

Employment Strategy Papers

School-to-work transition of youth in Sri Lanka

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Foreword

Sri Lanka, with its successful welfare policies and state, provided social security measures, has one of the highest literacy rates in the world. Access to free education since the second quarter of the 20th century has resulted in increasing numbers of students being admitted to schools. Numbers in the primary and secondary levels of education have swelled rapidly since then leading to significant numbers entering the tertiary level too. Despite the social mobility afforded by educational opportunities, the number of ‘unemployable youth’ has increased over the years pointing to the mismatch between the educational and employment opportunities available to the youth. Several studies in the past have dealt in- depth on issues related to this mismatch and other areas of concern such as employer expectations, quality of education, lack of communication and related life skills among the youth.

This study, undertaken in 2003/04, looks into new dimensions of the challenges encountered by youth in their search for employment. The major objectives of the survey was to study the nature of the transition from school-to work and to identify the hurdles encountered by them in their pursuits. Using a sample of 1800 respondents from widely distributed areas of the country this survey highlights the ‘grey areas’ hitherto least considered as important areas to be considered in the transition from school-to-work to make youth employable while promoting decent work for them. Besides the ‘youth aspiration – job availability’ mismatch in respect of public and private sector jobs this survey has also looked into the manner in which youth search and seek job opportunities. Career guidance and counselling on improving employability of the youth are highlighted by the study as important areas of concern that need immediate action. The problems connected to school dropouts and their employability are discussed in detail. Skills development is recommended in the schools curriculum up to the ordinary level general education. In this regard standardized vocational and technical training is recommended.

The survey reiterates the social perception on state employment. State sector employment is still preferred by a significant proportion of the youth despite the increasing role played by the private sector in the economy. The perception continues among the youth that the public sector offers on the average more valuable lifetime employment. The information on youth aspiration available at the Jobs-net agency of the Ministry of Labour corroborates this perception among the youth. The system of formal education that we inherited from the colonial time is largely responsible for this attitude. Self-employment does not come out as a preferred area of employment as it is not considered prestigious. The formal education system has also implanted attitudes in terms of the public sector. This study has recommended effective interventions either from the state or private institutions to change the status or the image of self-employment.

This study, while highlighting the trials and tribulations that school leavers encounter, particularly of those who failed to enter the universities, provides a situational analysis of the chosen problem for policy makers to design responsive policies on the employability of youth in Sri Lanka.

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Preface

Finding decent work for young people is a global challenge. There are more than one billion young people between the ages of 15 and 24 in the world today, comprising 18 per cent of the world's population. The ILO estimates that some 88 million young men and women were unemployed in 2003, accounting for 47 per cent of the 186 million people unemployed globally. Access to the labour market may often be further complicated for young people where sex, age, ethnicity, educational level, disability and other factors come into play. In many countries, female unemployment rates are higher than male, even in some cases where educational attainment may be higher. For those young people who are in work, many find themselves working in the informal economy, in unprotected, precarious and sometimes hazardous jobs, with long hours, poor pay and lack of access to social dialogue and social protection.

To address the challenge of youth unemployment and underemployment, the ILO is taking a lead role in the UN Secretary-General's Youth Employment Network (YEN) created within the framework of the Millennium Declaration. In partnership with the World Bank, the United Nations and the ILO, Governments resolved to "develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work".

Sri Lanka was one of the first countries to volunteer as a 'lead country' within YEN to respond to the challenge of implementing policies and programmes which will recognize youth as a national asset and a key part of addressing poverty alleviation, sustainable development and lasting peace. An important step in this process is understanding the problems young women and men face in accessing education, training and in entering the labour force for the first time. In collaboration with the ILO Office in Colombo, the Gender Promotion Programme (GENPROM) of the ILO commissioned research on the School-to-Work Transition in Sri Lanka. The survey, using generic instruments developed by GENPROM adapted to the Sri Lankan context, was conducted by the Programme on Improving Capacities for Poverty/Social Policy Research (IMCAP) at the University of Colombo during the course of 2003/04.

In 2004, the Gender Promotion Programme was integrated into the Employment Policies Unit of the Employment Strategy Department of the ILO. This timely move will provide a further opportunity for this research to contribute to the development of responsive programmes and effective policy solutions for promoting decent work for young people in Sri Lanka.

The report was written by members of the IMCAP team (see page v) and edited by Professor S.T. Hettige, Dr. Markus Mayer and Ms. Maleeka Salih. Comments and reviews were provided by Naoko Kiyan and Shafinaz Hassandeen in ILO Colombo and Sriani Ameratunga in GENPROM. Additional comments were provided by Mary Kavar in GENPROM. I would like to thank the Director of ILO Colombo, Ms Claudia Coenjaerts, for her substantial support to this endeavour.

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Executive summary

The Sri Lankan School-to-Work-Transition survey was commissioned by the International Labour Organization and conducted by the Programme on Improving Capacities for Poverty/Social Policy Research (IMCAP) at the University of Colombo during the course of the year 2003/04. The objectives of the study were to understand the nature of school-to-work transition for young men and women in Sri Lanka and to identify the hurdles faced by them in entering the labour market. The findings from the survey provide a solid basis for developing responsive policies and programmes in the context of high rates of youth unemployment and under-employment in Sri Lanka.

Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to the Sri Lankan context with a special focus on dominant youth issues and the integration of youth into the labour market. Unemployment and underemployment are major problems facing Sri Lankan youth, with the rate of unemployment consistently higher amongst women than men. The main sources of employment in the recent years have been primarily the state sector, an increasingly significant private sector, and a relatively high rate of migrant labour.

Sri Lanka has also experienced major violent unrest in the last three decades with two youth insurgencies in Southern Sri Lanka in the 1970s and 1980s and a separatist armed struggle in the North-East of the country from the early 1980s. Furthermore, Sri Lanka has also undergone major economic transformation since the introduction of liberal economic policies in 1977. These have had a huge impact on the education and employability of Sri Lankan youth.

Chapter 1 also describes the survey sample. In brief, the sample consists of 1800 respondents, of which 52.3 per cent are men and 47.7 per cent are women. The ethnicity breakdown is 44 per cent Sinhalese, 35 per cent Tamils and 21 per cent Muslims, which is not a true representation of the ethnic demography of Sri Lanka, but nonetheless, provides the possibility of scientific analysis of important sectoral and regional characteristics of Sri Lanka (purposely chosen by the team). The mean age of the respondents is 19.6 years. The survey comprises equal representation of in-school youth, job-seeking youth, employed youth and self-employed youth. Additionally, fifty employers and managers were also interviewed. The survey was conducted in the districts of Batticaloa, Colombo, Hatton, Jaffna, Kurunegala, Matara and Moneragala, representing the urban, rural, estate and conflict-affected areas of Sri Lanka.

Chapter 2 focuses on the employability of youth, particularly on their own perceptions and experiences in the school-to-work transition. With regard to education, 49.8 per cent of the sample has had a secondary school education, with 32.4 per cent having completed GCE Ordinary Level. 44 per cent of the youth were of the opinion that Advanced level education was the most useful qualification for finding decent work. This was confirmed by the responses from employers and managers, the majority of whom stated that a general education certificate is an important consideration at recruitment. This is surprising given the perceived inability of the current education system to fulfil the requirements of the labour market demands (as confirmed within this and other studies). It may appear that employers and managers lack other means of verifying suitability of job applicants.

Most young people had not received any guidance in choosing employment and career development, although most had received guidance on education and training. A high percentage of 69.8 per cent had received guidance with regard to education; however, only 29.3 per cent had received guidance with regard to employment and career development. In both cases, mainly parents and teachers had provided the guidance, revealing a lack of services of a formal nature, or at least a lack of recognition that such services are useful, where they do exist.

Many youth expected to do manual, clerical or technical jobs with very few thinking to undertake professional work. Although a relatively large percentage of schooling youth wanted to undertake work in the armed forces, this percentage became much lower in the job-seeking, employed and self-employed youth categories. Most youth believed that the main obstacle to employability was the unsuitable general education with other issues such as lack of English language and lack of influential contacts also playing a significant role.

Chapter 3 focuses on perceptions and experiences of Sri Lankan youth with regard to equal opportunities for young men and women. The chapter goes on further to explore some of the ethno-

geographical data as this provides an important reference point for understanding the felt grievances of youth, which have often been mentioned as underlying causes of youth unrest in Sri Lanka. 84 per cent of young people stated that men and women had equal opportunities for formal education, however this figure dropped to 55 per cent in relation to equal opportunities for vocational and technical training. More than half of the young people interviewed believed that it would be difficult for them to find a decent job. With regard to gender equality, 43.1 per cent of men believed that it would be easier for women to find a decent job, with a comparatively lower 33.1 per cent of women stating the same. 37.4 per cent of women stated it would be easier for men to find a job with only 28.7 per cent of men concurring with the same viewpoint. Whilst the majority of enterprises expressed that the gender of the applicant would not matter, nonetheless a significant number considered the gender of the applicant to be a very important factor in the recruitment of employees, more so for smaller enterprises than for bigger ones.

There seemed much scope for improvement with regard to methods employed in job-seeking. All groups of young people tended to search for employment through informal means of friends and family members (30-42 per cent). Very few took advantage of formal means of employment (with the exception of Sinhalese women, 30 per cent of whom see advertisements as the main method for seeking employment). Men differed clearly from women with regard to preferred methods of finding employment, with most men relying mainly on one method (that of finding jobs through friends) whilst almost equal numbers of women stated that they would seek employment through friends, relatives or advertisements.

On examining the responses on how young people had found jobs as well as how vacancies are filled by enterprises, it is not surprising that many young people have faith in such informal networks as a means of seeking employment. Most employed young people in the survey had found their current job through friends or family members (up to 85 per cent), with the lowest percentage of success through this method for Muslim women in the conflict-affected areas. Similarly, it is significant to note that most enterprises relied not on advertisements alone, but on recommendations by acquaintances for filling vacancies as well.

Most young men and women (well above 50 per cent) spent more than a year searching for employment. This is a long period of time, during which most young people describe themselves as 'merely' staying at home and looking for work (Sinhalese women were most likely to describe themselves as undertaking household work whilst looking for work). It is surprising that relatively low numbers of men and women engaged in family businesses or training whilst looking for work. Long transitions from school-to-work (as is the case here) create frustrations and uncertainties for youth, and may also hinder other life transitions such as acquiring a suitable status for marriage. This may be particularly relevant in Sri Lanka where stable employment is seen as a precondition for marriage, particularly for young men. The specificities with relation to gender, ethnicities and sector are particularly important when it comes to policy-making and national-level planning. Focused and targeted actions by relevant authorities can help to alleviate the many frustrations and disappointments experienced by young people in their transition from school-to-work.

Chapter 4 focuses on youth opinions on and experiences of employment and entrepreneurship in Sri Lanka. Government employment and own businesses were seen as the most preferred overall options, although this differed by gender and ethnicity. Most groups of men (with the exception of Sinhalese urban and Estate Tamil) preferred to start their own businesses. Most groups of women (with the exception of Muslim urban) preferred state employment.

Despite a majority of young men preferring to start their own businesses, there appears to be little formal sources of financial assistance for these groups of young people to start their own business. Less than 5 per cent of self-employed young people had found their source of initial funding in the form of bank loans or other government assistance. Not surprisingly, between 53-85 per cent of self-employed youth had stated that financial assistance to improve their businesses was the main form of required assistance. As starting capital, many had relied mainly on own savings or those from family or relatives. This does not portray an economic atmosphere, which encourages entrepreneurship among young people. The most likely reason both for almost all groups of young men and women for taking on employment was for economic or financial reasons. 41 per cent of all employed youth stated that they had stopped education for economic reasons.

Chapter 5 focuses on the opinions and experiences of undergraduate and post-graduate university students from the Faculty of Arts, particularly because this is seen as the worst affected category when it comes to graduate unemployment. One of the themes identified was the scarcity of quality science teachers in regional schools, which prompted students to choose the arts stream thereby entering the Faculty of Arts by default. Students in the Sinhala and Tamil streams mainly articulated this, with students in the English stream stating that they entered the Arts Faculty purely out of interest. It was also seen as a problem that some lectures were only in Sinhala because of a lack of lecturers in the Tamil and English media in all subjects. It was pointed out that more lecturers providing lectures in English would help to bring students from all streams together. Nonetheless, few lecturers (excepting senior faculty members) have the capacity to do this. Although a new system (known as the course unity system) has been introduced to the university that allows far more choices for students to take different subjects, the emphasis of the overall teaching is on theory rather than applied skills. This was pointed out as a problem because it does not adequately prepare graduates for future employment. A further problem was seen in the lack of a professional sphere that could absorb graduates from the Arts Faculty.

Main policy recommendations

A. Provision of quality professional guidance on educational and career choices

A significant proportion of youth have received guidance or advice on the types of education and training that they should follow mainly from their parents, relatives and teachers. In contrast, only a small proportion of youth have received advice or counselling on jobs or career paths that they should take from either their parents or other family members or teachers. However, it is noteworthy that youth do not seem to access facilities provided by public and private organizations with regard to guidance on careers.

It is significant that a majority of youth seek jobs through informal channels such as relatives and friends to a much smaller number from advertisements. These methods may not always be the most effective since the friends in question may only know a few options and may not be well versed with the requirements for those options. However, a well informed and reputed professional guidance service located both within and outside of schools may present an attractive means to ensure that employability of students are optimized. Current state initiatives such as JobsNet do not appear to be well recognized or credible within the sample and in any case are not accessible to all groups of people. It is recommended that the government employment services be strengthened in quality and outreach. Many youth continue to view political favouritism as an important factor that undermines equality of opportunity. It is necessary to institutionalize transparent processes that leave no room for discrimination on the basis of class, ethnicity and gender.

B. Developing alternative employment opportunities for young women and men with primary or secondary education

Employability is very much linked to the nature and extent of education and training which children and youth receive. In this regard, it is significant that a vast majority of children in Sri Lanka leave school before they complete a post secondary education. While economic difficulties compel many of them to leave school, the inability to make satisfactory educational progress is another major factor for the termination of education. Poor prospects for desirable employment following the completion of higher education constitute an important factor that encourages children to leave school.

The fact that a vast majority of youth leave school before they reach GCE A/L is of concern as a general education certificate is shown to be attractive to employers. Moreover, from a broader human resource development perspective, it is necessary to ensure that young men and women receive at least a post-secondary education before they leave the education system. Furthermore, there is no formal vocational education system that provides an alternative trajectory of qualification for employment for youth who leave school prematurely.

Vocational education in Sri Lanka is institutionalized outside the formal educational system. Vocational training institutes are open for all those who wish to enrol for the available courses. There are different entry requirements, with only a few courses offered for those with lower educational qualifications and the majority reserved for those with higher educational certificates such as GCE O/L and A/L. The result is a lack of an effective system for equipping the large group of early school leavers with practical skills that enable them to find employment. Rather, many of these students end up in the informal economy without any specialized skills to enhance their employability. Working conditions prevailing in the informal economy often do not permit workers to acquire marketable skills.

The problem is connected with the issue of skills development within the general educational system. The current school system is structured and organized in such a way as to equip students to find jobs as white-collar workers in the formal sector or to select those who are keen and capable to move into higher education. This is the result of continuation of educational structures during the British colonial period and after independence when education was closely linked to securing jobs within the state sector.

A revamping of the current educational system is urgently needed if these problems are to be addressed. It is recommended that the general education system also incorporate alternative trajectories for youth with primary and secondary education, vis-à-vis a formal vocational educational system with flexible entry requirements. Those who advocate educational reforms have paid considerable attention to the medium of instruction and computer literacy, issues that are of greater concern for those who reach higher levels of education, not the vast majority of youth who do not.

The lack of a working knowledge of English is widely perceived today as a major obstacle facing the vast majority of youth in the country, in particular those who originate from a disadvantaged background irrespective of gender and ethnicity. In spite of the recognition of this fact by the authorities, measures taken so far to address the issue have not been adequate. In fact, urgent steps should be taken on a priority basis to equip schools in all parts of the country with the necessary human and other resources so that school children have adequate access to facilities for learning English early on. This would not only help bridge the prevailing wide gap between advantaged and disadvantaged groups but also enable youth to access new knowledge using a widely accepted international language. The development assistance agencies can help the Sri Lankan government in this nationally important endeavour.

C. Improving employability and competitiveness through the improvement of quality vocational and technical training

Closely linked to the above issue is the provision of quality vocational and technical training. Most courses do not have transparent accreditation procedures and do not always produce people with comparable skills. In order to bolster the image and acceptability of vocational and technical education, it is necessary to standardize vocational and technical training qualifications as well as raise their quality, so that they enjoy greater credibility among both employers and potential employees. Many of those who follow vocational training courses do not seem to acquire sufficient marketable skills due to both the short duration of the training and inadequate exposure to practical and work situations.

As has been revealed by data in the survey, it is also important to ensure equal opportunities for women and youth from different ethnic backgrounds in vocational and technical education. This may mean reviewing the entry requirements, the range of courses on offer, the style of education or the training structures.

D. Increased understanding between employers and employees

One of the major problems with regard to employability and employment of young men and women has been the mismatch between the perceived needs of employees and their own actual preferences. For instance, most employers presumed that young people would like to have an interesting job or to earn a lot of money. However, these were not the main preferences of men and women. Most men and women in the survey assessed jobs with regard to their social aspects much more than financial or individual appeal of the job. For many respondents the ability to work independently was highly valued.

GCE A/L and O/L are clearly seen as the most important prerequisites to get a decent job. While there is increased awareness about the importance of the English language, additional qualifications through vocational or technical training are not at all perceived as ‘the most important’ prerequisite to find a decent job. Whilst this was true for small enterprises, many big enterprises also valued those with a certificate from a training institute thereby possessing some special skills.

Furthermore, the fact that a large proportion of respondents wished to be successful in work life is a significant finding. On the other hand, many respondents also tend to emphasize more socially oriented goals like ‘making a contribution to society, finding a purpose and meaning in life, and having a good family life’. It is interesting that only a small minority of respondents mention ‘having a lot of money’ as a life goal, indicating a low value placed on material success alone, although as stated before, this aspect appears not well understood by employers.

Such lack of awareness on the part of employers and employees may result in misguided attempts to make jobs more attractive (for example, increasing the financial incentive but not paying attention to the social implications of a job) on the part of employers whilst employees may engage in activities that do not increase their employability from the perspective of the employer. Increasing the understanding between employers and employees will be an important step. This can be done through raising awareness of both employers and employees and creating further opportunities for widespread distribution, dialogue and exchange. In formulating policies and programmes at national and other levels, these findings can provide a basis for discussion and analysis of policy and programmes options.

E. Understanding incentives for young people

Another important issue that deserves attention is the fact that many youth in the survey put more emphasis on non-material, long-term benefits of work than on immediate material rewards like a higher salary. They pay greater attention to independence, authority, ability to use their skills, job security, a work place closer to their residence, etc. When we look at the salaries they wish to have, acceptable salary/wage levels are not very high either. A vast majority could accept a monthly income of Rs. 5,000 (just over US\$50). It is unclear though whether this is intended as an income for self-sufficiency or for bolstering the household income with less financial independence for young people. There are some significant variations in this regard across different categories of youth by education, gender ethnicity and religion.

The above state of affairs is unlikely to change rapidly, as it reflects widely held values and attitudes. Nevertheless, policies and programmes can be developed to address the issues. For instance, the changes in the work environment and incentive systems can be effected to take care of the desires of new and potential recruits. This is particularly relevant for the expanding private sector where more and more youth will have to find employment in the future.

F. Changing the social perceptions of State employment and self-employment

The preference for public sector employment is more pronounced among in-school youth as well as among women in general. For instance, over 50 per cent of the in-school youth prefer state sector employment. Only 18 per cent of in-school youth prefer private sector employment. Among job-seeking youth with higher educational qualifications, i.e. GCE Advanced Level, a large majority, (61 per cent) prefers state sector employment. On the other hand, 25 per cent of job-seeking youth are willing to accept private sector jobs, a more realistic view given the growing significance of the private sector.

