Small-scale Enterprises: A Study of the Tourism Industry in Hikkaduwa, Sri Lanka.

Saman Handaragama
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This study investigates the factors, processes and conditions that determine women's decision-making power in the small-scale enterprises in the tourism industry in Hikkaduwa, Sri Lanka. This exploratory study employed several data collection techniques, including key informant interviews, non-participant observation, questionnaires, surveys, and in-depth interviews, carried out among small-scale tourist enterprises in the Hikkaduwa Urban Council area of the Galle district, Sri Lanka. The samples were selected using stratified and purposive sampling, and the data were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. Secondary information was primarily collected from the literature on gender studies and relevant documents of small-scale enterprises. This paper argues that the gender-appropriate roles and the values attached to them have had a more significant effect on determining women's status within business associations. Moreover, women's financial independence and decision-making power were lost under patriarchal control, which had a more significant influence on the nature of participation in the business phase, where women had to hold lower-level positions. At the same time, men remain in higher positions in business associations. This, again, leaves women with the least power in decision-making. For that reason, despite this significant contribution, women still participate in the family but hold an unimportant role in determining a better position for their status.

Keywords: Decision-Making Power, Gender, Small-scale enterprises, Sri Lanka, Tourist industry

*Corresponding author: saman@ssl.sab.ac.lk
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2954-8892>

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INTRODUCTION

In Sri Lanka, women's participation in the labour force has reached levels never seen before. Small-scale enterprises provide women with broader employment opportunities and more income-generating opportunities, especially for those at the margins of the economy (Gamage, 2003). According to the Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey (2024), women's participation in the labour force was 30.0%, while men's was 68.1%. The growth in women's participation in small-scale enterprises was especially evident in the tourism sector, where the government provided much support to facilitate growth after the civil war ended.

In Sri Lanka, the economically active population was about 8.4 million in 2016, of whom about 63.5 per cent were male, and 36.5 per cent were female. Of the economically inactive population, 24.6 per cent are males, and 75.4 per cent are females. It is important to note that male participation in the labour force is always higher than that of females. Based on the above statistics, 33% of females are economically active, while 71% are economically inactive. In contrast, 67% of males are economically active, and 29% are reported as economically inactive (Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey, 2024).

The unemployment rate among females is higher than that among males across all age groups (Department of Census and Statistics, 2016). This phenomenon persists: in 2024, 7% of women are reported as “unemployed,” while 3.6% of men are unemployed (Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey, 2024). Women made up 33.7% of the Sri Lankan workforce in 2009 (excluding the northern and eastern provinces), and only 1% or fewer females held higher management positions in Sri Lanka's top corporations (Wellalage & Locke, 2013, p. 114). It has been found that although female representation in the workforce has recently increased, Sri Lanka still has very few women in its higher managerial positions (Wellalage & Locke, 2012).

The SME sector in Sri Lanka accounts for 52 per cent of GDP, 45 per cent of total employment, and more than 75 per cent of enterprises (Ministry of Traditional Industries and Small Enterprise Development, 2013). According to the Ministry of Industry and Entrepreneurship Development (2024), entrepreneurship's contribution to the national economy was 3.2% in 2023, and the government's objective is to increase it to 10% by 2030. It is primarily known that these smaller enterprises face particularly severe competition as many of them operate at the margins of the formal economy with far fewer resources to hand than the more prominent global players, especially since national and regional enterprise policies favour large enterprises through their registration, licensing, formalisation, and resource acquisition (Richardson et al, 2004).

Women entrepreneurs face challenges that men do not (International Labour Organisation, 2015), so the recent increase in the number of women entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka is remarkable. At the same time, we still find women facing more difficulty than men in operating their business, and frequently face those gender biases in the socio-economic environment in which they operate (Richardson et al, 2004). The present study analyses women's participation in the tourism business in Hikkaduwa, Sri Lanka. It mainly focuses on their participation in business associations (BAs) and their decision-making powers within those associations. However, business associations have a positive impact on small businesses, particularly women in marginalised groups who face an unequal footing in the setting. Further, in cases where those associations are gender blind, which implicitly focus on men's needs and interests, they tend to support men's needs and interests and neglect those of women. Furthermore, considering the existing literature, a persistent research gap can be identified in women's decision-making power among small-scale entrepreneurs in the Sri Lankan tourism industry, particularly in subcategories such as accommodation, retail services, and food and beverage services, which remain under-researched.