With regard to the preferred sector of employment, there are significant ethnic and regional differences. The preference for public sector employment is more pronounced among disadvantaged rural youth as well as ethnic minorities in the East and the plantation areas. More urban Muslim men and women prefer private sector and self-employment than their rural counterparts. This no doubt largely reflects the existing opportunities in different parts of the country. What is evident from the above is that there are significant inequalities between rural and urban areas as well as among ethnic communities in terms of both expectations and opportunities.

There are social and cultural factors that discourage youth to opt for self-employment. State sector employment is seen to have higher social status whilst low social status is accorded to the self-employed. Self-employment in general is not considered as prestigious or valuable in the Sri Lankan context. There are no effective interventions either from the state or private institutions to facilitate self-employment activities and to change the status or image of self-employment. The media can be used to change social perceptions of people who are employed in the private sector or who are self-employed.

Pro-active measures to improve the image and life chances of self-employed persons could include assistance in setting-up of organisational structures for them and linking them to existing business networks that can provide various services to their members such as further training, social and health insurance, credit facilities, etc. Both state and non-state agencies could explore such possibilities, rather than focusing on the designing of various training programmes alone.

Due to inadequate training and the lack of access to investment capital, self-employment activities of youth remain largely subsistence-oriented. Such activities are not attractive to youth who look for a higher standard of living and greater social esteem. Introduction of business development services targeted at current and potential self-employed youth can make self-employment a viable livelihood option for school leavers. Well-planned self-employment projects backed by business development services can be expected to attract many unemployed youth in the country. Such services should be provided to youth through an integrated national effort involving state, non-state and private sector institutions.

G. Accessibility to the private sector

The data also reveals that youth experience additional difficulties in accessing the private sector if they have had their education in the public sector. This could result from two factors; firstly because the public sector education is geared towards public sector employment, more so than employment within the private sector or because the private sector perceives youth having education from private institutes to be better qualified. In either case, youth with a private educational background have a greater competitive advantage over youth with a public sector educational background in accessing employment within the private sector.

This can also explain the greater preference the youth in the survey showed towards public sector employment. Perceiving real or felt discrimination towards them by the private sector, many youth may opt for public sector employment even though this may not be a result of genuine interest in the public sector. It is recommended that this issue be addressed with interventions to better qualify students for the private sector in public sector education and by changing perceptions of the private sector about public sector education. One option to bridge the gap between public sector education and the private sector would be to provide internship opportunities for youth whilst in school. Introduction of a national service for in-school youth can also go a long way in orienting to the world of work.

H. Accessibility and availability of financial loans

It appears crucial that financial support be made more easily available and accessible for young people, so that they can continue education or start their own businesses. There is a significant proportion of youth who discontinue education for financial reasons or who have chosen their job mainly due to financial difficulties. Many people would like to start self-employment activities, either due to non-availability of other employment opportunities or due to certain advantages of self-employment such as higher income earning potential and more independence. Yet, it appears that there is no conducive and enabling environment for encouraging self-employment activities.

However, it is also important to acknowledge the fact that not every youth, who is unable to secure a job, would necessarily be a capable entrepreneur. Improved identification of youth with an entrepreneurial orientation would be another important step to improve the quality of existing training opportunities. While skill development is a critical input into self-employment, availability of investment capital is just as important. This latter issue should be addressed on a priority basis.

There are no interventions to address social security concerns of self-employed persons in the country. Most of them, being low and unstable income earners, have little or no social protection, either while being employed or afterwards. This is perhaps the main reason why self-employment is not very attractive to youth. Reforms are needed urgently to social protection coverage.

I. Provision of safe transport

25.8 per cent of employed youth had stopped education for safety and security reasons, related to the ongoing conflict or to harassment during travel to and from work. The latter was particularly the case for women living in rural areas close to regional towns, such as Kurunegala. This was further confirmed because a relatively larger percentage of women wanted to be working close to home than men. It is important to ensure that women have access to public transport services that do not expose them to abuse or harassment. Poor quality public transport services add to the difficulties that youth, particularly women, encounter in accessing education, training and employment.

J. Access to State sector employment

Inadequate access to alternative employment opportunities in the private sector increases the demand and competition for state sector employment, particularly among educated youth belonging to different ethnic communities. While the long-term solution to this problem lies in the creation of well-paid and stable employment in the private sector, ensuring of equal access to available state sector employment on a non-discriminatory basis is critical for maintaining social and political stability. As already mentioned, a systematic national effort should be made to provide language skills to youth as a way of ensuring equality and social justice. This is particularly applicable to ethnic minorities in disadvantaged parts of the country where opportunities for acquiring language skills are virtually non-existent.

K. National level interventions

As is already well documented in the case of Sri Lanka, youth issues, in particular those relating to education, training, employment and participation, have figured prominently in public discussions. These issues - more than likely - will continue to be significant in the near future. There is a need for continued monitoring of trends in the light of empirical data drawn from national surveys. National level interventions in the form of policies and programmes should be evidence-based so as to make sure that such interventions address real issues and felt needs. As a lead country in the Youth Employment Network Sri Lanka also has the opportunity to share its experiences and lessons learned with other countries and to learn from initiatives and interventions being undertaken in different parts of the world. The global concern with youth employment provides a timely opportunity for Sri Lanka to progress in its challenge to find decent work for young women and men.

1. Introduction: Youth, conflict and the politics of education and employment in Sri Lanka¹

1.1 Background to the study

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank, created the Youth Employment Network (YEN) as part of the Millennium Declaration. It recognizes the challenges that young people face globally with regard to educational and employment opportunities. Over 70 million young people are today actively and unsuccessfully looking for employment and this phenomenon is expected to increase in the future.

In response to the urgent need for forward looking strategies to create employment opportunities and future economic security for young people, the ILO is pursuing a range of activities including establishing a framework for promoting decent work for young people through its fundamental conventions; raising awareness of youth employment issues amongst its constituents, and undertaking research on employment issues including innovative and effective policies for enhancing equal opportunities for young people in employment and enterprises.

The Gender Promotion Programme (GENPROM) of the ILO has been actively participating in these activities and developed generic survey instruments on youth employment issues, which can be adapted to various national contexts. In coordination with the ILO Office, Colombo, GENPROM commissioned research in Sri Lanka as it is one of the 'lead countries' within YEN. Research is of particular importance in the Sri Lankan context since youth employment appears to be a chronic problem but as yet remains under-researched. Greater knowledge and information will lead to effective policy solutions to address the issue.

Against this backdrop, the "Improving Capacities for Poverty & Social Policy Research" (IMCAP) Programme of the University of Colombo was assigned to conduct a country-wide survey on youth in Sri Lanka between the age of 15-24 in order to get a more comprehensive picture about the nature of the school-to-work transition, and the hurdles young women and men face in entering the labour market.

The findings from the survey will provide a solid basis for developing responsive programmes. However, on many issues raised there is also an urgent need for further research and policy debate to understand the exact root causes of problems outlined and to identify innovative strategies to reform educational and employment policies in Sri Lanka.

1.2 Methodology

Questionnaires and sampling

Five different questionnaire schedules were provided by ILO to cover the school-to-work transition process, namely "in-school youth", "job-seeking youth", "self-employed youth" and "employed youth" between the age 15-24, with sample locations chosen from all parts of the country. Additionally, 50 interviews with "Employers and Managers" have been conducted as well, covering 30 employers/managers in and around Colombo and another 20 from outside the Western province. The employers sample has been selected with assistance of the Employer's Federation of Ceylon, differentiating between large employers (more than 50 employees) and medium size employers (between 5 to 50 employees).

For the youth interviews a household approach and purposive sampling method was adopted. Following ILO guidelines, the sample was initially limited to 1,650 respondents. However, due to the

¹ This chapter has been mainly written by S.T. Hettige, Markus Mayer and Dharmadasa Paranagama.

conflict situation in Sri Lanka, an additional 200 interviews were conducted to cover the war-affected Jaffna Peninsula in Northern Sri Lanka as well. In view of the ongoing peace-process the country is experiencing at the moment, it was felt that this sample could also provide valuable insights to employment strategies for youth in post-conflict transition period. Therefore, for each of the 4 youth categories another 50 interviews had to be added, bringing the total sample up to 1850.

1. In School Youth	450 schedules	age 15-24 years
2. Young Job Seekers	450 schedules	age 15-24 years
3. Self Employed Youth	450 schedules	age 15-24 years
4. Employed Youth	450 schedules	age 15-24 years
5. Employers / Managers	50 schedules	no age limit

The household was taken as the main sample unit. A representative purposive sampling procedure was adopted, using random as well as snowball mechanism in each location to identify households with youth falling in the given categories.

The “**In-School**” sample was divided into 2/3 of students from schools within the formal education system and 1/3 of the sample coming from technical and vocational training institutes that were offering courses not less than one year in duration. It was not possible to include the experiences of graduates within the sample population of this survey given that most Sri Lankan graduates complete university after the age of 26 years. Hence, this group was excluded from the sample. However, an additional qualitative survey with in-depth interviews was done with 120 social science students from the Colombo University in order to capture some of their experiences.

The “**Job-Seeking**” sample was selected mainly from youth who were explicitly looking for a job or work and who would have been able and willing to start work immediately, should they have found suitable employment. Thus, this definition was chosen in order to include casual workers as well as youth who were following short-term or part-time courses (usually of duration less than one year).

The “**Employed Youth**” sample was defined based on regional perceptions of acceptable employment, including the informal sector. These definitions will most likely differ from the ILO definition of employment that refers to working in a formally registered company or enterprise with a contract covered under labour law. This would result in capturing the experiences of a selected few given that the majority of employed youth in Sri Lanka work within what would be described under these conditions as the informal sector. However, the selection of employed youth in the field followed local definitions of employment being seen as “formal” employment.

The “**Self-Employed Youth**” sample was defined as those youth who were able to generate their own work or who work on their own account. The field selection followed local criteria of youth working “successfully” on their own account, in order to restrict the sample as much as possible to youth who are seriously trying to make their living through self-employment.

Regarding the socio-economic status of the interviewed youth a key decision was made to include only respondents from lower middle and lower socio-economic status. It was also decided, for the purposes of this survey, to subsume household work under the category of unpaid family work. Seven locations were chosen to represent the three ethnic groups of Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim as well as different urban, rural and estate sectors. The final selections of locations are as given below:

1. Colombo / Urban – all three ethnic groups
2. Kurunegala/ Rural – all three ethnic groups
3. Weligama / Semi-urban, coastal - Sinhalese
4. Monaragala / Rural remote – Sinhalese
5. Hatton / Estate – Indian Tamil
6. Batticaloa / Conflict-affected – Remote rural – Tamil & Muslim
7. Jaffna / Conflict – affected – Semi-urban – Tamil

Plan of operation

Fieldwork commenced in mid-July 2003 and was completed by mid October 2003 including the survey in Jaffna. Two field teams were formed to cover Sinhalese and Tamil areas in the main study locations, each team working under a Team Supervisor. In addition a resource person from the university overlooked each location and carried out test-checks to ensure the quality and reliability of collected information. The completed schedules were sent to the University weekly and a specially trained Sinhala and Tamil team carried out editing and coding. In the meantime, a special SPSS format for data entry was worked out. The format was prepared in such a way that all four different types of schedules could be entered into one SPSS file, considering the type of tabulations and analysis that had to be carried out. The question numbers of all questionnaires were recoded to obtain variables that can be identified unambiguously.

1.3 Profile of respondents

The total sample of 1800 youth respondents was equally divided among “In-school youth”, “Job seekers”, “self-employed youth” and “young employees”. At the same time the total sample was also distributed in seven locations representing ethnic, sectoral and socio-economic characteristics of the population. The distribution of the respondents by location is shown in Table 1.1.

Colombo	520 respondents representing the urban sector (all ethnic communities)
Kurunegala	320 respondents representing the rural sector (all ethnic communities)
Weligama	200 respondents representing the semi-urban, coastal belt (Sinhalese)
Moneragala	200 respondents representing remote, rural sector (Sinhalese)
Hatton	120 respondents representing the Tea Estate sector (Indian Tamils)
Batticaloa	240 respondents representing rural, conflict affected sector (Tamils and Muslims)
Jaffna	200 respondents representing war affected area (Tamils)

Table 1.1: Percentage distribution of respondents by location and category of youth

Location	In-school youth %	Job seekers %	Self-employed %	Young employees %
Colombo	28.9	28.9	28.9	28.9
Kurunegala	17.8	17.8	17.8	17.8
Matara	11.1	11.1	11.1	11.1
Monaragala	11.1	11.1	11.1	11.1
Hatton	6.7	6.7	6.7	6.7
Batticaloa	13.3	13.3	13.3	13.3
Jaffna	11.1	11.1	11.1	11.1

Source: STWT (2003)

Gender distribution

Altogether 52.3 per cent of males and 47.7 per cent of females have been enumerated in the above areas. This is a slight distortion to the proposed purposive selection of an equal number of male and female respondents that occurred due to the difficulty to identify in certain locations, female respondents of specific categories as was requested (e.g. self-employed female Muslims youth below age 24).

Ethnicity, religion and age structure

Ethno-religious composition of the sample proves the existing patterns, i.e. majority of Sinhalese are Buddhists, Tamils are Hindus, and Moors are Muslims. The age structure of the respondents indicates a mean age of 19.6 years.

Table 1.2: Percentage of respondent by ethnicity and religion

Ethnicity	%	Religion	%
Sinhalese	44.4	Buddhist	43.9
Tamil	34.8	Hindu	31.1
Moors	20.6	Muslim	20.7
Others	0.2	R Catholic	2.4
Total	100	O Christian	1.8
(Number: 1800)		Others	0.1
		Total	100

Source: STWT (2003)

Table 1.3: Percentage of respondents by age

Age years	%
15	8.2
16	8.1
17	10.7
18	11.7
19	9.7
20	11.8
21	8.8
22	9.9
23	12.3
24	8.8
Total	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Educational level

The educational level of respondents by gender is given in Table 1.4. It is evident that nearly 3/4th of the respondents had an education of secondary level, GCE O/L and GCE A/L, meaning that the youth had fairly a high level of education. This pattern was evident in almost all the districts/locations.

The School-to-work transition survey data shows that most young people start searching for work between the ages of 14-19 years (men; 85.8 per cent: women; 74.2 per cent) with the heaviest bias towards 17.9 years of age. For the population sampled, this means that most people start during or shortly after their lower secondary education to look for a job.

Table 1.4: Percentage of respondents by current educational level and gender

Current level of education	Colombo	Kurunegala	Matara	Moneragala	Hatton	Batti	Jaffna	Total
Male								
No formal education	4.7	0.6	0.0	0.0	1.7	7.6	0.0	2.5
Primary	11.3	4.2	5.2	1.8	23.3	21.2	13.3	10.4
Secondary	40.1	40.0	39.7	39.6	30.0	48.3	68.4	43.3
GCE O/L level	27.7	37.6	39.7	36.0	28.3	17.8	17.3	29.6
GCE A/L level	9.5	13.3	12.0	18.0	13.3	5.1	1.0	10.3
Technical training	2.2	0.6	1.7	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1
Vocational training	3.6	3.7	1.7	2.8	3.4	0.0	0.0	2.4
Degree	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Female								
No formal education	4.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.3	1.6	0.0	1.7
Primary	11.8	6.5	0.0	2.2	15.0	13.9	7.8	8.7
Secondary	39.8	31.6	28.6	25.8	38.3	57.4	67.6	41.5
GCE O/L level	32.2	35.5	36.9	32.6	28.3	22.1	14.7	29.5
GCE A/L level	7.7	20.0	25.0	31.5	11.8	4.2	9.9	14.1
Technical training	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.5
Vocational training	2.0	5.1	9.5	6.7	3.3	0.0	0.0	3.4
Degree	0.8	1.3	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Marital status

The marital status of the respondents indicated that the majority (86 per cent) was never married and only 13 per cent are married and are currently living with the spouse. This confirms the Sri Lanka situation that the majority of youth get married at a relatively later age.

Economic activities

The occupational categories were grouped as follows: All those involved in construction work, labourers and drivers were taken as manual workers. Salesman, computer and clerical related workers, waiters and banking workers were taken as those in the services sector. Agricultural sector includes those in agriculture and fisheries. The proportion of respondents in the services sector was considerably high, comparatively. With the exception of Jaffna, the proportion in self-employment was also high compared to other occupational categories. The proportion of youth in the agricultural sector was significantly low, excepting in Moneragala and Jaffna (see Table 1.5).

Mobility patterns

Respondents were asked to give the main reason for moving to their current residence. Out of 1800 respondents only 19.5 per cent had migrated to the current residence from elsewhere, indicating that the majority (80.5 per cent) were non-migrants (see Table 1.6).

Table 1.5: Percentage of respondents by economic activity of respondents and gender

Occupation of respondent	Colombo	Kurunegala	Matara	Moneragala	Hatton	Batti..	Jaffna	Total
Male								
Manual work	21.9	20.3	11.3	11.6	30.0	25.4	22.0	20.4
Business related	9.5	15.2	7.5	9.3	6.7	6.8	12.0	10.0
Services	35.0	32.9	35.8	34.9	10.0	15.3	20.0	28.8
Clerical & related	0.7	10.0	1.9	7.0	13.3	15.3	0.0	5.8
Self employed	23.4	16.5	11.3	11.6	30.0	30.5	0.0	18.4
Agriculture related	0.7	2.5	15.1	23.3	0.0	6.8	46.0	10.6
Factory work	8.0	1.3	15.2	2.3	10.0	0.0	0.0	5.3
Other	0.8	1.3	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Female								
Manual work	14.5	9.2	2.6	5.6	30.0	23.0	30.0	16.1
Business related	3.4	4.6	5.3	11.1	0.0	6.6	10.0	5.5
Services	22.2	24.6	18.4	44.4	10.0	9.8	14.0	20.4
Clerical & related	8.5	7.7	0.0	0.0	23.3	26.2	6.0	10.3
Self employed	27.4	18.5	7.9	0.0	26.7	32.8	8.0	19.9
Agriculture related	4.3	1.6	13.2	11.2	3.3	0.0	14.0	5.8
Factory work	17.9	33.8	52.6	19.4	6.7	1.6	18.0	20.7
Other	1.8	0.0	0.0	8.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Table 1.6: Percentage of respondents by whether they migrated to the current location

Migration	Colombo	Kuruneg.	Matara	Monerag.	Hatton	Batti.	Jaffna	Total
Lived here since birth	62.2	90.0	93.0	90.0	90.0	90.0	73.5	80.5
Not lived here since birth	37.8	10.0	7.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	26.5	19.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

The reasons to migrate to the current residence by category of youth are shown in Table 1.7 and by location in Table 1.8. It seems that the major reason to migrate was to accompany the family. Apart from this a considerable proportion of in-school youth had migrated for the purpose of education, probably looking for better schools, while jobseekers, self-employed and young employees had migrated looking for jobs.

Table 1.7: Reasons to migrate by youth category (%)

Reason to move	In-school youth	Job seekers	Self employed	Young employees
To accompany family	46.2	53.3	42.9	36.8
For education	20.0	5.3	4.4	1.1
For employment	3.1	12.0	23.1	32.2
Because of marriage	7.7	14.7	15.4	13.8
For education of children	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Due to security reasons	21.5	14.7	14.2	16.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Table 1.8: Percentage of migrants by reason to migrate

Reason to migrate	Colombo	Kuruneg.	Matara	Monerag.	Hatton	Batti.	Jaffna	Total
To accompany family	58.8	28.6	57.1	40.0	15.4	22.7	13.6	44.3
Education / training	6.2	14.3	0.0	5.0	0.0	4.5	11.4	6.9
Employment-related	22.6	25.0	21.4	20.0	23.1	9.1	2.3	18.9
Marriage	6.8	28.6	14.3	30.0	53.8	4.5	13.6	13.2
Education of children	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
Security/ safety	5.0	3.5	7.2	5.0	7.7	59.2	59.1	16.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Overall the mobility of young people appears to be rather low. Findings of the survey indicating the desire to find employment close to home further confirms this pattern. However, it is also important to keep in mind that in contrast to the global discussion on migration and urbanization in Third World countries, Sri Lanka rather appears as an outlier. In the early 1980's urban growth rate of major cities, including Colombo, was below 1 per cent - a phenomenon that sometimes led to the speculation of Sri Lanka facing even counter-urbanization tendencies with people moving back to rural areas, due to State sponsored welfare policies in the field of health and education (Panditharatna 1993, Moore 1992). Additionally, large-scale resettlements schemes such as the Mahaweli programme that the Sri Lankan government initiated during the 1970's and 1980's, have also facilitated a substantial rural-rural migration – without necessarily improving the socio-economic living conditions of the resettled poor – that may have otherwise resulted in an increasing urban migration (Muller/Hettige 1995).

Sri Lanka, on the other hand, also shows a particular pattern of large numbers of commuters that are coming to Colombo for work, often even on a daily basis from far away places such as Kandy or Galle. According to estimates nearly 80 per cent of the employees that are working in Colombo come from outside the Colombo district (Dunham/ Edwards 1997). Increased mobility and subsidized transport facilities in a relatively small country such as Sri Lanka may have blurred the conventional distinctions between urban and rural sectors (Corey 1996, Kortteinen 1999).

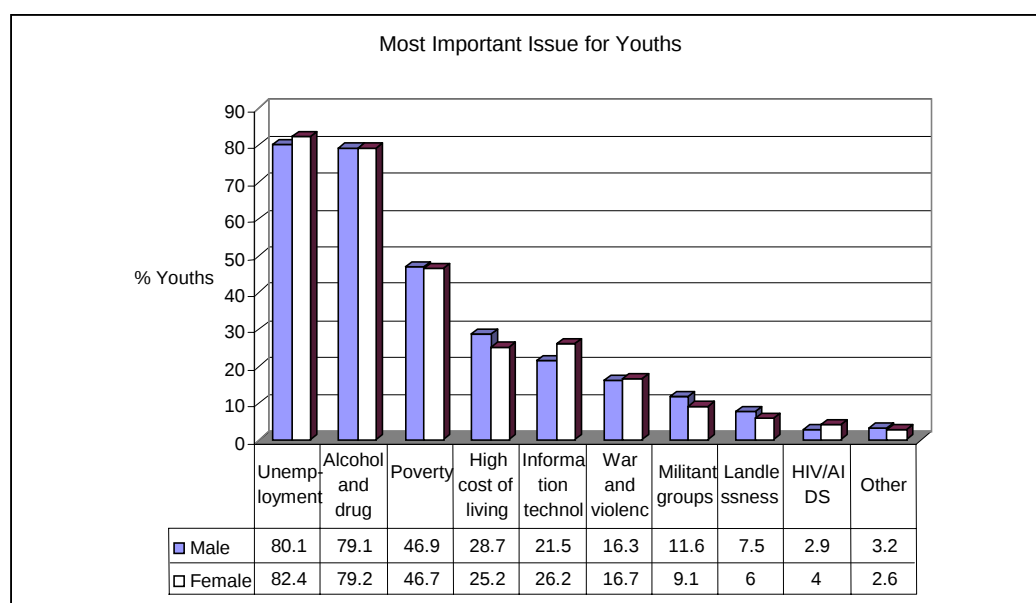
Main issues affecting youth

The main issues young people in Sri Lanka are concerned about at the time when the survey was conducted were unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse, and poverty/ high cost of living. Dealing with information technology and war and violence/ militant groups were other issues mentioned, but to a much lesser extent. There were no significant gender differences in these perceptions, which indication that the young people who answered this question identified themselves more strongly by their age rather than gender (see Table 1.9.)

However, an interesting aspect is being revealed when comparing the different youth groups in regard to the first mentioned, most important issue. In-school youth as well as job-seeking youth mentioned “alcohol and drug abuse” much more often than “unemployment) (12 to 15 per cent more), whereas for self-employed youth both issues are ranked similarly important.

Interestingly, for employed youth the issue of “unemployment” has become the foremost important concern (45.7 per cent of the employed youth mentioned unemployment, followed by 30.9 per cent putting alcohol and drug abuse to the top). Alcohol problems are often related to the parents, and therefore more an issue of concern for youth who are still living very closely with their family. Probably with increasing independence from their families (through employment) their main concerns are shifting respectively.

Table 1.9: Number and percent of youths by most important issue for youths and gender



Source: STWT (2003)

1.4 Limitations of the study

The research followed the survey instruments developed by GENPROM to be applied in different countries for the purpose of international comparisons. Although it was possible to adjust the questionnaire to the Sri Lankan context, no major changes were possible in terms of topics to be addressed and depth of the question content. Given the length of the questionnaires it was also not feasible to add more questions. However, the theoretical framework behind the questionnaire shows some limitation to capture all relevant aspects of the school-to-work transition and limits the predictive value of the data collected. Substantial amount of background data from other sources had to be consulted as well to cover important policy relevant aspects of employability, equal opportunity, employment and decent work and entrepreneurship.

The defined age period 15-24, again for the purpose of international comparison, caused major shortcomings in the context of Sri Lanka for a proper school-to-work transition analysis. Young people in Sri Lanka continue with their studies to a much older age than youth in many other developing countries. Even after formal school education, youth remain unemployed or visit various short-term training classes and courses, before they start searching for work more seriously. It can therefore be assumed that most of the interviewed youth JUST finished their education, JUST started looking for jobs, or JUST entered the labour market, resulting in a much more homogenous youth sample than this was probably the case in other countries. Especially experiences at work, whether self-employed or employed, have to be analysed carefully against this backdrop, as most of the youth were probably lacking necessary experience in this regard when interviewed (e.g. forms of discrimination or hurdles in their career avenues may not be encountered yet).

1.5 Youth in the Sri Lankan context

Sri Lanka has characteristics of both developed countries (such as low population growth rates, high life-expectancy rates, high literacy rates) and developing countries (low economic growth rates, low per capita income, high economic disparities between sections of the population). According to the National Youth Survey 2000, close to 50 per cent of the age group (15-24) was shown to be either unemployed and/or unsatisfied with their present employment and therefore seeking another

job. High unemployment and underemployment rates among youth have been recorded in Sri Lanka since such statistical information became available. This has been considered a chronic recurring problem since the early 1950s (Lakshman, 2002).

Sri Lanka on the other hand is also characterized as a country that undertook considerable efforts to give access to education to all citizens. This has led to the comparatively good social indicators Sri Lanka has in the field of health and education. Moreover it also contributed to the widespread perception in Sri Lanka that education is the most important means for upward social mobility. Respectively, during the last 25 years from 1975-2000, the number of schools and universities (and their student populations) increased significantly:

Table 1.10: Percentage increase in schools, universities, student populations, and the Sri Lankan population (1975-2000)

Year	No. of schools	No. of school students	No. of universities	No. of univ. Students	Total population
1975	8,622	2,431,626	3	12,643	13,496,000
2000	10,338	4,337,161	13	48,296	18,467,000
% increase	19.90	78.36	333.33	282.00	36.83

Source: Department of Census and Statistics (2000)

According to the above table it is very clear that the rate of increase in the students entering schools and universities has increased steadily compared to that of the total population during the last 25 years. However, there is still relatively little known about the quality of the labour force or that of the school leavers. Despite the acknowledgement that there are several problems associated with the school-to-work transition in Sri Lanka, there is a lack of reliable data relating to school leavers and their attitudes and capabilities, on type of job opportunities in the labour market, information on the aspirations, attitudes, life goals and experience of youth and reasons for the inadequate information flow between the youth and the labour market.

Demographic profile

Sri Lanka has undergone a demographic transition from high fertility and mortality to low fertility and mortality, since 1940s. At the turn of the 19th century, the major factor of population growth was the South Indian labour migration to the island. Today, out migration has contributed to reduce population growth. What the West achieved in the fields of low fertility and mortality in centuries, Sri Lanka achieved in a few decades. It was mainly not through economic development, but through the effective adoption of better health strategies.

Data from the Department of Census and Statistics show that the population growth rate had dropped from 2 per cent in 1970s to 1.3 per cent in 2003, as fertility and mortality rates dropped while out migration increased. By 2002 the population of Sri Lanka reached 19 million, with a density of 303 persons per sq. km. and a sex ratio of 97.7 (number of males per 100 females), in favour of females. However, the sex ratio at birth was 104. The Crude Birth Rate and Death Rate (per 1000 persons) dropped to 19.1 and 5.8 with a natural increase of 13.3. The Infant Mortality Rate dropped to 10 (per 1000 live births). As a result of falling fertility rates, the population under 18 years of age has dropped from 41.6 per cent in 1981 to 32.9 per cent in 2001.

The age structure of the population (Census of Population 2001) indicates that the school-going-age population aged 5-19 years was around 23 per cent of the population. The infant population, 0-4 years, was around 7.6 per cent. The aged population, 65 and above, was around 7 per cent. The proportion of dependents, that is the population aged 0-19 years and 65 years and above to the working population aged 20-64 years was around 60 per cent. Table 1.11 provides a better understanding of this data:

Table 1.11: Population by age groups

Age group	%
0-4 years	7.6
5-9 years	23.0
20-64 years	62.4
65+ years	7.0
Total	100.0

Source: D.C. & S. (2002)

Literacy levels

Even at the time of regaining independence in 1948, Sri Lanka had introduced universal and free education. Education was compulsory for children of school going age and was provided free of charge from kindergarten up to university level. As a result, the literacy rate of the country remained very high. By 1981, 87.2 per cent of the population aged 10 years and above could read and write. At the same time, more females tended to continue their higher education as well. There is no gender difference with regard education of children as 50.1 per cent of 4.1 million pupils in schools were females and 49.9 per cent were males in 2001. This indicates that more girls remain in schools when compared with boys and as a result, by 2001, 52 per cent of the university students were also females (DC& S 2002 p.371).

The latest Census of population in Sri Lanka conducted in 2001 could not cover the whole island (due to security problems) and gives the literacy rates only for the districts covered by the census (which excludes the Northern and Eastern parts of the country). However, the data shows that the gap between male and female literacy rates (population 10 years and above) had narrowed down considerably. During the Census periods of 1971 and 1981 the male literacy increased from 85.6 to 91.1, indicating a 5.5 points increase. The female literacy during the same period increased from 70.9 to 83.2 registering an increase of 12.3 points. The 2001 Census of population indicated a further narrowing down. The male literacy in different districts varied between a lower level of 81.1 (Nuwara Eliya) to a high level of 95.6 (Gampaha). The female literacy varied between 80.2 (Badulla, a plantation district) to 94.9 (Gampaha).

Labour market integration

Although more females, than males, enter higher education in Sri Lanka, the participation of females in the labour force was comparatively low and unemployment among females was high, as shown below.

As economic development lagged behind, youth aspirations for decent jobs, decent family life, right to justice and fair competition could not be fulfilled. As a result of the lack of economic opportunities many female youth tended to migrate to the Middle East as housemaids. Although, during the period of 1999-2002 the unemployment rate remained around 8.8 per cent, the absolute number of the unemployed population increased from 590,000 to 626,000. Female out migration through legal means increased from 116,000 to 133,000 and males from 63,000 to 71,000 per year. Nearly 80 per cent of the female migrants to the Middle East were employed as housemaids. Although some of these females who migrated out to the Middle East as housemaids were subject to much harassment, the out migration of females still continues, as shown in Table 1.13.

Table 1.12: Employed and unemployed population aged 10 years and above

	2002 – 2 nd quarter (in '000)			Percentage %		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Population 10 years and above	6,953.50	7,210.83	14,164.33	49.09	50.91	100.00
Total labour force	4,671.13	2,346.13	7,017.26	67.18	32.54	99.72
Employed	4,331.27	1,998.38	6,329.65	92.72	85.18	90.20
Unemployed	339.86	347.75	687.61	7.28	14.82	9.80
Not in the labour force	2,282.37	4,864.70	7,147.07	32.82	67.46	50.46

Source: D.C. & S (2002)

Table 1.13: Number and percentage of out migrants by gender

	1999	2000	2001	2002
Male	63,720	59,793	59,807	70,726
Female	116,015	122,395	124,200	132,984
Total	179,735	182,188	184,007	203,710
As housemaids	88,063	99,413	102,850	108,514
Percentages				
Male	35.45	32.82	32.50	34.72
Female	64.55	67.18	67.50	65.28
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
As housemaids, % out of all female migrants	75.91	81.22	82.81	81.60

Source: D.C. & S (2003)

1.6 Impact of conflict in Sri Lanka

As mentioned earlier, Sri Lanka has long been regarded as a model for successful welfare policies and state-provided social security measures that have led to comparatively good social indicators of literacy, life expectancy, fertility decline and low infant mortality (e.g. Ahmad et al 1991, Jayasuriya 2000). However, the validity of the current measurement of these indicators has to be questioned, considering the unstable political and socio-economic past of Sri Lanka over the last two decades. An intensifying violent conflict with the Tamil separatist movement in the North and East as well as youth unrest in the South has certainly jeopardized the developmental achievements of the past (e.g. Arunatilake et al 2000; Gunatilleka 2001). The lack of any comprehensive census based socio-economic data since 1981 means that Sri Lanka lacks an actual situational analysis of its poverty levels.

Paradoxically, some of the achievements of the Sri Lankan welfare model, such as access to education, may have led to different forms of relative deprivation, arising from the gap between the newly formed aspirations of the well educated and the available economic and social opportunities. Education is certainly seen as the main avenue for upward social mobility in Sri Lanka, but with a primary and secondary education system that largely seems to prepare for clerical jobs within government administrative structures (whose capacities to offer such jobs are indeed limited) many educated youth find themselves in the category of the so-called “unemployable youth” at the end of their educational efforts. In combination with the formation of new regional and ethnic identities this incompatibility with the existing job market (combined with increased restrictions and reluctance to

stay in the agricultural sector) may have contributed towards various perceived or real forms of socio-economic discrimination among particular communities.

In recent times Sri Lanka may be described as a country beset with a number of social conflicts, many of them characterized with a high degree of violence. A main issue in this regard is the political and economic concentration of power in Colombo and the rivalry between the main political parties. Social and regional disparities are being politically instrumentalized and contribute to the evolution of violent, predominantly anti-systemic conflicts. Three conflict areas can be described as most significant in Sri Lanka (Mayer et al 2003):

- The most prominent violent conflict is the war between the Sri Lankan state and the Tamil militants in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country. This conflict is mainly taking place between the Sri Lanka army and the *Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam* (LTTE). After almost 20 years of armed violence, the conflict that started as a struggle for political rights and self-determination of a minority community, had generated new conflicts - some of which had not existed earlier (e.g. Tamil-Muslim polarization in the Eastern province), and destroyed modes of co-existence between diverse and often mixed ethno-religious communities. Besides the ethno-political dimensions of the conflict, other causes are rooted in questions of resource utilization and land distribution in the predominantly rural areas in the North and East and in the access to state controlled assets and employment opportunities. Estimates assume that nearly 60,000 people were killed in the course of the conflict and approximately 800,000 people have been displaced. After an escalation of the conflict in 1998 to 2001, a new government with the support of Norwegian mediators was able to enter into a ceasefire agreement with the LTTE in early 2002. The initiated peace process has brought relief to the population; however, the situation still has to be seen as fragile due to the tensions not only between the government and the LTTE, but also between the main Sinhalese political parties. It is also yet to be seen in which way LTTE will establish their rule in the North-Eastern parts of the country under a political settlement, especially with regard to their treatment of local minorities.
- Sri Lanka was twice confronted with a large-scale unrest of Sinhalese youth from the rural South. The second insurgency in particular, from 1987-1991, brought the country to the verge of collapse. The suppression of the movement left nearly 40,000 to 60,000 dead or missing and most of them were youth. The reasons for the unrest can be seen in the structural changes in the agricultural sector that has limited livelihood opportunities and perceived injustice in the distribution of state-controlled resources. Missing (or not perceived) alternatives have led to unemployment and frustration of a large number of educated rural youth. The *Janata Vimukti Peramuna* (JVP), a radical, Marxist-oriented party that was behind the youth unrest in the past, has regained substantial political power since the last 10 years. This can be seen as a strong indicator for the pertaining dissatisfaction of the rural youth with the existing social and political system.
- Conflict potentials also exist in the estate sector in the Central province of Sri Lanka between the Sinhalese establishment and Estate Tamil workers of Indian origin, who were brought to Sri Lanka during the British colonial period as workers for the tea estates. They received citizen rights only in the 80's and still face various forms of discrimination that are partly also linked to the main ethno-political conflict. Privatization of estate companies and reform efforts in the educational sector has increased the number of un(der)employed youth, who are facing various discriminatory practices to find employment outside the estate sector. Sporadic outbreaks of violence in the hill country in the recent past must be seen as a serious warning that may point towards another youth unrest potential in the country.

Additionally to the above described conflict lines the politically motivated violence between members of different Sinhalese parties has increased dramatically, especially before elections. An area of concern lies also in new tensions and violence that erupted between Sinhalese and Muslim communities in the Central Province and in Colombo and various violent clashes between Tamil and

Muslim communities in the East of Sri Lanka. The role of the Muslims as a religious minority in Sri Lanka needs to be taken into special consideration in view of the ongoing peace process between the LTTE and the Sinhalese state. Tensions between the Northern and Eastern Tamils, especially within the armed forces of the LTTE, have recently increased as well and have further complicated the search for a peaceful solution of the 20 years old ethnic conflict in the country.

The effects of nearly two decades of civil war and violent conflict in Sri Lanka are visible in the increased politicization of the state and governmental institutions, social disintegration through death of family members and displacement, trauma, destruction of infrastructure and property, amplified criminal violence, domestic violence, youth violence, high suicide rates and a highly negatively affected economy combined with high rates of state indebtedness.

1.7 Education, skills and employment policies in Sri Lanka

As education expanded in Sri Lanka after independence higher rates of unemployment among educated youth were generated in the late 1960s. Youth employment figured prominently in the public discourse on the JVP-led youth uprising in Southern Sri Lanka in 1971. The widely held assumption at the time was that widespread unemployment among youth with educational qualifications led many youth to join the rebel movement due to their frustrations.

Some educationists in the country tended to attribute unemployment among educated youth to the nature of the education the youth had received, namely, white collar oriented education sans any useful skills that could have helped them to fit into the economy. This, assertion in turn became widely accepted and the regime in power at the time took steps to reform the school and university curricula, in order to provide school children with a range of life skills and make university education job oriented, particularly in the Arts stream.

The above changes were introduced within the general education system, but no attempt was made to integrate such internal reforms with either the external institutions providing vocational training or public and private work organizations that would have eventually absorbed school leavers. In any case, vocational training institutions usually attracted school dropouts, or those who were considered as “failures”. Those who continued to remain within the general education system till they acquire educational certificates were considered to be fortunate and successful and therefore, enjoyed greater social esteem, even if they did not find desirable white-collar employment quickly. Moreover, public opinion was strong that it is the responsibility of the state to find them employment in keeping with their qualifications. The general tendency was for successive governments to absorb educated youth into state institutions as clerks, teachers, welfare officers, development assistants, etc. Such employment did not require any specific skills but carried many privileges such as regular pay, job security, old age pensions, and social influence. On the other hand, those who left school early and acquired productive skills through vocational training usually ended up as casual workers who did not enjoy any of the privileges mentioned above.