This paper aims to investigate the gendered perspective on decision-making power within the business associations of small-scale entrepreneurs in the Sri Lankan tourism industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Female entrepreneurship as an academic subject is a relatively recent endeavour. Although several women are in the workforce, their participation in management and decision-making remains low (Brass, 1985). Female entrepreneurship is in a critical situation due to the burdens of family responsibilities and the inability to commit to the venture (Surangi, 2020). Women-owned enterprises tend to be smaller (OECD, 2012). Gender researchers and feminist scholars have strongly argued that structural discrimination, male dominance, and family responsibilities hurt the performance and development of women-headed businesses (Hearn et al, 2009). Even though female entrepreneurship empowers women and contributes to economic growth, various obstacles to female entrepreneurship exist in the social arena of developing countries (Colonna et al., 2025). Mainly, they have not received sufficient support from society to achieve competitiveness, productivity, and considerable growth in potential (Markovic, 2015).

One of the reasons given why women are not present in large enterprises, as in the case of Sri Lanka, is that it is common for women in SME thrive to fulfil the necessities of their families, such as educating and feeding their children, rather than enhancing their entrepreneurial skills and expanding their business (Madurawala et al, 2016). In a patriarchal system, women's decision-making power is controlled by men (Bhasin, 1993). Women's leadership in SMEs is becoming a trend since many women face discrimination and are forced out of leadership positions in large firms. Motivated women operating SMEs have more flexible business hours and create innovative

products and services for a new consumer market. However, women are still in lower-status, non-decision-making positions (Stewart & Gudykunst, 1982; Elmuti & Davis, 2009).

Madurawala et al (2016) pointed out that some of the obstacles that women entrepreneurs face in South Asia and developing countries are: lack of access to finance, lack of adequate financial literacy, legal and policy constraints, lack of access to network information and communication, an unequal share of family and household responsibilities, obstacles in technology and markets, etc. According to Jeremy Hobbs, gender equality enables the hiring of more talent, provides significant insights into business, and promotes secure and high-quality supply (Oxfam International, no date). Further, civil status, education level, family background, and access to resources are pivotal barriers to women's entry into small-scale entrepreneurship (Amarasooriya et al., 2024). In addition, limited access to finance, low financial literacy, social norms and stigmas, and cultural barriers are major factors that limit women's entry into entrepreneurship (Rodrigo et al., 2024). Women are excluded from decision-making in the family and at the community level. Hence, women are further disadvantaged because men hold more extraordinary decision-making powers. In a patriarchal system, women's decision-making power is controlled by men (Bhasin, 1993). Studies have found that women have different perceptions and attitudes towards business participation than men. Women tend to reflect more upon the future and new possibilities and are reluctant to take risks (Scheinberg & MacMillan, 1988). Further, how women engage in those activities demonstrates that their definition of success differs from that of men. Women have easily achievable targets. Therefore, this background is relevant to women engaged in small entrepreneurial activities, since those usually require small initial capital (McElwee and Al-Rahma, 2003). By today, under the projects for small and medium scale entrepreneurship development, the government has allocated Rs. 2700 million to 360 projects across the country.

The SMILE III Revolving Fund and the E-Friends II Revolving Fund Loan Scheme have been introduced to empower small-scale enterprises (Ministry of Industry and Entrepreneurship Development, 2024). Male and female-owned firms consistently show that women-owned businesses tend to be smaller than those owned by men; women-owned businesses reported poor performance. This determines her intent to expand the business and her ability to manage it with the resources available. They are still likelier to be the "primary parent, emotional nurturer, and housekeeper" (Cliff, 1998, p. 526). Female entrepreneurs may perceive inadequate resources to pursue business growth—specifically, insufficient business experience and a lack of freedom from household responsibilities. Therefore, many female business owners deliberately keep their businesses small (Cliff, 1998). "When women start businesses, they do it on a smaller scale than men and in a limited range of sectors. Self-employed women frequently earn 30 to 40% less than their male counterparts. Two key differences between male and female entrepreneurs help explain these relatively low returns: women start their enterprises with limited management experience and devote much less time to their businesses than men" (OECD, 2012, p. 16). In the econometric analysis, civil status, family burdens, age, educational status, and access to business development services (BDS) are the key factors behind the low levels of female entrepreneurship (Deyshappriya, 2019).