It is against the above background that the failure of curricular reforms introduced in the early 1970s should be understood. With the change of government in 1977, the status quo was restored; vocational skills programme in the general education system was abandoned. School children were no longer provided with any hands-on skill training, as long as they remained within the general education system. They could do so after leaving school. Job oriented courses in the universities also came to an end and the Arts students could once again acquire an academically oriented BA degree in such fields as History, Political Science, Sociology and Economics.

The expansion of the state sector in the 1960s and the 1970s helped absorb many educated youth into white-collar employment. Increasing political pressure emanating from the unemployed youth persuaded successive governments to accommodate them in various government institutions, leading to overstaffing and under-employment. Since this practice could not be continued indefinitely, educated unemployment began to mount again in the 1980s. The implementation of liberal economic reforms from the late 70's onwards led to a contraction of the state sector, making it more difficult for educated youth to find state sector employment.

Even though the private sector began to expand after economic liberalization, most educated youth who have had their education in the mother tongue (either Sinhala or Tamil) did not have access to white-collar employment in the private sector. The business language of the corporate private sector has always been English and this compelled it to recruit white-collar employees from among English-speaking, urban middle and upper class youth. Meanwhile, such recruitment became easy as the expanding private education sector in the country began to churn out English-speaking youth in significant numbers.

While the number of children attending private schools increased steadily over the last two decades (see Table 1.14) a large number of international schools catering to affluent strata of society have also been established in Colombo. A recent study by Hettige et al (2003) revealed that number of students attending international schools has increased rapidly over the same period. Fees charged by most of the school are very substantial and only affluent parents can admit their children to these schools.

Table 1.14: Private schools: student enrolment 1966-1998

Item / Year	1966	1976	1986	1996
Private fee-levying schools	24862 (0.96%)	11072 (0.43%)		
Private non fee-levying schools	32525 (1.25%)	28924 (1.12%)	79717 (2.06%)	86205 (2.02%)
Total No. of Pupils	2588502	2573645	3864187	4254393

Sources: Statistical Abstract of Ceylon 1967-68 and 1973, Department of Census and Statistics, Colombo
Statistical Abstract of Sri Lanka 1979, 1985, 1992 and 1999, Department of Census and Statistics, Colombo

Persisting high rates of unemployment among educated youth do not appear to dampen the demand for educational certificates. This is true at both secondary and tertiary levels. Even though the number of universities has doubled over the last decade, available university places are still grossly inadequate to meet the growing demand. This seems to point to the persisting significance of education as an avenue of social mobility.

It is also significant that, in spite of the growing significance of the private sector, almost at the expense of the state sector, a large majority of educated youth continue to desire and expect state sector jobs. This is true in all parts of the country, in particular in rural areas. Main reasons for this preference are job-security, pensions, and higher social status associated with public sector employment. It is also noteworthy that there is a widespread feeling among youth that they do not have equal opportunities in the expanding private sector and that the private sector discriminates against them. For instances according to the National Youth Survey of 1999/2000 a majority of the respondents feel that the private sector discriminates on the grounds of social background (NYS 2000).

The demand for vocational training has increased over the last two decades (see Table 1.15). Yet, such demand has come mainly from youth with lower educational attainment. In other words, it is still the choice of those who fail to climb the educational ladder. Even though there has been a significant increase in the demand for vocational skills, both in the country and abroad, widespread youth preference is still to acquire educational qualifications and secure white-collar employment. This is no doubt a reflection of persisting social values and unequal distribution of social and economic rewards between white collar and blue-collar jobs. Blue-collar workers are more likely to be casually employed and therefore do not enjoy privileges such as job security, social protection, etc.

The discussion so far has raised several key issues, e.g. the lack of integration of skill development into the general education system on a sustained basis. This has reinforced the continuing white-collar orientation of a vast majority of youth, in spite of the general recognition that it is not possible for many youth to find white-collar jobs. Secondly, the general education system continues to be least equipped to provide pupils with English language skills in spite of the overwhelming demand for such skills by both the private sector employers and upwardly mobile youth. As a consequence, most educated youth in the country continue to be monolingual at a time when the knowledge of a

second language is critical from a national integration point of view. As Table 1.16 shows student performance in English at the GCE (O/L) is highly unequally distributed across the country, while Colombo stands out the district with the best performance, more peripheral districts record quite poor rates of achievement. The pattern has not changed much over the last decade.

Table 1.15: Vocational training: number recruited in each year according to level of apprenticeship 1973-1996

Apprenticeship/ Year	1973	1975	1977	1979	1981	1983	1985	1987	1989	1991	1993	1995
Engineering Undergraduate Apprentices-Moratuwa	-	-	135	117	267	543	364	425		706	535	794
Engineering Undergraduate Apprentices Peradeniya	-	-	-	251	740	837	497	522		1206	538	621
National Diploma in Engineering Science	-	90	80	194	163	159	277	248	250	229	300	300
National Diploma in Technology	245	342	237	308	404	391	391	309	76	258	368	390
Craft (Trade) Apprentices	1005	1954	998	4066	4148	4015	4519	4142	5591	4858	7855	11388
Craft (Normal) Apprentices	-	-	--	398	4081	600	603	455	1790	2453	3133	3731
Village Level Apprentices	-	-	-	-	303	721	1067	1711	2168	881	4288	4314
Special Situational Apprentices	-	-	-	-	239	102	119	5	-	-	-	-
Construction Supervisor	-	-	-	-	153	269	143	179	194	104	-	-
Higher National Diploma in Engineering	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	196	153	45
School Leavers (Artisans Trade) Apprentices	-	-	-	-	140	22	-	-	-	-	-	-
Job Bank Apprentices	-	-	-	51	1033	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Craft Accelerated Apprentices	-	-	-	4328	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Arts Graduates Apprentices	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	1250	2386	1450	9713	8671	7663	7980	7996	10069	10891	17170	21583

Source: T.V.E.C. Publication (1973-1995)

Table 1.16: GCE O/L English results by some selected districts (%)

Education Regions	1990			1995			1999			2000		
	Distinction	Ordinary pass	Failure	Distinction	Ordinary pass	Failure	Distinction	Ordinary pass	Failure	Distinction	Ordinary pass	Failure
All Sri Lanka	2.47	22.35	68.65	3.04	21.86	63.55	4.98	20.08	63.19	4.19	15.59	70.16
Colombo	16.88	30.88	30.88	16.85	26.72	28.84	23.69	23.07	29.57	22.86	20.23	34.35
Kandy	3.26	23.00	23	3.54	21.61	63.03	6.78	22.12	56.93	5.46	17.09	65.49
Kurunegala	1.14	20.06	20.06	3.12	22.51	62.71	6.88	21.89	55.56	6.15	17.90	62.84
Galle	2.13	24.18	24.18	3.07	21.46	62.19	5.99	20.70	60.05	4.85	16.63	67.15
Kalutara	1.62	24.82	24.82	2.81	23.97	59.74	5.78	21.83	58.2	3.90	17.65	66.42
Nuwara Eliya	0.25	16.92	16.92	0.95	22.94	67.66	1.93	19.08	71.11	1.20	12.42	80.45
Monaragala	0.25	14.17	14.17	0.69	15.34	79.5	0.94	13.30	80.41	0.88	10.51	83.61
Puttalam	0.79	17.30	17.3	0	0	0	1.72	19.81	70.71	1.06	12.01	81.49

Source: Data Files 1990, 1995, 1999 and 2000, Department of Examinations, Colombo

It is noteworthy that youth leaving privileged, urban public schools also find private sector employment, at least partly due to their own social background. Most of them also hail from well-to-do families. And, last but not least, the gap between white collar employment and blue collar skilled work in terms of social and economic rewards remains as wide as ever, in spite of the fact that the demand for productive skills seems to be growing steadily. There are no attempts to bridge the above gap in terms of job security, health and social insurance, and social recognition. It is significant that casualization of employment is quite common among skilled craft categories, making the latter more vulnerable to market pressures. A case in point is the construction sector that employs a large proportion of workers on a casual basis.²

Recent policy interventions of the Sri Lankan Government

The issues outlined above no doubt affect the transition from school to work in a significant manner. In fact, since school education in general does not transmit many productive skills to pupils, there is a wide gap between school and the world of work. This, of course does not apply to those youth who find white collar employment with the help of their educational certificates and other attributes like language skills and computer literacy. On the other hand, those who do not succeed in their academic career, i.e. school drop outs, usually find unskilled, casual jobs or go for vocational training before they enter the world of work. What is noteworthy is that a large proportion of youth who secure educational certificates remain unemployed, as they cannot find desired employment. Many of them join radical political movements that promise to fight for their interests. This is the general pattern throughout the country.

Sri Lanka has been attempting to evolve equitable and transparent youth policies over the last several decades. However, continued politicization of state programmes and actions is critical issue. Feelings of injustice and discriminations, lack of equal opportunity and sense of powerlessness with respect to decision-making processes are important factors that alienate many youth from mainstream society and politics. Even though the political rhetoric has emphasized the need for rational and equitable policies, in many cases successive regimes have failed to live up to expectations that such political rhetoric has given rise to. This has been compounded the failure of some employment and training programmes to produce the expected outcomes either due to design faults or implementation failures or both.

Recent programmes and policies initiated by various Sri Lankan Governments have included initiatives such as the Youth Corps, Tharuna Aruna and the JobsNet. **Youth Corps** has set a target of providing training to 40,000 unemployed youth per year outside the existing vocational training system, which will certainly have an impact on the latter. In some sense the notion that those who participate in the programme will be “future leaders” of the country is also more a rhetorical statement than a realistic one. Those who opt for vocational training are not youth who have such high aspirations and in many cases are working as casual workers within the informal economy.

Tharuna Aruna, an innovative programme aimed at helping graduates to become more skilled and find private sector employment has also been struggling to reach its targets. Of a total of over 20,000 graduates only less than 1,000 graduates, at the time of writing this report, have been placed in regular employment in the private sector. The drop out rate has been very high. Many left the programme when they found low paid government jobs. Others were employed as casual workers until their perceived training was completed at which time they were sent home. The programme is now entering a new phase and has drawn lessons learned from the previous phase on strengthening public-private partnerships for gainful youth employment.

Jobsnet programme was launched with the view to enabling unemployed youth to contact employers directly, without political or other interferences. Many jobs in the past have been allocated to youth on the basis of political loyalty and other personal friends and this has been a serious attempt to overcome such interference. Jobsnet continues to expand its network across the country.

² These workers operate in the informal economy, constantly looking for work, from one short-term contract to another. They are not covered by any national social protection scheme and forced to rely on informal social support from family, relatives and friends.

So, as regards the training and placing of unemployed youth in desirable areas of work, recent state sponsored programmes have not been entirely successful. Moreover, they do not address the root causes of the problem of youth unemployment. Until and unless these causes are addressed, youth discontent will continue to be a serious socio-political issue that may be exploited for political purposes by interested parties. What we could formulate and implement as rational policies in the relevant fields remains a question for serious discussion.

2. Education and employability: Skills, competencies and expectations of Sri Lankan youth³

2.1 Introduction

Employment is not the same as employability. In its simplest form, being employed means having a job. Unfortunately for a youth or adult who is not adequately prepared for gainful employment, having a job is likely to be a temporary condition. On the other hand, being employable means possessing the skills, knowledge and competencies needed to become productively employed, to maintain employment, and to progress in the workplace (Bhareman and Spill; 1998). Employability can be defined as the increased opportunity and capability for constructing the productive skills and competencies that will allow people to find, create, keep, enrich and change jobs and to obtain fair personal, economic and professional rewards in return. For many young people in Sri Lanka, what they have learned in school may not be directly related to what they need to know in order to succeed in employment after leaving school.

There have been few studies that have looked at what specific factors contribute to employability, particularly in the Sri Lankan context. In this survey, education and training opportunities, additional courses, language proficiency, as well as guidance on education and career choices were taken to be factors that can influence the employability of young people. These were examined from the perspective of young people as well as potential employers.

In addition, other factors such as the daily activities of young people and their membership in community organizations were taken as potentially contributing to employability by increasing their social networks. Expectations were also seen as part of employability, since the desired job will significantly influence which jobs people apply for and accept.

In order to know about current trends in the employment and education structures, it is necessary to begin the chapter by discussing the educational history of Sri Lanka and the changes in employment structures following economic liberalization.

2.2 History of Sri Lankan education system

This section briefly reviews the development of the Sri Lankan education system over the last century in relation to the main changes that took place under three different periods namely, the colonial period, following independence of Sri Lanka and after the introduction of economic liberalization in the late 70's.

Colonial period

In 1505, the Portuguese captured the coastal areas of Sri Lanka as the first European colonisers. During this period, they started parish schools attached to Catholic churches whilst officially discouraging indigenous Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim schools. In 1658, the Dutch displaced

³ This chapter has been mainly written by Nishara Fernando, Markus Mayer and Maleeka Salih.

the Portuguese as the colonial power and ruled the coastal areas of the island until 1796. They further extended the system of parish schools established by the Portuguese in Colombo, Galle and Jaffna areas and used Sinhala or Tamil as the medium of instruction. What is important to note here is that, the Dutch colonial influences were confined only to the low country coastal lands and did not expand into the central parts of the country.

The British colonial period began in 1796 and ended in 1948 with Sri Lanka gaining independence in that year. By 1830 there were five different types of schools; the government schools, mission schools (Baptist, Wesleyan, American and Anglican), private schools controlled by individual entrepreneurs, Catholic schools and indigenous religious schools (*pirivenas* of the Buddhist, temple and *verandah* schools of the Hindus and *maktabs* and *madrasas* of the Muslims (Little, 1999). The importance of education as an aspect of social status was relatively weak under both Portuguese and Dutch periods of colonial rule. However, it became much stronger during the British colonial rule due to the opening up of job opportunities in the British colonial civil service for Sri Lankans with successful educational attainment through English education. This situation required the aspirants for such employment to shift into English education. It also persuaded parish schools to change their medium of instruction from vernacular language to English. It is important to note that replacement of some European civil servants by Sri Lankan civil servants further confirmed that there was a link between an English education and high status of jobs. Therefore, at a later stage government schools also strengthened their focus on English education.

Examinations were first introduced to schools for selection purposes in the 1960s. Candidates for junior positions in government services and later for the award of scholarships to study at Colombo Academy were selected on the basis of examination results from the eighth grade examination. Later, University of Cambridge local examinations and University of London examinations were introduced in 1880 and 1882 respectively. All these examinations were conducted in the English medium. By the end of the nineteenth century, schools were distinguished along many dimensions: medium of instruction (Sinhala, Tamil and English), the source of the financial control of the school (government, religious body, private), type of religion promoted by the school (Buddhism, Roman Catholicism, Islam, Hinduism etc), social background of the students and the type of public examinations which could be sat for by students (Little, 1999).

While the Kandyan Sinhalese slowly adapted to the situation, low country Sinhalese, Burghers and Jaffna Tamils gained the greatest advantage from the nineteenth century education. However, due to the high pressure to create school curricula more relevant to the Sri Lankan socio-economic context at that time, the vernacular eighth grade school leaving examination was introduced and this certificate had helped many to get appointments like village headmen and registrars.

As discussed earlier, it is understandable that English medium schools offered the best employment opportunities and entrance was limited to only those who could pay fees. In other words, access to those schools was limited only to students who came mainly from middle or upper class families. However, in 1945 the State Council enacted legislature to introduce Free Education. Even though the main intention of the Act was to transform education from 'patrimony of the rich' to an 'inheritance of poor', the immediate consequences of the Act was that, while the well-to-do continued to send their children to good government schools without paying fees, the majority of the poor continued to receive poor quality education free of charge (Jayasuriya, 1979). On the other hand, the long-term consequence of the Free Education Act was 'the replacement of a stratified system of education by a unitary system' (Little, 1999).

After independence of Sri Lanka

Soon after independence of Sri Lanka, a parliamentary Act compelled all unaided schools to register with the Ministry of Education. It is noteworthy that, between 1930 and 1960, the number of Buddhist schools grew from 240 to 1121, and the numbers of schools run directly by the state increased from 37 per cent to 63 per cent (De Silva, 1979). In 1961, the State prohibited private individuals to establish new schools and took full control of the education system. On the basis of greater state control over the education system, one could argue that it had increased equal educational opportunities in the country. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the existing inequalities between

different types of schools, particularly those between urban privileged schools and rural underprivileged schools, became less significant.

Although the controversial Official Language Act was introduced in 1956, which made Sinhala the official language in place of English, the medium of instruction was changed to Sinhala or Tamil for year one in all primary schools already in 1948, secondary schools in 1953 and university arts subjects in 1959. These changes in the policy of medium of instruction in schools were reflected in changes in examinations systems that led to the elimination of English medium examinations.

The 1960s witnessed the emergence of a significant unemployment problem, especially among educated youth where the National Education Commission emphasized the importance of changing the education system to conform to the economic needs of the country. However, in 1971 an Education Review Committee recommended a radical change in the system of formal examinations and vocationalization of the school curriculum. These educational reforms were introduced in 1972 (Little, 1999).

It is important to note that State oriented development strategies adopted in the late 1950s did not facilitate the growth of the private corporate sector. Nevertheless the rapid expansion of the State institutions, including public enterprises such as industrial factories, banks and infrastructure projects, enabled many people to move up the social ladder through formal education. In other words, State sector employment - mostly white collar positions, became the main source of employment for youth with educational qualifications who came from not so well to do families (Hettige, 2000).

Economic liberalization and its aftermath

After the introduction of liberal economic policies in 1977, the State freed the economy from State control and domination. This led to a speedy expansion of the private sector, creating many new job opportunities for those who are equipped with new types of skills and qualifications, in the fields of tourism, information technology, management and accountancy and even in the field of education. In the new economic environment, local as well as trans-national employers created new economic demands for vocational, academic and professional qualifications on the one hand, and different education and training agencies such as public (State funded), private (market driven) and trans-national sectors that supplied those qualifications on the other.

Nonetheless, students who relied on different types of suppliers ended up having different life chances contributing to further social differentiation. In other words, some argue that the gap between the rich and poor kept on widening due to the above economic environment and this led to a severe problem of youth unemployment particularly among the educated youth due to the mismatch between education and employment (Hettige, 2000; Little, 1999). Owing to this situation, the then People's Alliance government in the mid 1990s introduced educational reforms to state schools, vocational/technical colleges and state funded universities as a response to the problem of youth unemployment.

The supply of different types of qualifications became a major profit making business in Sri Lanka over the past twenty years, following economic liberalization. It is also important to note that the number of students who follow university level courses in foreign institutions with the help of access arrangement consultants or by directly applying to the relevant universities has increased over the last ten years in Sri Lanka.

With regard to the general education system, more and more private schools are established under the label of International schools, mainly in the Western Province and in some main cities such as Kandy, Kurunegala and Matara. These schools use English as the medium of instruction and prepare students mainly for international exams like the London General Certificate of Education Ordinary Levels and Advanced Levels (GCE O/L and A/L). Available data shows a gradual increase of enrolments in private fee levying schools after economic liberalization (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Number of students by type of school

	1966	1967	1971	1975	1978	1982	1984	1996	1998
Govt.schools	2,398,968	2,415,346	2,654,503	2,431,626	2,990,106	3,398,056	3,539,096	4,119,627	4,134,838
Private schools	32,525	37,650	33,237	33,412	33,436	59,383	58,658	86,205	91,370

Sources: Statistical abstract of Sri Lanka: 1967-68, 1973, 1979, 1985, 1992 and 1999

The importance of acquiring Information Technology and English Language skills in order to find a decent job is widely accepted by Sri Lankan youth in response to the current demand from different types of employers. The following statements taken from the Employer Survey, 2001-2002 of the GQL Research Project of the University of Colombo, further confirm this:

As the modern banking sector is completely computerized, IT knowledge is a must for grade 1, 2, and 3 officers as well as clerks. English is also a prerequisite because no one can survive in a computerized environment without having a sound English knowledge.

Manager – Human Resource and Administration, National Savings Bank

We strongly need English and computer skills especially for high level positions (general manager, directors, technical engineers,) as well as clerical posts (technicians, clerks, and computer operators)

Head of Human Resources, Sri Lanka Telecom

English is essential for middle management (accountants, engineers and legal officers,) and for high-level positions (general manager, chairperson, deputy chair person and directors). Both clerical (technicians, clerks, and computer operators) and executive positions require computer literacy.

Personal Manager, Hayleys

Our main communicative language is English. We use other languages (Sinhala and Tamil) only when interacting with customers who do not speak English. In addition, computer literacy is essential for positions at all levels (executives, accountant, cashier, clerks).

Manager – Human Resources, Eagle Insurance

The above trend is also evident from Table 2.2, which shows a rapid increase in student enrolments in some selected computer-training institutes in Colombo. Further, the decision to equip the younger generation with computer skills by establishing school computer centres reveals the importance of this skill in government and private sectors (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.2: Students enrolment of some selected computer-training institutes (1981-2000)

Year	Number of students							Total
	DP Aids	Tec Sri Lanka	IDM	Singapore Informatics	ICT	NYSC	Aquinas	
1981	28	-	-	-	80	-	-	108
1982	-	280	-	-	-	-	-	280
1984	-	-	110	-	-	-	-	110
1985	480	-	-	-	860	-	33	1,373
1987	-	-	-	-	-	-	39	39
1990	2,100	3,800	-	-	-	-	83	5,983
1991	-	-	-	400	-	-	-	40
1992	-	-	-	-	-	-	69	69
1994	-	-	-	-	-	-	197	197
1995	5,033	9,200	4,200	-	-	124	-	18,557
1996	-	-	-	4,800	420	108	154	5,482
1997	-	-	-	-	-	119	-	119
1998	-	15,300	-	-	-	118	193	15,611
1999	-	-	-	-	-	125	-	125
2000	11,500	27,000	13,500	-	1,800	132	200	54,132

Notes - * IDM - Institute of Data Management (Pvt) Ltd, ICT - Institute of Computer Technology, University of Colombo, NYSC - National Youth Services Council, Maharagama

Source: Data Files – Ministry of Education, 2001

Table 2.3: Schools with computer centres by province

Province	No. of computer centers	No. of students 1994-1997			
		1994	1995	1996	1997
North Central Province	6	1,681	1,275	1,261	1,891
Central Province	8	1,018	1,095	1,571	1,919
Southern Province	9	950	875	2,098	3,896
Sabaragamuwa Province	8	323	720	277	314
Western Province	23	675	887	2,720	6,926
Uva Province	7	0	667	1,369	1,128
North Western Province	6	0	0	515	1,781
North Eastern Province	5	0	0	0	569
Sri Lanka	72	4,647	5,519	9,811	18,424

Sources: Data Files-Ministry of Education, 2001

2.3 Employability trends after economic liberalization

So far, an attempt has been made to outline some of the changes that occurred in the field of education over the last decades in Sri Lanka, particularly paying attention to the changes after economic liberalization. It is also important to examine what the changing patterns of employment mean for youth.

Firstly, foreign employment was insignificant as a source of wage employment before economic liberalization. With economic liberalization, foreign employment opportunities expanded rapidly. Several years after economic liberalization, it has become one of the most significant sources of income, particularly for some groups of women. See table 2.4 below:

Table 2.4: Percent of female migrants and migrant remittances of selected Asian countries

Country	% of women migrants	Billion US Dollars	Year
Philippines	72	7.18	2002
Indonesia	76	4.54	1999
Sri Lanka	65	1.32	2002

Compiled from the Asian Migrant Yearbook 20002-2003,
Asian centre-Migrant Forum in Asia 2004

Secondly, service sector employment has increased more rapidly than the manufacturing sector. Manufacturing represented an insignificant share of employment in the 1960s. For instance, it was only 7.3 per cent in 1963. Employment in manufacturing increased marginally in the early 1970s. However, following economic liberalization, manufacturing became an increasingly significant area of employment, particularly for women. It reached nearly 17 per cent by the mid 1990s.

Thirdly, agricultural sector recorded its peak in 1973 when it accounted for 54.5 per cent of the employed population. It recorded a significant decline immediately following the implementation of liberal economic policies, when it went down to 48.3 per cent in 1978-9. In 1996-7, it had declined to 37.3 per cent, which is a substantial reduction from a peak of 54.5 per cent in 1973.

Fourthly, corporate sector employment before economic liberalization was relatively insignificant compared to the state sector employment. While over one million people were employed in the state sector institutions, only 283, 457 persons were employed in the private corporate sector at the time of liberalization. On the other hand, the state sector has remained highly significant as a source of employment in the years following liberalization although the relative significance of the private sector has also increased over the years. Employment data from the 1990s show that the relative

significance of private sector employment increased while that of public sector employment decreased (see Tables 2.4 and 2.5).

These changes within the employment sector have had huge implications for the employability of youth, because they have influenced what attributes, skills and competencies are most valued within the existing labour market. It is against this background that the perceptions, experiences and problems of youth in Sri Lanka will be explored.

Table 2.5: Employed persons in Sri Lanka by sector before and after economic liberalization⁴

Year	Government*	Semi-government*	Private*
1977	422,647	617,033	283,437
1978	446,085	652,472	321,951
1979	470,118	747,034	315,972
1982	484,802	784,370	345,679
1987	513,300	752,700	NA
1989	588,500	749,700	425,784
1991	652,959	654,000	687,086
1992	653,959	637,271	NA
1993	676,403	618,793	NA
1994	699,898	625,666	NA
1995	737,504	569,484	NA
1996	752,194	409,278	NA
1997	762,067	309,633	NA
1998	790,492	300,654	NA
1999	822,122	296,248	NA
2000	856,665	299,615	NA

Source: Annual Reports 1982-2000, Central Bank of Sri Lanka

* 'Semi-government' refers to production or service institutions wholly or partly owned by the State. These are different from government institutions, departments, provincial and local government institutions which come under the 'government' category. 'Private' refers to the private corporate sector with medium and large- scale enterprises.

Table 2.6: Status of employment in Sri Lanka by sector and category (%)

Period	Public sector employees	Private sector employees	Employers	Self-employed	Unpaid family workers	Total
1990	21.5	33.7	1.8	29.2	13.8	100
1991	22.9	39.5	2.2	25.4	10.0	100
1992	20.0	40.0	1.6	27.1	11.3	100
1993	17.4	42.8	2.0	27.4	10.4	100
1994	16.4	44.3	2.3	27.2	9.8	100
1995	15.6	44.3	2.5	28.3	9.4	100
1996	15.0	45.8	2.3	26.8	10.0	100
1997	15.1	44.3	2.3	28.8	9.4	100
1998	14.5	41.2	1.9	28.9	13.6	100
1999	14.4	43.1	2.0	28.3	12.2	100
2000	13.6	43.2	2.3	27.6	13.3	100

Source: Annual Reports 1999, Central Bank of Sri Lanka

⁴ Note: Central Bank reports do not provide data on private sector employment after 1992. However, these reports indicate a decrease in public sector employment and an increase in private sector employment in relative terms. For instance, the share of public sector employment decreases from about 23 per cent in 1991 to about 13 per cent in 2000. The share of private sector employment increases from about 33 per cent in 1990 to about 44 per cent in 2000 (Central Bank reports).

2.4 Youth opinions on prerequisites for work

As discussed earlier, employability is partly seen as the prerequisites for obtaining and maintaining employment. In the STWT survey greater significance was given to the skills required to obtain employment. It is important to note that the administered interview schedule addressed only the basic level skills such as formal general education, vocational and technical training, and language skills. Higher order cognitive skills such as problem-solving, innovative thinking, decision making and affective qualities such as responsibility-bearing, positive attitudes towards work, efficiency and punctuality were not considered in the survey.

Education and training as a pre-requisite

A significant proportion of youth in the STWT survey found that the most useful education and training needed to obtain a decent job these days was GCE A/L (37 per cent), while 25.3 per cent mentioned GCE O/L and another 10.5 per cent mentioned a university degree. On the other hand, 14 per cent of youth have emphasized the importance of proficiency in the English language, while another 8.5 per cent mentioned either technical or vocational training.

Opinions of in-school youth

Compared to the overall sample, a lower percentage of youth in education (i.e. in-school and technical/vocational training) stated that GCE O/L is the most useful (15.1 per cent compared to 25 per cent). Responses of schooling youth by district variations are noteworthy with regard to the most useful level of education and training needed to get decent jobs. For instance, a significant proportion of both Batticaloa (60 per cent) and Hatton youth (57 per cent) think that GCE A/L is the most useful level of education to get a decent job compared to youth in other districts (Colombo – 38 per cent, Kurunegala – 40 per cent, Matara – 46 per cent and Monaragala 38 per cent).

This might indicate that Tamils from either a marginal rural location or from a caste discriminated background (plantation sector–Hatton) seem to put their trust more than others in A/L education despite the absence of well equipped schools in the area. This might also be the most difficult to achieve for them. Conversely, a clear proportion of both Kurunegala (21.3 per cent) and Matara youth (24 per cent) stated that proficiency in English is the most useful training in order to get a decent job compared to youth in other districts. Rural youth living close to dynamic medium towns recognize English as crucial for finding a good job.

Table 2.7: Opinions of schooling youth on most useful education and training (%)

Groups	Prim	Sec	GCE O/L	GCE A/L	Degree	Masters degree	English	Technical training	Vocat. Training	Other
All groups	3.0	2.0	25.0	37.0	10.5	1.0	14.3	3.4	5.0	0.2
In-school	0.9	1.3	15.1	44.0	13.3	1.1	14.2	4.9	4.7	0.4
<i>In-school and technical/vocational training youth</i>										
Men	1.3	.9	12.0	42.9	13.7	1.3	16.7	6.0	4.7	0.4
Women	0.5	1.8	18.4	45.2	12.9	0.9	11.5	3.7	4.6	0.5
Colombo	1.5	2.3	16.9	37.7	10.0	-	15.4	7.7	6.9	-
Kurunegala	1.3	1.3	15.0	40.0	10.0	1.3	21.3	3.8	6.3	-
Matara	2.0	-	10.0	46.0	6.0	4.0	24.0	4.0	4.0	-
Monaragala	-	-	18.0	38.0	18.0	4.0	8.0	6.0	8.0	-
Hatton	-	-	13.3	56.7	16.7	-	6.7	6.7	-	-
Batticaloa	-	1.7	10.0	60.0	21.7	-	5.0	-	1.7	-
Jaffna	-	2.0	20.0	44.0	18.0	-	12.0	4.0	-	-

Source: STWT (2003)

GCE O/L and GCE A/L qualifications are clearly seen as the most important prerequisites to get a decent job among youth in Sri Lanka. Although there is apparently an increasing awareness of the importance of English language, other qualifications through vocational or technical training are not perceived as helpful to find a decent job. These perceptions need to be considered in the discussion about “vocationalizing” school education in Sri Lanka.

Opinions of job-seeking youth

When the responses of the in-school youth and job-seeking youth are compared, there are a number of similarities with some differences noted in the percentage of youth who stated the usefulness of GCE O/L and A/L as an educational qualification for a decent job. The percentage of job-seeking youth stating the GCE A/L as the most useful education is 33.1 per cent as compared with 44 per cent stated by schooling youth. On the other hand, the percentage of youth who stated the GCE O/L has increased from 15.1 per cent to 26.9 per cent when the responses from the schooling youth and job-seeking youth categories are compared. It could be that the aspirations of schooling youth are higher than those of job-seeking youth or it may be that the job-seeking youth have a better understanding of the requirements of the labour market, with the exposure to it.

There are no significant gender differences in the given responses. However, when the responses by district are compared, there are some interesting differences. In comparison to job-seeking youth from other districts, slightly more than half of the youth from Hatton (53.3 per cent) stated GCE A/L to be the most useful. The percentage of responses from the other districts for GCE A/L ranged from 22 per cent to 38 per cent.

Furthermore, in comparison with their schooling counterparts, the percentage of Batticaloa youth who stated that GCE A/L is the most useful have gone down from 60 per cent to 35 per cent. Correspondingly, the percentage of Batticaloa youth who consider the GCE O/L to be the most important increased from 10 per cent to 38.3 per cent when comparing the schooling and job-seeking youth. Furthermore, only 3.3 per cent of Batticaloa job-seeking youth stated English to be the most useful. The percentage of responses from the other districts for English ranged from 10 per cent to 25 per cent.

Table 2.8: Opinions of job-seeking youth on most useful education and training (%)

Groups	Prim.	Sec.	GCE O/L	GCE A/L	Degree	Master degree	English	Technical training	Vocat. Training	Other
All groups	3.0	2.0	25.0	37.0	10.5	1.0	14.3	3.4	5.0	0.2
Job-seekers	3.3	1.8	26.9	33.1	9.8	0.7	16.9	3.1	4.0	0.2
<i>Job-seeking youth</i>										
Men	3.6	1.3	24.2	34.1	9.0	0.4	17.5	4.0	5.8	-
Women	3.1	2.2	29.6	32.3	10.6	0.9	16.4	2.2	2.2	0.4
Colombo	6.9	2.3	20.8	29.2	8.5	-	20.0	5.4	6.2	0.8
Kurunegala	-	-	22.5	33.8	11.3	2.5	25.0	2.5	2.5	-
Matara	-	-	24.0	38.0	14.0	-	16.0	2.0	6.0	-
Monaragala	-	-	32.0	22.0	10.0	2.0	20.0	6.0	8.0	-
Hatton	-	6.7	20.0	53.3	10.0	-	10.0	-	-	-
Batticaloa	10.0	3.3	38.3	35.0	8.3	-	3.3	-	1.7	-
Jaffna	-	2.0	38.8	34.7	8.2	-	14.3	2.0	-	-

Source: STWT (2003)

Opinions of young employees

Around 62 per cent of respondents in the STWT survey identified GCE O/L and A/L as the most useful qualification. Some 14 per cent believed English proficiency to be the most useful qualification in getting a decent job. Only 7.5 per cent of the interviewees considered technical and

vocational training as useful. It is interesting to note that there are no significant differences between the responses of employed and job-seeking youth.

However, within the group there are some responses that are interesting. Firstly, the percentage of employed women who stated that the GCE A/L to be the most useful qualification is comparatively higher at 39.6 per cent when compared to that of employed men at 26.9 per cent. Unlike their schooling and job-seeking counterparts (13.3 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively), 46.7 per cent of employed youth from Hatton stated that GCE O/L is the most useful qualification to find a decent job.

The high percentages of 60 per cent and 53.3 per cent of in-school and job-seeking Hatton youth stating GCE. A/L to be the most useful qualification decreased to 33.3 per cent of employed Hatton youth. This may be as a result of higher aspirations of schooling and job-seeking youth compared to youth who may have had to settle for a job different to their aspirations at some time with a corresponding change in their perceptions.

Interestingly, reverse shifts (valuing GCE A/L more than O/L) from their job-seeking youth have been observed in the responses of employed youth from Batticaloa and Jaffna. 46.7 per cent of employed youth from Batticaloa and 44 per cent of youth from Jaffna stated A/L to be the most useful educational qualification as compared to 35 per cent and 34.7 per cent of job-seeking youth, respectively. A comparatively low percentage of 16 per cent of Matara youth stated O/L to be the most useful educational qualification.

Table 2.9: Opinions of employed youth on most useful education and training (%)

Groups	Prim	Sec	GCE O/L	GC. A/L	Degree	Masters degree	English	Technical training	Vocat. Training	Other
All groups	3.0	2.0	25.0	37.0	10.5	1.0	14.3	3.4	5.0	0.2
Employee	3.8	2.7	28.7	33.1	9.1	1.1	14.0	3.3	4.2	-
Men	4.8	3.1	31.3	26.9	10.5	0.4	13.2	4.8	4.8	-
Women	2.7	2.2	26.0	39.5	7.5	1.7	14.8	1.8	3.6	-
Colombo	6.9	3.8	27.7	26.9	5.4	-	20.0	5.4	3.8	-
Kurunegala	1.3	2.5	27.5	31.3	12.6	1.3	15.0	5.0	3.8	-
Matara	-	-	16.0	38.0	16.0	2.0	22.0	-	6.0	-
Monaragala	2.0	-	36.0	20.0	14.0	2.0	16.0	-	10.0	-
Hatton	3.3	6.7	46.7	33.3	3.3	-	3.3	-	3.3	-
Batticaloa	-	1.7	31.7	46.7	6.7	1.7	3.3	5.0	3.3	-
Jaffna	10.0	4.0	24.0	44.0	8.0	2.0	6.0	2.0	-	-

Source: STWT (2003)

Opinions of self-employed youth

The responses of self-employed youth are in general very similar to that of job-seeking and employed youth. About 66.7 per cent of self-employed youth valued a GCE educational qualification and 12 per cent valued English language skills. Interestingly, the percentage of self-employed women who stated English to be the most useful educational qualification decreased to 6.8 per cent from 16.4 per cent and 14.8 per cent of job-seeking youth and employed youth respectively. It is also comparatively low compared to 15.8 per cent of self-employed men who stated English to be the most useful qualification.

In general, the percentage of self-employed youth valuing English as the most useful qualification has decreased in Kurunegala (7.5 per cent) as compared with 15 per cent of employed youth and 25 per cent of job-seeking youth from Kurunegala. Almost equal numbers of youth from Matara stated GCE O/L, GCE A/L, and English to be the most useful qualifications (24, 26 and 24 per cent, respectively). Exactly half of all self-employed youth from Jaffna (50 per cent) stated that the GCE A/L to be the most useful.

Table 2.10: Opinions of self-employed youth on most useful education and training (%)

Groups	Prim	Sec	GCE O/L	GCE A/L	Degree	Masters degree	English	Technical training	Vocat. Training	Other
All groups	3.0	2.0	25.0	37.0	10.5	1.0	14.3	3.4	5.0	0.2
Self Empl.	2.4	2.0	30.7	36.0	7.6	1.6	12.0	2.4	5.3	-
Men	1.9	0.8	29.3	34.4	7.3	1.5	15.8	2.7	6.2	-
Women	3.1	3.7	32.5	38.2	7.8	1.6	6.8	2.1	4.2	-
Colombo	3.1	3.1	30.8	33.1	4.6	0.8	16.2	2.3	6.2	-
Kurunegala	3.8	2.5	31.3	31.3	12.6	3.8	7.5	1.3	6.3	-
Matara	-	-	24.0	26.0	8.0	4.0	24.0	2.0	12.0	-
Monaragala	-	-	32.0	28.0	10.0	2.0	20.0	4.0	4.0	-
Hatton	-	3.3	30.0	43.3	10.0	-	3.3	10.0	-	-
Batticaloa	5.0	-	28.3	48.3	8.3	-	3.3	1.7	5.0	-
Jaffna	2.0	4.0	38.0	50.0	2.0	-	4.0	-	-	-

Source: STWT (2003)

Additional skills for improved employability

Additional skills and knowledge such as computer training, English skills, and entrepreneurship are often perceived as an important means to improve employability. In particular, the perceptions of job-seeking, employed and self-employed youth were considered because it is assumed that these youth would be the most familiar with ways to enhance their employability.

Opinions of job-seeking youth

Looking at perceptions of job-seeking youth regarding which extra courses could help them in their search for a decent job, around 30 per cent mentioned “apprenticeship with an employer” and again nearly 30 per cent pointed out “computer training”, followed by another 20 per cent stating that entrepreneurship training to start an own business would be the most useful. Language and other skills training accounted for only approximately 10 per cent of the sample (see Table 2.11).