It has been identified that women choose not to become entrepreneurs because of a perceived lack of self-efficacy, and the decisive motivational factor behind women's entrepreneurship is the lack of environmental support (Maes et al., 2014). At the same time, it is argued that even though women are in smaller enterprises and lower positions, women running independent businesses lead to women's empowerment. Keller and Mbewe (1991) describe empowerment as a process whereby women can organise themselves to increase their self-reliance, assert their independent right to make choices, and

control resources, thereby challenging and eliminating their subordination. More overlapping notions are often included in defining empowerment: options, choice, control, and power. These often refer to women's ability to make decisions and affect outcomes important to themselves and their families.

In Sri Lanka, Firms with female top managers report lower performance in capacity utilisation, sales, employment growth, and overall labour productivity. Moreover, they remain under-represented among senior officials, managers, and business proprietors, despite high educational attainment. Researchers argue that men are found to be better at business and women remain underrepresented in the SME sector because of socio-cultural restrictions on women, such as the household work burden, limited mobility after dark, and concern about reputation, better knowledge and skills of men, and superior physical strength of men. Some of them are a lack of access to finance, inadequate financial literacy, harmful norms and attitudes towards entrepreneurship as a career option, limited mobility, lack of access to networks and communication, an unequal share of family and household responsibilities, and no maternity protection. Again, market access was a significant challenge for women. Many start a business without fully understanding market needs, gaps, and product demand. Therefore, they have difficulty finding and reaching new markets, as they lack sufficient information about commercial opportunities in existing markets (Attygalle et al., 2014).

Therefore, Women's control over income, relative contribution to family support, ownership of assets and land, access to credit, representation in local trade associations, access to markets, access to and control of family resources, participation in domestic decision-making, and bargaining power are the commonly used dimensions of empowerment at household and community level are specific ways where women are empowered. Only minimal research has been done to analyse and explore gender differences in decision-making power in the tourism sector. No literature has been found on gender differences

in decision-making power in small-scale enterprises in the tourism industry. The present study will fill this research gap.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The focus of the study had up on the most influential small-scale businesses in Hikkaduwa of southern Sri Lanka, since this paper endeavours to analyse how men and women stand differently in their decision-making power in the business associations of small-scale entrepreneurs related to tourism in the study area identified within international industry classification system parameters and hence such uses in the international arena of tourism used as the basis for business group identification in the study. Several data collection techniques were adopted for this study. These include key informant interviews, non-participant observation, surveys using questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and public and private documentary sources. These data collection techniques have been used to collect quantitative and qualitative primary and secondary data. The first data collection tool of this study is key informant interviews. This exploratory study used both qualitative and quantitative data, employing several data collection techniques. There were 25 key informant interviews in this study. Most important basic and background information, as well as information related to cross-analysis, was obtained through key informant interviews at two stages: before launching other data-gathering techniques, and after gathering information for this study. The entire population of female entrepreneurs (195) had been considered for the study. At the same time, an equal number of male entrepreneurs (195) from among the existing 542 businesses was selected using stratified sampling. Hence, the total sample consisted of 390 entrepreneurs.

Table 1: Selected Small-Scale Men and Women-Owned Enterprises for the Study

Business Group	Existing Business ventures related to tourism	Sample	
		M	W
Accommodation	Guest houses	131	30
	Combined entities of both restaurants and guest houses	46	8
Food and Beverage Services	Restaurants	106	16
	Bakery and snack centres	17	6
Tourist Affiliated Retail Stores	Retail shops	81	38
	Groceries	56	15
	Ready-made Garment shops	59	61
	Tailoring	17	9
	Handicraft shops	11	6
	Communication and Photography printing services.	18	8
Total		542	197

Source: Hikkaduwa Urban Council (2025)

The survey was conducted among small-scale male– and female–owned tourist-related entrepreneurs. The questionnaire survey technique was the second data collection tool utilised in this study. Defining "small" is controversial because there is no universal definition. In Sri Lanka, a small-scale enterprise is a business that employs fewer than 25 people. This was done after establishing a good rapport with them in the Grama Niladari Divisions of the Hikkaduwa Urban Council area.

This study aims to gather primary data through non-participant observation. It was the third data collection technique adopted to support this analytical study. Valuable and accurate information can be gathered more reliably through non-participant observation. Through this method, it is expected to gain insights into the structure of tourism in the area, the tourist activities, household patterns, income-generating activities, the running of small-scale businesses by male and female entrepreneurs, and the social and

cultural patterns observable in these Grama Niladari Divisions.

This research has triangulated data collection tools and respondents to authenticate and ensure the validity of the results. As the study's specific objectives are achieved through various data collection tools, the triangulation of these data certainly enhances their accuracy and authenticity. The data obtained via survey could be triangulated with key informant interviews, non-participant observation, in-depth interviews, response and field notes, and vice versa. Additionally, to further ensure validity, the researcher scrutinised and reconfirmed the overall research plan and procedures.

The part one of the questionnaire consisted of demographical information of the entrepreneur, details of family members, details of training or examination in business, details of family members involved in business and the part two of the questionnaire was aimed at collecting data related to ownership of the business location, history of the business, intention of the business, business competition, level of assistance received, distance between rivals, business expansion, aspects of improving the business, aspect impacts on expanding the business. Also, part three of the questionnaire was dedicated to obtaining data on responsible persons in business activities, the control of the business in various aspects, involvement in business circles, profit distribution decisions, and the ownership of business assets.

The fourth tool for primary data collection includes in-depth interviews. The study utilised twenty-five (25) in-depth interviews. The rapport extended by the informants and the reliability maintained in providing information in the questionnaire survey were considered for selecting interviewers, choosing those willing to share detailed business data. Informants were selected using purposive sampling to obtain the most reliable and informative qualitative data for this study. In the interview, hidden and undisclosed information could be obtained by observing the respondents' facial expressions, gestures, postures,

and attitudes.

The data were gathered from government institutions such as the Ministry of Tourism, the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, the Hikkaduwa Urban Council, the Hikkaduwa Divisional Secretariat, Grama Niladhari (offices), and other relevant government and private institutions during the secondary data collection process. Statistical data on the field setting's demographic, social, and economic aspects were collected from government and private institutions to support successful research. The initial design of the data collection method was based on the existing secondary data and statistics on the number of enterprises run by women and men, which have changed since the war ended in 2009. Such secondary data on the research area assisted in more accurate and reliable research. For further analysis, books, articles, and reports related to the scope of the study were also referred to gather relevant information.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the present study, the term 'Business Association' (BA) was used synonymously with gathering small-scale entrepreneurs in the tourism industry to gain their common purpose. They have formed their BAs to enable them to accomplish work that individual parties could not achieve on their own. They are strongly influenced by the people who make them up. Associations exist because businesses want them to and are willing to support them financially and otherwise (Bennett, 2000, p. 18).

Joining BAs is a matter of control for businesses. At gatherings where most business people participate, we can meet new people, make new contacts, and learn about the latest techniques and market variations (Male, Accommodation sector, has owned a business for over 19 years).

Women's representation in top-level or boardroom roles has been reported to be lower, but their participation in business associations is notable

at desired levels. For this study, women and men have shown equal ground in joining BAs. Belonging to a professional body can give them a competitive advantage in business, especially for small-scale enterprises. This could also help with networking, obtaining business information, and promoting the self-interest of the underprivileged in a competitive business environment (Amyx, 2005).