Table 2.11: Opinions of job-seeking youth on the usefulness of extra courses (%)

	Apprentice ship	Computer training	Entrepreneurship training to start own business	Language skills	Skills training	Others
All group	32.3	23.1	25.1	6.8	12.2	0.4
Job-seekers	30.2	29.8	19.3	8.9	11.1	0.7
Men	31.8	26.9	20.6	9.4	10.3	0.9
Women	28.6	32.6	18.1	8.4	11.9	0.4
Colombo	27.7	33.1	16.9	13.1	8.5	0.8
Kurunegala	35.0	23.8	10.0	16.3	15.0	-
Matara	60.0	22.0	8.0	8.0	2.0	-
Monaragala	44.0	30.0	10.0	6.0	10.0	-
Hatton	13.3	50.0	26.7	3.3	6.7	-
Batticaloa	18.3	23.3	33.3	1.7	20.0	3.3
Jaffna	10.0	34.0	40.0	2.0	14.0	-

Source: STWT (2003)

The highest percentages of job-seeking youth who stated that apprenticeships were the most useful for obtaining decent work comes from Matara (60 per cent) and Monaragala (44 per cent) whilst the lowest percentage for apprenticeships come from Jaffna (10 per cent). Computer training was stated as the most useful by close to one-fourth of all job-seeking youth from different districts with the exception of Hatton where it was stated by exactly half of all job-seeking youth (50 per cent). Entrepreneurship was valued as the most useful extra course by only 8 per cent of job-seeking youth from Matara and 10 per cent of job-seeking youth from Monaragala and Kurunegala. In contrast, 40 per cent of Jaffna job-seeking youth and 33 per cent of Batticaloa job-seeking youth stated entrepreneurship training to be the most useful.

Opinions of employed youth

The responses from employed youth are in general similar to the responses of job-seeking youth on usefulness of different types of extra courses. When it comes to gender differences, a slightly higher percentage of employed women (28.4 per cent) stated that computer training would be the most useful course compared to 19.4 per cent of employed men. In contrast, 27.8 per cent of employed men stated that entrepreneurship training would be the most useful compared to 19.4 per cent of employed women.

A significant difference is the sharp decline in the percentage of employed youth from Hatton who stated that computer training would be the most useful extra course (10 per cent) in comparison to their job-seeking counterparts (50 per cent). Apprenticeships are also stated more often as the most useful extra course by employed youth in Hatton and Jaffna (40 per cent and 22 per cent respectively) as compared to their job-seeking counterparts in the respective districts (13.3 per cent and 10 per cent). There has been a slight increase in the percentage of employed youth from Kurunegala who stated that entrepreneurship training to be the most useful extra course in comparison to job-seeking youth from Kurunegala (10 per cent to 21 per cent). These changes have to do most likely with the greater exposure to the work-place. It is however interesting that computer training has not increased significantly given the rapid proliferation of computer training institutes even in rural Sri Lanka.

Table 2.12: Opinions of employed youth on the usefulness of extra courses (%)

	Apprentice ship	Computer Training	Entrepreneurship Training to start own business	Language skills	Skills Training	Others
All group	32.3	23.1	25.1	6.8	12.2	0.4
Employee	34.1	23.8	23.6	6.0	12.2	0.2
Men	32.2	19.4	27.8	5.7	14.5	0.4
Women	36.0	28.4	19.4	6.3	9.9	-
Colombo	29.5	24.8	20.9	7.8	17.1	-
Kurunegala	37.5	16.3	21.3	8.8	16.3	-
Matara	60.0	16.0	16.0	4.0	4.0	-
Monaragala	34.0	42.0	8.0	6.0	10.0	-
Hatton	40.0	10.0	33.3	6.7	10.0	-
Batticaloa	25.0	26.7	35.0	3.3	8.3	1.7
Jaffna	22.0	28.0	38.0	2.0	10.0	-

Source: STWT (2003)

Opinions of self-employed youth

There is a slight shift in the opinions of self-employed youth with 32.5 per cent of self-employed youth stating entrepreneurship training to be the most important compared to 19.3 per cent and 23.6 per cent of job-seeking and employed youth respectively. However, it is surprising that the increase is not larger than has been observed as it can be assumed that entrepreneurship training is one of the most useful extra courses for self-employed youth.

With regard to gender differences, there were no significant gender differences in response to the given question with the exception of the slightly greater number of women (36.1 per cent) stating entrepreneurship training to be the most useful in comparison with that of men (29.8 per cent). The percentage of women who stated computer training as the most useful extra course has decreased from 28.4 per cent of employed women to 15.2 per cent of self-employed women, the percentage of women who stated that entrepreneurship training to be the most useful has increased from 19.4 per cent of employed women to 36.1 per cent of self-employed women. The percentages for men have not changed much.

With regard to district differences, 51 per cent of self-employed youth from Monaragala stated apprenticeships to be the most useful extra course compared to 34 per cent of employed youth from Monaragala. The lowest percentage of self-employed youth who stated apprenticeships to be the most useful comes from Colombo at 21.7 per cent. A surprisingly high percentage of 48 per cent of self-employed youth from Matara stated that computer training to be the most useful in comparison to employed youth from Matara (16 per cent) and to self-employed youth from other districts. The percentages of responses for computer training from self-employed youth from other districts range from 10 per cent to 28.6 per cent. The lowest percentage for entrepreneurship training comes from Monaragala district with 12.2 per cent. The highest percentages for entrepreneurship training come from Colombo (41.9 per cent), Hatton (41.14 per cent) and Batticaloa (41.7 per cent).

Table 2.13: Opinions of self-employed youth on the usefulness of extra courses (%)

	Apprentice ship	Computer Training	Entrepreneurship Training to start own business	Language skills	Skills Training	Others
All group	32.3	23.1	25.1	6.8	12.2	0.4
Self empl.	32.5	15.7	32.5	5.6	13.2	0.4
Men	34.9	16.1	29.8	5.1	13.7	0.4
Women	29.3	15.2	36.1	6.3	12.6	0.5
Colombo	21.7	14.7	41.9	6.2	14.0	1.6
Kurunegala	41.8	11.4	21.5	8.9	16.5	-
Matara	48.0	48.0	16.0	6.0	16.0	-
Monaragala	51.0	28.6	12.2	-	8.2	-
Hatton	24.1	10.3	41.4	6.9	17.2	-
Batticaloa	33.3	10.0	41.7	6.7	8.3	-
Jaffna	32.5	15.7	32.5	5.6	13.2	0.4

Source: STWT (2003)

Language proficiency

Language proficiency has important implications for employability, especially given the increasing significance of the private corporate sector as an employer. Global links through trade and migration have created the necessity to be familiar with an international language such as English. Furthermore, the presence of ethnic groups with different languages (the Sinhala-speaking Sinhala community and the Tamil-speaking Tamil and Muslim communities) ensures that language plays a significant role in access to jobs and employment. Hence, the perceptions of youth as to what languages would be the most useful in getting employment were explored in the survey. The results are presented below.

Opinions of in-school youth

A clear proportion of schooling youth pointed to the importance of English language as the most useful language to get a decent job (43.6 per cent) whilst another one-third (37.8 per cent) emphasized the importance of all three languages (i.e. English, Sinhala and Tamil). There were no significant gender differences although a slightly higher percentage of men (47.2 per cent) noted

English to be the most useful against 39.6 per cent of women. Similarly, a slightly higher percentage of women noted that all three languages are most useful (41 per cent) against 34.8 per cent of men. Knowing only one of the vernacular languages was not seen to be useful. The percentages were 1.8 per cent for Sinhala and 0.7 per cent for Tamil.

With regard to differences amongst districts, high percentages of schooling youth in Matara (82 per cent) and Monaragala (80 per cent) stated English to be the most useful language. This viewpoint was not overwhelmingly shared in the districts of Hatton, Batticaloa and Jaffna (10 per cent, 16.7 per cent and 12 per cent respectively). This was not because Tamil speaking youth do not see the usefulness of English but rather that they mostly realized that they need to speak all three languages (Sinhala, Tamil and English) being a minority community. 76.7 per cent of schooling youth from Hatton, 65 per cent of schooling youth from Batticaloa and 54 per cent of schooling youth from Jaffna stated knowing all three languages to be the most useful. On the other hand, 32 per cent of youth from Jaffna stated that it is important to know Tamil and English in order to get a job. This could also indicate that Tamil youth feel more strongly the need to communicate in Sinhalese and English as well, given that one is the language of the majority community and that the other is being increasingly recognized as a working place language.

With regard to ethnicity, a significant proportion of Sinhalese youth (76 per cent) believe that English language proficiency is the most useful language in order to get a decent job compared to Tamil (14 per cent) and Muslim youth (23 per cent). On the other hand a clear proportion of Tamil (60 per cent) and Muslim youth (58 per cent) point to the importance of proficiency in all three languages compared with Sinhalese youth (11 per cent).

Table 2.14: Opinions of schooling youth on most useful language proficiency (%)

	Depend on what	Does not matter	English	Sinhala	Sinhala and English	Sinhala, Tamil and English	Tamil	Tamil and English	Arabic
All groups	0.3	0.2	40.0	5.2	3.6	37.0	4.8	0.2	0.1
In-School	0.9	0.2	43.6	1.8	8.2	37.8	0.7	6.4	0.2
In-school and technical/vocational training youth									
Men	0.9	0.4	47.2	1.3	9.0	34.8	0.4	5.6	-
Women	0.9	-	39.6	2.3	7.4	41.0	0.9	7.4	0.5
Colombo	1.5	0.8	41.5	3.1	15.4	33.1	0.8	2.3	0.8
Kurunagala	-	-	52.5	2.5	10.0	33.8	-	1.3	-
Matara	4.0	-	82.0	2.0	4.0	8.0	-	-	-
Monaragala	-	-	80.0	2.0	4.0	14.0	-	-	-
Hatton	-	-	10.0	-	10.0	76.7	3.3	-	-
Batticaloa	-	-	16.7	-	1.7	65.0	1.7	15.0	-
Jaffna	-	-	12.0	-	2.0	54.0	-	32.0	-
Sinhala	1.5	-	76.0	2.5	8.5	11.0	-	0.5	-
Tamil	0.7	-	14.0	-	8.7	60.0	2.0	14.7	-
Muslim	-	1.0	23.0	3.0	7.0	58.0	-	6.0	1.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Opinions of job-seeking youth

The opinions of job-seeking youth are in general similar to that of schooling youth. As can be seen from the table below, 37.6 per cent of job-seeking youth stated English to be the most useful and 37.6 per cent stated all three languages to be the most useful. There were no notable gender differences either within the group of job-seeking youth or with regard to schooling men and women.

There are some interesting district level differences between job-seeking youth. Similar to schooling youth, the highest percentages of job-seeking youth who state English to be the most useful come from Matara (72 per cent) and Monaragala (76 per cent). The lowest percentage comes from Jaffna at 2 per cent. The highest percentages for knowing all three languages come from Hatton (70

per cent) and Batticaloa (71.7 per cent). Since youth in these communities live in areas where there are all three ethnic groups (Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim), it is likely that they perceive three languages to be important.

In Jaffna, where there is only the Tamil community living, a comparatively higher percentage of youth (34.7 per cent) state Tamil and English to be the most useful languages compared to 8.3 per cent in Batticaloa and none in Hatton. However, there are no notable differences when comparing responses from schooling and job-seeking youth.

With regard to ethnic differences, 73.5 per cent of Sinhalese youth state English to be the most useful, whilst 61.5 per cent of Tamil youth and 67 per cent of Muslim youth state all three languages to be the most useful. Again, there are no notable differences when comparing responses from schooling and job-seeking youth.

Table 2.15: Opinions of job-seeking youth on most useful language proficiency (%)

	Does not matter	English	Sinhala	Sinhala and English	Sinhala, Tamil and English	Tamil	Tamil and English	Other
All groups	0.2	40.0	5.2	3.6	37.0	4.8	0.2	0.1
Job-seekers	0.2	37.6	5.6	10.2	37.6	2.7	5.8	0.2
Men	0.5	39.6	7.7	10.4	36.0	2.3	3.6	-
Women	-	35.7	3.5	10.1	39.2	3.1	7.9	0.4
Colombo	0.8	32.3	11.5	15.4	37.7	0.8	0.8	0.8
Kurunegala	-	56.3	2.5	6.3	28.8	3.8	2.5	-
Matara	-	72.0	8.0	16.0	4.0	-	-	-
Monaragala	-	76.0	6.0	12.0	4.0	-	2.0	-
Hatton	-	10.0	3.3	16.7	70.0	-	-	-
Batti	-	6.7	-	3.3	71.7	10.0	8.3	-
Jaffna	-	2.0	-	-	59.2	4.1	34.7	-
Sinhala	-	73.5	7.0	12.5	5.5		1.5	-
Tamil	-	8.8	2.7	9.5	61.5	3.4	14.2	-
Muslim	1.0	9.0	7.0	7.0	67.0	7.0	1.0	1.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Opinions of employed youth

There are no notable differences between job-seeking youth and employed youth with regard to which languages are perceived to be the most useful. The percentage of employed youth from Matara who stated that English to be the most useful is 60 per cent, a 20 point decrease compared to schooling youth from Matara. There has been a decrease in the percentage in employed youth in Jaffna who stated that all three languages are the most useful from 34.2 per cent in the job-seeking category to 26 per cent in the employed category. Furthermore, the percentage of Jaffna youth who stated that Tamil and English are the most useful languages have decreased from 34.7 per cent in the job-seeking category to 18 per cent in the employed category. This may be as a result of changing aspirations once youth have entered the labour market. Correspondingly the percentage of Jaffna employed youth who stated Tamil only to be the most useful has risen to 26 per cent from 4 per cent in the job-seeking category. This may be because interactions of employed youth take place mainly within their own community in the Jaffna district.

Table 2.16: Opinions of employed youth on most useful language proficiency (%)

	Depends	Does not matter	English	Sinhala	Sinhala and English	Sinhala, Tamil and English	Tamil	Tamil and English
Men	0.4	-	40.4	8.0	8.4	31.6	8.0	2.7
Women	-	-	39.5	6.3	7.6	39.5	3.1	4.0
Sinhala	-	-	74.9	5.5	11.1	8.5	-	-
Tamil	-	-	12.6	6.6	4.0	54.3	14.6	7.9
Muslim	1.0	-	11.2	11.2	8.2	61.2	3.1	3.1
Colombo	0.8	-	42.6	11.6	10.1	28.7	5.4	0.8
Kurunegala	-	-	55.0	8.8	6.3	28.8	-	-
Matara	-	-	60.0	10.0	20.0	10.0	-	-
Monaragala	-	-	77.6	2.0	10.2	10.2	-	-
Hatton	-	-	10.0	10.0	3.3	70.0	6.7	-
Batticaloa	-	-	8.3	-	3.3	75.0	5.0	8.3
Jaffna	-	-	8.0	2.0	-	46.0	26.0	18.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Opinions of self-employed youth

In general, the responses of self-employed youth reflected the responses of job-seeking and employed youth. However, the percentage of men who think that English is the most useful language is considerably higher at 44.6 per cent when compared to 30.4 per cent of women who think that English is the most useful. Interestingly, the percentage of men who stated that all three languages are useful decreased slightly from 36 per cent in the job-seeking category to 27.1 per cent in the self-employed category.

Table 2.17: Opinions of self-employed youth on most useful language proficiency (%)

	Depends on what	Does not matter	English	Sinhala	Sinhala and English	Sinhala, Tamil and English	Tamil	Tamil and English	Other
Men	0.0	0.8	44.6	6.2	11.2	27.1	5.4	3.5	0.0
Women	0.5	0.0	30.4	6.3	9.9	39.8	6.8	4.2	0.5
Sinhala	0.0	1.0	73.0	6.5	13.5	5.0	0.0	1.0	0.0
Tamil	0.6	0.0	10.1	3.9	5.6	54.7	14.5	8.4	0.6
Muslim	0.0	0.0	12.9	11.4	15.7	54.3	1.4	0.0	0.0
Colombo	0.0	0.0	34.1	9.3	19.4	27.9	3.9	2.3	0.8
Kurunegala	0.0	1.3	52.5	6.3	10.0	27.5	0.0	1.3	0.0
Matara	0.0	0.0	80.0	10.0	8.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Monaragala	0.0	2.0	66.0	8.0	14.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hatton	0.0	0.0	13.3	6.7	6.7	70.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Batticaloa	1.7	0.0	11.7	0.0	3.3	61.7	13.3	8.3	0.0
Jaffna	0.0	0.0	6.0	0.0	0.0	48.0	28.0	16.0	0.0

Source: STWT (2003)

The percentage of self-employed youth from Matara who stated that English is the most useful has increased from 60 per cent to 80 per cent, similar to the percentage of schooling youth from Matara. The percentage of youth from Monaragala who stated that English is the most useful has further declined from 80 per cent of schooling youth, 76 per cent of job-seeking youth and 77.6 per cent of employed youth to 66 per cent in the self-employed category. The percentage of self-employed youth from Batticaloa (61.7 per cent) who stated that knowing all three languages is the most useful is

comparatively lower than the 75 per cent of employed youth and 71.7 per cent of job-seeking youth. This may be because self-employed youth may not have many opportunities to interact with people from other communities.

Guidance on types of education and training (all groups)

Guidance on type of education and training is seen as an important strategy for enhancing the employability of people through attempts to match competencies labour market opportunities. In addition, guidance on type of education and training may help people to consider a wider range of options than they may usually do. However, a lot of the usefulness of guidance in contributing to employability comes from the experience and thinking of those who are providing guidance and the quality of guidance provided. Unfortunately, the survey has not been constructed to investigate these aspects of guidance, nor has it investigated how useful the individual in question perceived the guidance. What has been discussed below is mainly whether youth in question have or have not received guidance in relation to education and training choices, and who provided the guidance. The results are discussed below.

With respect to the above question, more than half of the respondents have received such guidance (55 per cent) in relation to education and training while only 45 per cent have not received guidance. With regard to different youth groups, it is clear that a significant proportion of in-school youth (70 per cent) have received guidance on types of education compared to other groups (job seekers, 55 per cent, employed 50 per cent and self-employed 44 per cent).

Table 2.18: Received guidance on types of education and training (%)

Groups	Yes	No
All groups	55	45
In-school	70	30
Job-seekers	55	45
Employed	50	50
Self-employed	44	56

Source: STWT (2003)

It is necessary to identify persons who gave such guidance or advice. 55 per cent of schooling youth have received it from parents. The percentages for other groups of youth range from 62 per cent to 66 per cent, showing that job-seeking, employed and self-employed youth receive such guidance mainly from parents. 22 per cent of schooling youth have received guidance from schoolteachers and another 17 per cent from relatives. It may be that schooling youth have the greatest number of opportunities to obtain guidance from teachers, and that other groups have less contact with their teachers. However, what is interesting is that government or private agencies do not feature in the list of people from whom youth obtain guidance on education. There are no gender variations with respect to this question.

Table 2.19: Who provides guidance on education and training for all groups (%)

	Parents	Teachers	Relatives	Siblings	Other
All groups	61.0	17.0	15.0	5.0	2.2
In-school	55.0	22.0	17.3	1.9	3.7
Job-seekers	62.0	14.0	13.0	10.0	2.5
Employed	66.0	15.4	11.4	4.1	2.0
Self-employed	65.0	15.0	14.0	4.0	1.3
Men	54.0	22.7	17.2	3.7	2.4
Women	56.0	21.3	17.3	-	5.3

Source: STWT (2003)

Guidance on types of jobs and careers (all groups)

Similar to guidance on type of education and training, guidance on types of jobs and careers also has the potential to contribute to the employability of youth as they may then consider alternative options to their common aspirations. There might be better match between the capacities and competencies of the person and the requirements of the job thereby ensuring job satisfaction.

Although a majority of youth receive guidance on the types of education or training courses to choose or to follow, a quite different picture appears when asked about advice or counselling received on jobs or career. About two thirds of the interviewed youth stated that they have not received advice or counselling (62 per cent), while only 38 per cent of respondents answered affirmatively. This indicates a major gap in supporting youth in the transition from school to work.