Table 2: Membership in Business Association by Gender

Type of SSE	Male		Female	
	How many businesses Are you a member of the associations?		How many businesses Are you a member of?	
	Nil	1-5	Nil	1-5
Accommodation	18 (9.2%)	20(10.3%)	20(10.3%)	18(9.2%)
Food and Beverage service	12(6.2%)	10 (5.1%)	16(8.2%)	6 (3.1%)
Tourist-affiliated retail stores	78 (40%)	57(29.2%)	65 (33.3%)	70(35.9%)
Total	108 (55.4%)	87 (44.6%)	101 (51.8%)	94 (48.2%)
	195(100.0%)		195(100.0%)	

Source: Authors' own

In the present study, we found that women have shown a higher rate of membership acquisition in BAs than men in small-scale entrepreneurial activities in the tourist industry of Sri Lanka. There are two significant reasons why women join the association. One reason is that women themselves are actively taking charge of the business. At the same time, some believe that their husbands do not participate in business associations properly, which can undermine the future benefits they can receive. Businesses that women manage might be even higher than those reflected in the association membership. In general, most businesses are owned by men. The reasons are that they face less corruption, make higher investments in security, and take more bank loans, even when collateral requirements are higher, especially when men are the top managers.

The second reason is that women entrepreneurs find that business associations are one of the few ways to obtain resources needed for their business, including loans and networks. The quote above also shows that she wanted to join a business association because she needed capital. Women who have shown higher participation in joining BAs come from families in which women play a key role in family decisions, from less financially successful businesses, and lack industrial experience. Therefore, they are seeking better opportunities by joining the BAs. They have a positive attitude toward BA's ability to make their business successful.

Scholars have argued that women must increase network diversity by adopting the same strategies as male entrepreneurs (Mirchandani, 1999). These women are less attached to their conventional gender roles and view their businesses as the only paths to gain financial and social autonomy. In contrast, women who were firmly attached to conventional gender roles reported lower participation in business associations. As seen in Table 2, women who join business associations are those whose husbands are unemployed.

Also, the fact that females were more aware of their knowledge deficiencies may make them less confident in their ability to succeed in starting a business. From an opposite perspective, however, males may have been overly confident of their abilities, given their actual level of knowledge (Kourilsky & Walstad, 1998, p. 81).

I want to grow, but gradually—I knew I could not run into success without good knowledge of the market. I spent much time fixing internal things (like managing my children's work while running my business). The closer we get to the people, the more we can succeed. So, I have to gain more experience. If I failed, I would have no other source of income. BA ensures our protection in the market. They are more experienced personnel than we are. Such as the market, changes in the market, government decisions on tourism, tax policies, etc. (Female,

business owner, has owned a business for over 3 years).

Hence, they continue to believe in the benefits a business association can provide to business owners. This situation led women to join the business association around them. The main reason is that a business association allows its members to network and share information and resources. Moreover, association members can help one another directly by referring services such as accounting, building maintenance, recruiting staff, and marketing. Joining a business association provides a new business owner with contact information for other local businesses, thereby speeding up community integration (Hartman, 2017).

This study reveals that membership was similar or showed no significant difference. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between gender and holding official positions in business associations. The relation between these variables was not significant. ($p > 0.8.1$) The way males and females function in business associations differs in the study sample. Women tend to occupy less desirable, non-powerful positions, while men hold dominant positions in those associations. That does not imply women are unlikely to receive positions in those associations; instead, they receive less influential ones, such as committee members, assistant secretary, etc. Men are liable to hold positions such as chair, secretary, and organisers, etc. Table 3 indicates the state of position holding among genders.

Table 3: Bearing Official Position in the Business Association by Gender

	Types of Small-Scale Enterprises (Male)				Types of Small-Scale Enterprises (Female)			
Bearing an official position	Accommodation	Food and Beverage service	Tourist-affiliated retail	Total	Accommodation	Food and Beverage service	Tourist-affiliated stores	Total
Yes	8 (4.1%)	5 (2.6%)	38 (19.5%)	51 (26.2%)	12 (6.2%)	3 (1.5%)	38 (27.2%)	53 (27.1%)
No	30(15.4%)	17 (8.7%)	97 (49.7%)	144 (73.8%)	26 (13.3%)	19 (9.7%)	97 (72.8%)	142 (72.9%)
Total	195(100.0%)				195(100.0%)			

Source: Authors' own

This can be viewed in terms of structures created by human interactions. To understand the setup, Bourdieu, in his reflexive social theory, creates assumptions that underpin society's 'natural' attitude toward gender differences, which has formed into women with negative qualities (weak) and men with positive qualities (Strength). Consequently, these social structures are hierarchical and benefit men while disadvantaging women. One's position within social structures is determined by the amount and type of capital one possesses and by interpretations of the value placed upon such capital, which appears in different forms, such as economic, cultural, informational, social, and symbolic. 'Masculine or patriarchal corporate culture' and 'lack of role models' are the barriers to women accessing leadership in Sri Lanka (Welllage & Locke, 2012). Most women in the Eurasian countries often face direct or hidden discrimination in the economic, political, and social spheres. Although women constitute more than half of the population and voters, they have little influence on their countries' futures. In general, attitudes across Eurasia

construe men as the only real political actors. In the same sense, women in politics are often more closely scrutinised and criticised than men, due to the unequal division of family responsibilities, which places women at a disadvantage. Women remain overrepresented among contributing family workers or in occupations (such as domestic workers) more likely to be in informal work arrangements, thereby preventing their access to social protection (International Labour Organisation, 2016). These stereotypes about women's and men's roles in society create a negative image of women. This situation is common in every aspect of women's decision-making power in those societies. In a way, access to powerful positions in business associations is determined by societal attitudes shaped by gender differences and the capital they possess. The Glass ceiling exists between upper middle and senior management positions, where women do not reach senior management positions (Arttachariya, 2015).

Women's selection into less desirable positions within the sample associations has shown that they tend to lose their decision-making power within those associations. Decision-making is the power of an individual to decide any matter in his/her daily life. It can be regarded as an identification and choice of alternatives based on the values and preferences of a decision maker (Harris, 2012). The deciding plans (Annual general meeting and its schedules), deciding how to respond to political, social or economic issues that affect business owners, about welfare initiatives they can take, contacting governmental bodies, appointing or shifting members are some of the prior decisions in which women have a poor chance to raise their voices.

Table 4: Respondents' Perception of Business Initiation and Decision-Making Power by Gender

	Types of Small-Scale Enterprises- Male				Types of Small-Scale Enterprises- Female			
	Accommodation	Food and Beverage service	Tourist Affiliated Retail service	Total	Accommodation	Food and Beverage service	Tourist Affiliated Retail Service	Total
Yes	9 (4.6 %)	6 (3.1%)	29 (14.9%)	44 (22.5 %)	8 (4.1 %)	2 (1.0%)	11 (5.4%)	21 (10.7 %)
No	29 (14.9 %)	16 (8.2%)	106 (54.4%)	151 (77.5 %)	30 (15.4 %)	20 (10.2 %)	124 (63.6%)	174 (89.3 %)
Total	195(100.0%)				195(100.0%)			

Source: Authors' own

Table 4 shows that significantly fewer women than men think they can influence a business association's decision. The chi-square test significance level is less than 2%.

Women's voices and participation should not be viewed in absolute terms but as a matter of degree; women rarely have complete voices or none at all but have more or fewer voices in different areas of their lives. Their individual and collective capabilities, as well as their socio-political environment, shape the extent and quality of their voice and public engagement (Domingo et al., 2015, p. 10).

That does not mean she will never get a chance to raise her voice inside the BAs; instead, she will get little of it.

The position holders have more experience as senior members and more power to raise their voices than we do in making decisions about BAs.

Other members highly respect them because they have held those positions for a long time. Most of the time, male members have more power in our associations (In-depth Interview, Field data, Small Scale Female Entrepreneur).

In making decisions concerning business, charity, political or social institutions, 89.2% of women reported they have never led an initiative in their business associations. This is for men, which is 77.5%. This indicates that, compared to men, women have a lower chance of making decisions in business associations. Researchers Paustian-Underdahl et al. (14), Brass (85), and Scand Hein (07) have found that men are typically the dominant group in most business organisations. In this situation, men intentionally exclude women from informal interactions within associations. Men are typically perceived as more appropriate and effective in leadership positions than women.