45 per cent of job-seekers and 41 per cent of self-employed youth have had guidance on jobs and careers. This is high compared to 29 per cent of schooling youth who have had guidance on jobs and careers. Given that the youth interviewed are above 15 years of age, it is important that they have had some discussion on what their career options could be so that the appropriate educational choices and efforts can be made.

Table 2.20: Experiences of all groups of guidance on types of job and careers (%)

	Yes	No
All groups	38	62
In-school	29	71
Job-seekers	45	55
Employed	37	63
Self-employed	41	59

Source: STWT (2003)

2.5 Social capital of youth

Social capital is often understood as the social relations and networks that one has to call upon in times of need and difficulty, thereby increasing or decreasing the vulnerability of economically or socially disadvantaged groups of people. In relation to employability, social capital of youth is seen as the links and networks that young people form which enables them to get in contact with possibly influential people who can facilitate a successful job-search.

The more pro-active young people are, the better are their chances of identifying their skills and demonstrating them to others so that their capacities and competencies are well-known within their communities or social groups (notwithstanding their networks through family members and relatives). To investigate this issue, two aspects were chosen; namely, what activities youth engage in while searching for jobs and existing membership in community organizations.

Youth activities whilst job-seeking

When young people were asked as to what kind of activities they engaged in while looking for a job, it appeared that in general many young people did not engage in any activities other than staying at home and looking for work (see figure 2.1 below).

The four items presented are (a) staying at home and looking for a job, (b) staying at home and helping with household work, (c) helping in the family business and (d) engaging in further education or training. The most frequent activity for all groups was staying at home, though this pattern was markedly different for Sinhalese men in relation to Tamil and Muslim young people. Almost equal proportions of Sinhalese men appeared to engage in four of the activities listed in relation to all other groups who overwhelmingly marked staying at home as the primary activity. It is certainly disconcerting that many young people appear to 'stay at home' during the time spent searching for work.

A relatively large percentage of Sinhalese women (58 per cent) mentioned that they undertook household responsibilities whilst searching for a job. However, many Tamil and Muslim women noted that they ‘merely’ stay at home whilst looking for a job. This is most unlikely given the socially prescribed gender roles for women in most Sri Lankan communities. Perhaps this is rather an indication that household responsibilities are not perceived as an additional activity. Many young women of all ethnicities may simultaneously engage in these activities whilst at home and may continue to do so even after they start working, without perceiving this as something they do ‘additionally’.

It is also interesting that many young people did not engage in any further training activities whilst waiting for a job. The findings from this survey indicate that less than 10 per cent of all groups were engaged in obtaining further training or education whilst waiting for a job. One reason may be that the sample population (having focused on young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds) may not have had the resources to engage in such activities where such training opportunities were present or there may not have been the facilities to do so (in geographically remote areas).

Figure 2.1: Main activities engaged in whilst looking for a job broken down by ethnicity and gender within overall population (%)



Source: STWT (2003)

Membership in community organizations

Respondents were asked whether they have become members of any of the village level associations or organizations. 72.6 per cent of men have membership in one type of organization or other compared to 44 per cent of women. Sports clubs were the most popular choice amongst men from all groups (28.1 per cent) and within each category of schooling (36.9 per cent), job-seekers (38.1 per cent), self-employed (17.4 per cent) and employed (21.2 per cent). The most popular choices for women in all groups were youth associations (8.6 per cent of all women in the survey), sports clubs (7.9 per cent), women’s groups (7.1 per cent) and savings and loans groups (6.5 per cent).

Table 2.21: Respondents by membership in organization (%)

		Sports club	Clubs	Youth association	Trade union	Cooperative	Women's group	Religious organizations	Village based society	Community organization	Political organization	Savings and loans group	TOTAL HAVING MEMBERSHIP	TOTAL WITHOUT MEMBERSHIP
All groups	Men	28.1	3.7	15.1	1.3	0.6	0.6	10.9	3.1	2.6	2.7	3.9	72.6	27.4
	Women	7.9	0.8	8.6	1	0.8	7.1	5.9	2.6	2	0.8	6.5	44	56

Source: STWT (2003)

2.6 Youth expectations of types of jobs

It is important to take youth's aspirations about employment into consideration if employability is not seen as merely getting a job, but finding satisfying and fulfilling work in line with one's skills and aspirations. When asked the question of what kind of job they would expect to obtain with their current education or training, nearly 23 per cent of respondents mentioned 'clerical', while 21 per cent stated manual and a further 22 per cent stated technical work. 36 per cent of employed youth stated that they expected to do technical work compared to 3.6 per cent of schooling and 18 per cent of self-employed youth. A comparatively high percentage of 34.7 per cent schooling youth stated that they expected to undertake clerical work compared to 11 per cent of self-employed youth. 29 per cent of job-seeking youth stated that they expected to undertake technical work, with a close 25 per cent of job-seeking youth stating that they expected to do clerical work. 28 per cent of self-employed youth stated that they expected to do manual work. A relatively high 17.3 per cent of schooling youth expected to join the armed forces following their schooling. The percentages of youth from the job-seeking, employed and self-employed categories who stated joining the armed forces as their expected work were only 3-4 per cent.

Table 2.22: Youth expectations of types of jobs (%)

Groups	Manual	Clerical	Technical	Professional	Other	Armed Forces	Sales	Not decided	No response
All groups	21.0	23.0	22.0	15.0	5.0	3.0	10.0	0.2	1.4
In-school	22.0	34.7	3.6	2.9	8.2	17.3	6.9	2.9	1.6
Job-Seekers	16.0	25.0	29.0	12.0	5.0	3.0	8.0	0.2	1.0
Employed	13.0	16.0	36.0	14.0	4.0	4.0	16.0	-	2.0
Self-Employed	28.0	11.0	18.0	10.0	10.0	4.0	16.0	-	1.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Expectations of schooling youth

Within the responses of schooling youth, the gender variations with respect to the above question are important to note. A significant proportion of young women expected to do clerical work (41 per cent) compared to young men (28.8 per cent). Close proportions of 24 per cent of men and 19.8 per cent of women expected to undertake manual work. Relatively high percentages of 14.6 per cent of men and 20.3 per cent of women expected to undertake work within the armed forces. When examining the district variations, the highest percentages of youth expecting to join the armed forces come from Batticaloa (31.7 per cent) and Kurunegala (22.5 per cent). This is in comparison to percentages as low as 8 per cent in Matara and Jaffna. Ethnic variations reveal that 28 per cent of

Muslim schooling youth expected to join the armed forces in comparison to 13 per cent of Sinhala and 16 per cent of Tamil youth.

In relation to education there are also some interesting variations. A significant proportion of vocational training youth (50 per cent) expected to get a job in the clerical sector, which is surprising. It indicates that half of the youth that participated in a vocational training programme might still be mainly interested in clerical work rather than starting their own business. Similarly, none of those youth in technical training expected to work in the technical sector, expecting rather to work in 'other' work (44.4 per cent) and the armed forces (33.3 per cent). 42.5 per cent of GCE A/L educated youth and 38.4 per cent of GCE O/L youth expected to do clerical work, with only low percentages of 2.5 per cent and 0.7 per cent of these sections of youth respectively expecting to do professional work. A high percentage of 66.7 per cent of primary school educated expected to do manual work.

Table 2.23: Job expectations of schooling youth (%)

Groups	Manual	Clerical	Technical	Profes- sional	Other	Armed Forces	Sales	Not decided	No response
In-school	22.0	34.7	3.6	2.9	8.2	17.3	6.9	2.9	1.6
Colombo	35.4	32.3	-	-	9.2	17.7	3.1	2.3	-
Kurunagala	21.3	45.0	-	-	1.3	22.5	8.8	1.3	-
Matara	24.0	42.0	-	-	10.0	8.0	16	-	-
Monaragala	20.0	32.0	-	-	14.0	14.0	14	6.0	-
Hatton	3.3	46.7	-	-	20.0	10.0	3.3	16.7	-
Batticaloa	20.0	36.7	-	-	8.3	31.7	1.7	1.7	-
Jaffna	2.0	10.0	32.0	26.0	2.0	8.0	6.0	-	14.0
Men	24.0	28.8	3.4	2.6	12.0	14.6	10.7	3.0	0.9
Women	19.8	41.0	3.7	3.2	4.1	20.3	2.8	2.8	2.3
Primary	66.7	-	-	-	33.3	-	-	-	-
Secondary	25.9	29.9	3.6	4.9	5.8	18.3	5.8	3.1	2.7
GCE O'L passed	19.2	38.4	4.1	0.7	10.3	16.4	10.3	0.7	-
GCE A'L passed	15.0	42.5	5.0	2.5	7.5	15.0	5.0	5.0	2.5
Technical training	11.1	11.1	-	-	44.4	33.3	-	-	-
Vocational training	15.4	50.0	-	-	3.8	15.4	3.8	11.5	-

Source: STWT (2003)

With regard to district variations, a surprisingly high 32 per cent of Jaffna youth expected to do technical work and 26 per cent expected to do technical work. This is in keeping with the high educational aspirations usually associated with Jaffna Tamils. High percentages of 36.7 per cent and 31.7 per cent of Batticaloa expected to do clerical work and work in the armed forces respectively. 46.7 per cent of Hatton youth expected to clerical work, with a surprisingly low percentage of 3.3 per cent of Hatton youth expecting to do manual work. High percentages of youth from different districts expected to do clerical work, 32 per cent of Monaragala youth, 42 per cent of Matara youth and 45 per cent of Kurunegala youth. Close percentages of 35.4 and 32.3 per cent of Colombo youth expected to do manual and clerical work respectively.

Expectations of job-seeking youth

Close proportions of 29.1 and 25 per cent of job-seeking respondents mentioned technical job and clerical job, respectively. Another 16 per cent mentioned manual job. Gender variations with respect to the above question are important to note. A significant proportion of young women (29.5

per cent) expected to do clerical work compared to 20 per cent of young men. The proportion of young women expecting to do clerical work have decreased in the schooling category from 41 per cent to 29.5 per cent in the job-seeking category. On the other hand, the percentage of women expecting to do technical work has dramatically increased from 3.7 per cent in the schooling category to 30.4 per cent in the job-seeking category. Interestingly, the percentage of women (20.3 per cent) and men (14.6 per cent) who expected to join the armed forces in the schooling category have decreased in the job-seeking category to 1.8 and 4.9 per cent, respectively.

In relation to education there are some interesting variations. A significant proportion of youth with primary (45 per cent) and secondary education (39 per cent) expect to work in the technical field. On the other hand, more youth with GCE A/L (60 per cent) and O/L (37 per cent) expect to do clerical work.

Table 2.24: Job expectations of job-seeking youth (%)

Groups	Manual	Clerical	Technical	Professional	Armed forces	Sales	Not decided	Other	No response
Job-seekers	16.2	24.7	29.1	11.8	3.3	8.4	0.2	5.1	1.1
Men	15.7	19.7	27.8	13.9	4.9	10.8	0.4	6.7	-
Women	16.7	29.5	30.4	9.7	1.8	6.2	-	3.5	2.2
Colombo	19.2	20.0	33.1	7.7	1.5	13.8	-	3.8	0.8
Kurunegala	13.8	36.3	26.3	12.5	1.3	6.3	-	2.5	1.3
Matara	12.0	20.0	26.0	14.0	10.0	8.0	2.0	8.0	-
Monaragala	10.0	36.0	8.0	26.0	14.0	6.0	-	-	-
Hatton	13.3	30.0	33.3	16.7	-	3.3	-	3.3	-
Batticaloa	16.7	15.0	43.3	11.7	-	8.3	-	1.7	3.3
Jaffna	24.0	20.0	28.0	2.0	-	4.0	-	20.0	2.0
Primary	34.5	3.4	44.8	-	3.4	6.9	-	6.9	-
Secondary	20.4	8.5	39.3	10.0	3.0	9.5	-	7.5	2.0
O'level	12.9	37.1	21.4	10.0	5.0	9.3	-	3.6	0.7
A'level	3.2	59.7	4.8	24.2	1.6	3.2	1.6	1.6	-

Source: STWT (2003)

The district variations are again interesting, especially in comparison to schooling youth. The percentage of youth in Jaffna who expected to do professional work (26 per cent) has substantially decreased to 2 per cent in the job-seeking category. On the other hand, there is a dramatic surge of expectations amongst almost all job-seeking youth to undertake technical work, with the percentages ranging from 26 per cent to 43.3 per cent for all districts except for Monaragala (8 per cent). This is in comparison to the complete lack of expectations to do technical work amongst schooling youth in all districts except for Jaffna (32 per cent). Although high proportions of youth in the schooling category from Batticaloa and Kurunegala had stated an expectation to join the armed forces, this expectation had decreased substantially to 0 per cent and 6.3 per cent amongst job-seeking youth in these two districts, respectively. The high percentage of Colombo schooling youth (35.4 per cent) who had expected to do manual work decreased to 19.2 per cent with a higher percentage of Colombo job-seeking youth (33.1 per cent) expecting to do technical work.

Expectations of young employees

Overall there are a number of similarities to employed youth, although the changes in trends from the schooling youth to job-seeking youth have become even more pronounced amongst employed youth. Expectations to do manual and clerical work as well as joining the armed forces have further decreased whilst expectations to do technical work have further increased. The percentage of

women who expected to do technical work has increased from 30.8 per cent in the job-seeking category to 45.3 per cent.

The proportion of youth expecting to do technical work has increased substantially with percentages ranging from 22 per cent (in Monaragala) to 56.7 per cent (in Hatton). This is comparison to a range of 8 per cent (in Monaragala) to 43.3 per cent (in Hatton) in the job-seeking category. Correspondingly, the proportion of youth expecting to do clerical work has decreased with percentages ranging from 6.7 per cent (in Hatton) to 22 per cent in Monaragala. This is in comparison to a range of 15 per cent (in Batticaloa) to 36 per cent (in Monaragala) in the job-seeking category. Clearly, expectations have changed with greater exposure to the job market, either because of the gaining of further skills or because aspirations have become more modified in relation to what is available in the job market.

Table 2.25: Job expectations of employed youth (%)

Groups	Manual	Clerical	Technical	Professional	Other	Armed Forces	Sales	Not decided	No response
Employees	13.3	16.0	36.4	14.2	4.4	4.0	8.9	0.4	2.2
Men	15.9	11.5	27.8	17.6	3.1	6.2	15.0	0.4	2.6
Women	10.8	20.6	45.3	10.8	5.8	1.8	2.7	0.4	1.8
Colombo	18.5	18.5	30.0	13.8	6.9	1.5	8.5	-	2.3
Kurunegala	12.5	15.0	40.0	16.3	1.3	3.8	11.3	-	-
Matara	8.0	20.0	44.0	4.0	-	12.0	10.0	-	2.0
Monaragala	12.0	22.0	22.0	20.0	4.0	12.0	4.0	4.0	-
Hatton	3.3	6.7	56.7	10.0	6.7	-	10.0	-	6.7
Batticaloa	5.0	15.0	38.3	20.0	1.7	1.7	11.7	-	6.7
Jaffna	24.0	8.0	40.0	12.0	10.0	0.0	6.0	-	-

Source: STWT (2003)

Expectations of self-employed youth

The overall responses in self-employed youth have changed substantially in some aspects in comparison with job-seeking and employed youth. The percentage of women (34.6 per cent) expecting to do manual work in the self-employed category is far more than that in the employed category (10.8 per cent) and in the job-seeking category (16.7 per cent). Correspondingly, there has been a decrease in the percentage of youth who expected to do technical work in the employed category (45.3 per cent) and in the job-seeking category (30.4 per cent) when compared to the self-employed category (17.3 per cent). The percentage of men who expected to do clerical work in the employed category (27.8 per cent) and in the job-seeking category (19.5 per cent) has further declined when compared to self-employed category (6.9 per cent).

With regard to district variations, the percentage of youth from Jaffna who expected to undertake manual work has increased substantially to 52 per cent when compared with the 24 per cent in the employed category and job-seeking category. In Batticaloa, 33.3 per cent of self-employed youth stated that they expected to do manual work, followed by 21.7 per cent of self-employed youth who stated that they would undertake sales work. In Hatton, almost even proportions of self-employed youth stated that they expected to undertake clerical work (20 per cent), technical work (26.7 per cent) and other work (26.7 per cent). In Monaragala, 26 per cent of youth stated that they expected to do clerical work, whilst in Matara, 24 per cent of youth stated that they expected to do technical work closely followed by 20 per cent who stated that they expected to undertake manual work.

Table 2.26: Job expectations of self-employed youth (%)

	Manual	Clerical	Technical	Professional	Other	Armed forces	Sales	Not decided	Non-response
Men	23.9	6.9	18.5	10.4	10.8	7.3	19.3	-	2.7
Women	34.6	17.3	17.3	8.4	8.9	0.5	11.5	-	1.6
Colombo	32.3	5.4	18.5	10.8	3.8	1.5	21.5	-	6.2
Kurunegala	26.3	13.8	16.3	10.0	16.3	7.5	8.8	-	1.3
Matara	20.0	16.0	24.0	16.0	0.0	8.0	16.0	-	-
Monaragala	14.0	26.0	10.0	18.0	6.0	16.0	10.0	-	-
Hatton	6.7	20.0	26.7	6.7	26.7	-	13.3	-	-
Batticaloa	33.3	8.3	16.7	3.3	16.7	-	21.7	-	-
Jaffna	52.0	2.0	18.0	-	12.0	-	14.0	-	2.0

Source: STWT (2003)

2.7 Labour market transition: perceived obstacles

In a discussion on what contributes to employability, it is equally important to inquire about the perceptions of young people on what are the obstacles to finding a job. It was decided to discuss the perceptions of job-seeking youth in particular because job-seeking youth are currently undergoing the experiences of a job search and may be in a good position to comment on their perceptions of obstacles to employability.

An unsuitable general education was chosen by an overwhelming 46.5 per cent of the job-seeking youth as the major obstacle to finding a decent job. This is somewhat ironic given that a general education (GCE O/L and A/L) was also seen as the most useful educational qualification to get a job. This may be an indication that the quality of general education does not match the prevailing labour market. There are no notable gender differences in relation the question. However, with regard to district variations, there are some interesting differences. 50 per cent of Jaffna youth and 49.2 per cent of Batticaloa youth believe that the main obstacle is the unsuitable general education. This percentage is the lowest in Hatton, with 26.7 per cent of job-seeking youth stating that the unsuitable general education was the main obstacle. A further 33.3 per cent of Hatton youth stated other obstacles to finding a job but did not specify these.

There are some interesting regional variations in the above picture, e.g. a fairly high number of youth from the Estate sector (Hatton), who mention the problem of higher requirement for jobs needed than they received through their education. This has to be seen against the fact that many schools in the Estate sector are not sufficiently equipped with qualified Tamil medium teachers, thus the school drop out rates are fairly high. Many youth fail the O/L exam because of insufficient knowledge in Mathematics, which then doesn't enable them to apply for jobs or further training opportunities outside the estate sector.

In Monaragala, 36 per cent of youth stated unsuitable general education, with a further 20 per cent stating the lack of influential contacts as the main obstacle. This supports the assertion that contacts (political or otherwise) are a main source of jobs for youth in Southern Sri Lanka. This is especially apparent in remote locations such as Monaragala, where political support seems to be an important resource for getting a job. Development planning and implementation is highly centralized in Sri Lanka and remote rural communities often perceive the direct support of a Member of Parliament as the only means to receive support (Mayer 2000). Surprisingly, not many youth stated the lack of English skills as a main obstacle to employability, with percentages ranging from 0 per cent in Batticaloa and Jaffna to 16.3 per cent in Kurunegala.