It has increasingly led to a decline in women's opportunities to be in decision-making positions. This shows that the challenges faced by women in tourism persist. This is the key limitation for women entrepreneurs in tourism, especially those operating small-scale enterprises that target tourists.

I have been a member of the association for twenty years. I have participated in meetings and been actively involved in policy-making and implementation for small-scale business owners. I am a senior member who has not received the leadership. The other male members have presumed that I am not qualified to be a leader. They pointed out that I am a woman who has to do a lot of work because I have no time to make effective decisions. I tried to talk to the former leaders, but they still think my skills are not strong enough for leadership (In-depth Interview, Field data, Small-scale female Entrepreneur).

The Ignorance of women's leadership has shown that they are overlooked in the participation process. The members in higher positions are getting more opportunities to meet officials (Discussions about their matters with administrations such as the Urban Council, the Tourism Authority, the Environmental Authority, the Legal Agents, and the Political Authorities) in their business associations. The women do have fewer opportunities to raise their voices in accordance. The women have been appointed as supportive staff members for the association, but not as organisational leaders. The story of a small-scale female entrepreneur mentions how women's leadership is being ignored in the business association.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Conclusion

The gender study investigated the factors, processes, and conditions that determine women's decision-making power in small-scale enterprises. Gender based labour division has discriminated against women as an unimportant character in the business phase and located the women in a secondary layer where they are tasked with the work done but have fewer rights to make decisions. Along with the male counterpart, women's gender-based roles have deprived women of their independence, decision-making power, and autonomy in the tourist industry. Hence, social structural expectations attached to gender heavily influence women's roles in business associations and determine women's decision-making power in small-scale enterprises. Therefore, women's position in the small-scale tourist industry is defined or redefined according to gender divisions and expectations, because gender at any level (micro or macro) simultaneously produces and influences women's positions in small-scale entrepreneurial activities in the tourist industry in Sri Lanka. However, individual, cultural, and institutional characteristics should be considered in generalising results.

Forming structural and psychological empowerment is crucial for active involvement in domestic matters. In that context, entrepreneurs motivated through psychological counselling and adversary programs to develop their personalities can create positive attitudes and impacts. Such activities can make both men and women aware of gendered learning in society and help ensure that no gender stereotypes persist, as women are capable of successful employment and career development. Women entrepreneurs could build confidence and play more prominent, influential roles in BAs by strengthening social support. Women's grassroots business associations can further encourage women to build self-confidence. Business associations can encourage female entrepreneurs to support them more by giving them access to training, networks, social support, and bank financing for business growth.

Implications

The implications of this study can be divided into three categories: theoretical, social, and policy. Gender and social systems constrain women's decision-making power in small-scale enterprises in the tourism industry, particularly in subcategories such as accommodation, food and beverages, and retail services. It clearly depicts the gendered asymmetries in women's autonomy and leadership. Gender plays a major role in defining women's positions in entrepreneurship at the macro and micro levels. As the social implications, promoting gender equality strengthens the local economy. Maintaining gender stereotypes constrains balanced gendered participation in small-scale enterprises in the tourism industry. Thus, the women in this sector are empowered, leading to the development, social cohesion, and family welfare. In light of the policy implications of this study, promoting psychological empowerment programs alongside small-scale entrepreneurship policies is essential. Further, encouraging equal decision-making by ensuring egalitarian opportunities for women's participation in leadership and providing access to formal banking systems, networks, and training sessions to enhance

their entrepreneurial capacity. Hence, ensuring awareness and education is important for eradicating gendered inequalities and stereotypes by fostering responsibility for economic activities.

Future Directions

Today, the Sri Lankan economy is blooming, with slight changes in economic growth. Future research can examine the scope of women's participation in decision-making in small-scale enterprises in the tourism industry before and after the inflationary crisis and the economic collapse. Future studies can delve into the in-depth analysis of variations in women's decision-making roles across urban and rural tourism enterprises.

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