Table 2.27: Perceptions of job-seeking youth about main obstacle in finding a job (%)

	Unsuitable general education	No suitable training opportunities	Requirements for job higher as education	No work experience	No English language skills	Lack of influential contacts	Family responsibilities	Not enough jobs	Other
Job-seekers	46.5	7.6	6.9	3.1	8.2	7.1	3.1	6.2	11.1
Men	47.1	7.6	5.4	2.2	5.8	7.6	2.7	9.0	12.6
Women	46.0	7.5	8.4	4.0	10.6	6.6	3.5	3.5	9.7
Colombo	53.1	10.8	3.8	2.3	10.0	1.5	1.5	3.1	13.8
Kurunegala	47.5	6.3	3.8	2.5	16.3	6.3	5.0	3.8	8.8
Matara	44.0	10.0	2.0	2.0	12.0	10.0	4.0	12.0	4.0
Monarag	36.0	10.0	4.0	-	8.0	20.0	4.0	16.0	2.0
Hatton	26.7	-	16.7	6.7	3.3	10.0		3.3	33.3
Batti	49.2	8.5	13.6	3.4	-	3.4	1.7	5.1	15.3
Jaffna	50.0	-	14.0	8.0	-	10.0	6.0	6.0	6.0
Primary	75.9	10.3	3.4	-	-	3.4	-	6.9	-
Secondary	58.0	5.5	8.0	4.0	3.5	4.0	3.0	3.0	11.0
O'level	35.7	11.4	6.4	2.9	12.9	7.1	4.3	7.1	12.1
A'level	19.4	6.5	4.8	3.2	16.1	16.1	3.2	14.5	16.1

Source: STWT (2003)

With regard to level of education, 75.9 per cent and 58 per cent of those with primary and secondary education respectively stated that an unsuitable general education was the main obstacle. It is interesting that with higher education, other factors begin to play a greater role. For those with A/L education, only 19.4 per cent stated an unsuitable general education to be the main obstacle. Lack of English language skills, lack of influential contacts and other factors were stated by 16.1 per cent of A/L educated youth each. A further 14.1 per cent stated lack of enough jobs as the main obstacle.

2.8 Preferences of employers

Important characteristics considered by employers

The STWT research also surveyed Employers' perceptions on the employability of youth, as they are main people who have the power to value or devalue the skills, competencies and characteristics of potential employees. Hence, some of the preferences of employers are discussed in this final section on employability. Respondents were asked about the type of characteristics (such as sex, age, education, training, language) that they look for when recruiting employees.

Alarmingly, the gender of the applicant appeared to be the characteristic considered very important by 36.7 per cent of all enterprises followed by education at 32.7 per cent. Almost equal proportions of large enterprises gave highest consideration to the education (26.3 per cent) followed by gender (21.1 per cent) and other (21.1 per cent). Age and past training were also considered by large enterprises at 15.8 per cent and 10.5 per cent respectively. Small enterprises overwhelmingly considered gender to be very important followed closely by education (36.7 per cent). Past training was considered to be very important by 10 per cent. It is certainly surprising to see gender rated so highly in the preferences of employers as this subverts all expectations of equal opportunities for men and women when seeking a job. It would be important to know whether men or women are more preferred by enterprises. The more precise reason of their higher consideration of sex as well as educational background when recruiting new employees would be worthwhile to study further.

Table 2.28: Number of enterprises by type of characteristics they prefer in job applicants (%)

		Small enterprises	Big enterprises	Total
Very important	Sex	46.7	21.1	36.7
	Age	3.3	15.8	8.2
	Education	36.7	26.3	32.7
	Past training	10.0	5.3	8.2
	Language proficiency	3.3	10.5	6.1
	Other	-	21	8.1
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Preferences in provision of training opportunities

Information on providing training after recruitment was also recorded and examined. Almost all the enterprises provided training for new recruits. 96.7 per cent of small enterprises and 89.5 per cent of big enterprises. The training was on the job training as it promotes the quality of the work at little extra cost. It is also unclear whether on-job-training would contribute to the employability of workers, as it would ultimately count as experience on the job and not as an added qualification. Apart from providing training for new recruits, employers were asked whether they provide additional training, probably after a few years. After recruiting and providing this training, 84.2 per cent of big enterprises and 63.3 per cent of small enterprises gave their workers an additional training or retraining after a few years.

Whilst a large majority of organizations (66.7 per cent) stated that they showed no preference for gender when selecting workers for additional training, a further 24.4 per cent of enterprises stated that they prefer to select men workers for training as compared to 8.9 per cent of women workers. This again shows a high inequality status. Small enterprises are far more discriminatory in practice with a relatively high 37 per cent stating that they would prefer to select men for additional training.

Table 2.29: Percentage of enterprises by training of employees (%)

Does enterprise provide training for new workers?	Small enterprises	Big enterprises	Total
Yes	96.7	89.5	93.9
No	3.3	10.5	6.1
Type of training: on the job	76.7	78.9	77.6
specially organized	13.3	5.3	10.2
other, specify	10.0	15.8	12.2
Additional trainings or re-trainings	63.3	84.2	71.4
No additional trainings or re-trainings	36.7	15.8	28.6
<i>Preference For Selection Of Additional Training (Sex)</i>			
Men Workers	37.0	5.6	24.4
Women Workers	14.8	-	8.9
No Preference	48.1	94.4	66.7

Source: STWT (2003)

Preferences of employers for educational and training background of employees

The managers/employers were also asked about the preference given for previous training acquired when selecting young people for jobs. Small enterprises were more concerned about the general education of the applicant (45 per cent), than any type of previous training (31 per cent). However, 'big enterprises' gave more preference to previous training, whether on the job or through

certification, (55.5 per cent) than to the general education (27.8 per cent). This preference confirms the perceptions of young people that general education qualifications such as O/L and A/L are the most useful educational qualification for finding a job. It also highlights the importance of additional qualifications from special skills training institutes when applying for big enterprises.

Table 2.30: Percent of enterprises by preference for education and training when recruiting by numbers of employees

	Small enterprises	Big enterprises	Total
Preference for workers with general education	44.8	27.8	38.3
Preference for certification from other training institution	13.8	33.3	21.3
Preference for workers with previous on-the-job training	17.2	22.2	19.1
No preference for type of training	13.8	5.6	10.6
No previous training required	10.4	11.1	10.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

3. Equal opportunities: Differing personal aspirations and perceived discrimination amongst Sri Lankan youth⁵

3.1 Youth and the unemployment problem in Sri Lanka

An important aspect of unemployment patterns in Sri Lanka is the unequal distribution of unemployment, with greater numbers of women experiencing unemployment than men. An important factor contributing to this situation can be seen in the much larger number of women choosing social and fine arts subjects in school when compared with men. However, discriminatory practices regarding access to higher job positions also contributes to unemployment amongst women, especially among those with better educational qualifications:

Highly educated Sri Lankan women, however, are also more likely to be unemployed than are less educated women, and this finding strongly contradicts arguments that stress education as the route to women's economic independence. (...) High educational levels in Sri Lanka do not make women more marketable, but contribute to the mismatch between the aspirations of young women and the jobs available to them (Malhotra/ De Graff 1997, p. 390).

Hence, this chapter will briefly explore the perception of equal opportunities available for men and women in a number of different areas such as education, training and jobs promotions. Other important dimensions such as how easy or difficult it is to find jobs will be explored to understand how men and women view their own chances for employment as well as for one another. A further section will attempt to understand how long men and women search for employment, what kinds of job-seeking strategies they prefer and how these strategies work out.

⁵ This chapter has been mainly written by Markus Mayer and Maleeka Salih.

Specifically in this chapter, a further breakdown of the data by ethno-geographical factors is also provided. Given the reinforcement of strong ethno-geographical identities in Sri Lanka following a protracted armed conflict arising out of intense grievances about discrimination, a differentiated breakdown of data will make the results of this survey more relevant to the felt experiences of youth within different Sri Lankan communities. Equally, such an in-depth analysis may be particularly important for policy-makers so that the vulnerabilities of particular groups of young people are captured and made explicit, thereby allowing policy-makers, development workers and state officials to intervene in strategically significant ways.

Access to employment is one of the critical issues in the development discourse of Sri Lanka, which on the one hand is characterized by its welfare policies and high educational achievements and on the other hand economic development that does not provide sufficient employment prospects to a large number of youth. In one of the most comprehensive poverty assessment studies of Sri Lanka, undertaken by the World Bank in 1995, this particular phenomenon has already been mentioned:

Sri Lanka's unemployment rate is high by international standards. It has exceeded 14 per cent on average since 1980. Moreover, unemployment spells longer: in 1980, 85 per cent of the unemployed had spent more than one year searching for a job (World Bank Poverty Assessment on Sri Lanka 1995).

According to the Sri Lankan Quarterly Labor Force Survey of the Department of Census and Statistics (QLFS) and the World Bank data put together in the development strategy paper of the Sri Lankan government "Regaining Sri Lanka" (GoSL, 2003), unemployment is highest among youth. In 1997/98, 71 per cent of the unemployed in Sri Lanka were youth, with an unemployment rate of 36 per cent for the age cohort of 14-18 years and 30 per cent for the age group of 19-25 years. The unemployment rate for youth with A-level qualification is 25 per cent, indicating a high degree of educated youth unemployment in Sri Lanka.

Female unemployment is significantly higher with the rate of female unemployment being more or less double than that of males for the last three decades, although the gap between male and female unemployment appears to be less dramatic in 2000. In 2000 unemployment rate for men is around 7 per cent and around 12 per cent for women (GoSL 2003, Lakshman 2002).

The National Youth Survey, conducted in 1999/ 2000, reveals even higher numbers. Nearly 55 per cent of the youth between the ages of 20–24 years perceived themselves as "looking for a job". However, this didn't indicate that all these youth are unemployed or underemployed. The sample also covered those youth, who perceived themselves as not satisfied with their present employment and therefore are looking for a job (Lakshman 2002). However, although they wouldn't strictly fall under the category of being "unemployed", the fact that such a large number of youth, who may have just started with their first job, are unhappy with their present employment, should give rise to serious concerns. Any sustainable employment policy would need to address these aspirations of job-seeking youth as well.

A World Bank study in 1999 on unemployment in Sri Lanka explains this pattern identifying strong job preferences among the unemployed in Sri Lanka, especially those with relatively better educational attainments, who would not be willing to take up "any job" being offered to them (World Bank 1999). This is further emphasized by the fact that unemployment rates are highest among those with the highest educational levels, namely O/Level and A/Level and above (Central Bank 1998/ Lakshman 2002). Another related phenomenon is the large number of youth, who continue with further education, often in form of various short-term training and tuition classes to bridge the waiting period for a suitable job (often without a real interest in the employment field for which the training is offered). In terms of policy implications, the extreme high number of youth who are either staying outside the labor market or are unhappy with their position in the labor market is worryingly high (NYS 2000).

The distribution of unemployment in Sri Lanka also shows sharp regional differences. According to QLFS data in the first quarter of 2000, the largest number of unemployed can be found in the rural areas: 86 per cent of the total unemployed (Lakshman 2002, p. 60). It can therefore be assumed that many of those youth "unwilling to take up any job" are from rural areas. As speculated elsewhere (Mayer 2002) the widening gap between employment aspirations and employment

opportunities for educated rural youth is further increased by various large scale developmental initiatives of the government in some of the under-privileged rural districts that receive wide-spread publicity, but which rarely show significant outcomes at the local level. The planned activities of the Southern Development Authority for the Hambantota district is one such example that ultimately rather increased the frustration of youth, as the following citing from the National Youth Survey highlights:

Only signboards are coming to Hambantota. The Southern Development Authority is a white elephant, a cheating programme, which only sets up signboards, without really paying attention to us. Development is only about surveys, but youth are unconsidered (Hambantota youth, male, 21 yrs, A/L educated).

More than 100 NGO's have come to our village; they come and do something useless and leave. Most of them donate spectacles or provide some facilities for fishery. They all say that commonly work is being done. Only their big shots gain commonly. (Weligama youth, male, 27 yrs., A/L educated)

As pointed out in a study by the Ministry of Youth Affairs (2001), it is important to recognize the dimensions of youth unemployment that go beyond the understanding that unemployment is mainly due to gaps between employee skills and available job opportunities. Important other explanations such as the slow growth hypothesis and restrictive labor market hypothesis focus more on a possible overall deficiency of demand for employees and a lack of investment to create enough job opportunities. (IPS 2003)

3.2 Equal opportunities in education and training for men and women

In this section, the opinions of interviewed in the STWT survey of youth on equal opportunities for both men and women, in formal education and technical and vocational training are examined in some detail. This section is especially important from a gender-sensitive point of view, based on the assumption that in many countries men and women do NOT have equal opportunities when it comes to opportunities for education and training offered by the state or private institutions (due to various cultural and socio-economic factors). Although based only on perceptions and opinions of youth being interviewed in this sample, it is however important to get some indications about the state of gender (in-) equality in Sri Lanka regarding education and training.

Equal opportunities in formal education

In relation to formal school education, a high proportion of young people in this survey (89 per cent of in-school and vocational/technical training youth, 88 per cent of self-employed youth and 85 per cent of employed youth) stated that men and women have equal opportunities for formal education. It is noteworthy that 74 per cent of job-seeking youth perceive that men and women have equal opportunities for formal education, a comparatively low figure with regard to other categories. The data showed that there were no significant variations when the data was disaggregated by gender, age and level of education.

On the other hand, breakdown of data by ethnicity also in this survey showed a significant variation. It is especially Tamil and Muslim job-seeking youth who perceive that men and women do not have equal opportunities for formal education (29 and 34 per cent respectively) compared to Sinhala youth (8 per cent). See Table 3.1 below. In other words, gender discrimination is felt more among Tamil and Muslim youth than among Sinhala youth. The fact that job seekers include school dropouts may have a bearing on the pattern of response to the question regarding gender inequality.

Table 3.1: Opinions of all groups on equal opportunities in formal education (%)

Groups	Have equal opportunities			Do not have equal opportunities			Not sure			Do not know		
All groups	84.0			12.4			1.2			2.4		
In-school	89.1			9.3			0.7			9.0		
Job-seekers	74.0			21.0			2.2			3.1		
Self-employed	88.0			10.0			0.1			2.0		
Employed	85.0			10.0			0.1			4.0		
Ethnicity*	S	T	M	S	T	M	S	T	M	S	T	M
In-school	93.0	85.0	87.0	7.0	11.0	12.0	-	2.0	-	0.5	1.3	1.0
Job-seekers	88.0	62.0	63.0	8.0	29.0	34.0	2.5	2.7	1.0	1.5	6.1	2.0
Self-employed	90.0	86.0	87.0	9.0	11.0	10.0	-	1.1	2.8	1.5	2.3	-
Employed	92.0	78.0	80.0	5.0	15.0	17.0	0.5	1.3	1.0	3.0	4.6	5.1

Source: STWT (2003)

* S- Sinhala, T-Tamil, M-Muslim

Opinions of schooling youth

In relation to formal school education, a high proportion of respondents in this survey (89 per cent) stated that men and women have equal opportunities for formal education against 9 per cent who stated that they do not have equal opportunities. By district breakdowns, it is especially youth from Hatton (nearly 22 per cent - well above the overall percentage of 9.3 per cent) who think that men and women do not have equal opportunities for school education compared to youth in other districts (see Table 3.2). The sample of youth from Hatton is drawn from a distinct ethnic community, Tamils with Indian origin who mainly work in a particular environment, namely plantations. It would be an important aspect to investigate further the reasons behind these apparently stronger perceptions of gender inequality in this sector than elsewhere in Sri Lanka.

However, it is noteworthy that Colombo also shows a slightly higher number of schooling youth who do not perceive equal opportunities for men and women. This could be due to greater awareness about the more competitive school system within the Colombo Metropolitan Area, including a number of private schools that are not affordable for the majority of youth in the country.

Table 3.2: Opinions of schooling youth on equal opportunities in formal education (%)

Groups	Have equal opportunities		Do not have equal opportunities		Not sure	Do not know
In-school	89.1		9.3		0.7	0.9
Men	88.4		10.3		0.4	0.9
Women	89.9		8.3		0.9	0.9
Sinhala	93.0		6.5		-	0.5
Tamil	85.3		11.3		2.0	1.3
Muslim	87.0		12.0		-	1.0
Colombo	81.5		14.6		0.8	3.1
Kurunegala	100.0		-		-	-
Matara	92.0		8.0		-	-
Monaragala	93.3		6.7		-	-
Hatton	76.7		21.7		1.7	-
Batticaloa	92.0		6.0		2.0	-
Jaffna	89.1		9.3		0.7	0.9

Source: STWT (2003)

Opinions of job-seeking youth

Looking at how job-seeking youth perceive the existence of equal opportunities for men and women for formal education, a majority of 74 per cent of youth in this category of this survey perceived that they have equal opportunities. Nonetheless, this is quite low in comparison to youth in other categories. The percentage of youth who do not see equal opportunities in formal education have increased from around 10 per cent in other categories to 20 per cent for job-seeking youth. Similar to other categories of youth, perceptions of unequal opportunities are highest among Indian Tamils from the Estate community: nearly 54 per cent perceive inequality in relation to formal education (see Table 3.3). In this regard more attention has to be paid to this sector when it comes to educational reform programmes.

Table 3.3: Opinions of job-seeking youth on equal opportunities in formal education (%)

	Have equal opportunities	Do not have equal opportunities	Not sure	Do not know
Job-seekers	73.6	20.7	2.4	3.1
Men	70.7	23.4	1.8	4.1
Women	77.0	18.1	2.7	2.2
Colombo	66.2	25.4	3.8	4.6
Kurunegala	70.0	27.5	1.3	1.3
Matara	92.0	4.0	-	4.0
Monaragala	96.0	2.0	2.0	-
Hatton	33.3	53.3	6.7	6.7
Batticaloa	78.3	18.3	1.7	1.7
Jaffna	79.2	16.7	-	4.2
Sinhala	88.0	8.0	2.5	1.5
Tamil	61.9	29.3	2.7	5.6
Muslim	63.0	34.0	1.0	2.2

Source: STWT (2003)

Opinions of employed and self-employed youth

The statistics of this survey show that around 85 per cent of employed women and men felt that men and women have equal opportunities for formal education. Nearly the same percentage is also appearing for self-employed youth. Placing this finding into an ethnic perspective reveals another dimension. More respondents from the Sinhalese community believe that there are equal opportunities in education for men and women than those from the other two communities, namely the Tamils and the Muslims. 92 per cent of the employed respondents from the Sinhalese community believed in the existence of equal opportunities for men and women in formal education whereas about 79 per cent of the employed Tamils and 83 per cent of the employed Muslims responded positively. Again this pattern is largely repeated by the self-employed sample (see Table 3.4).

There is a perception that the Muslim community is more conservative than the Tamils and therefore in the past the number of Muslim women entering into formal education – particularly in higher education – was relatively low compared to that of the Sinhalese and Tamil communities. This tendency has changed considerably during the last two decades. More women from the Muslim community now gain access to formal school education as well as to university education.

Table 3.4: Opinions of employed and self-employed youth on equal opportunities in formal education (%)

	Have equal opportunities	Do not have equal opportunities	Not sure	Do not know
Employed				
Men	84.6	8.4	1.3	5.7
Women	86.1	11.2	0.4	2.2
Sinhala	91.5	5.0	0.5	3.0
Tamil	78.8	15.2	1.3	4.6
Muslim	82.8	11.1	1.0	5.1
Self-employed				
Men	88.4	9.3	1.5	0.8
Women	86.9	10.5	-	2.6
Sinhala	89.5	9.0		1.5
Tamil	85.9	10.7	1.1	2.3
Muslim	87.3	9.9	2.8	-

Source: STWT (2003)

A noteworthy feature is the comparatively higher number of self-employed youth from Jaffna who does not perceive equal opportunities in formal education (18 per cent as opposed to 8 - 13 per cent in other districts). This could be an indicator that specifically youth in Jaffna had no proper access to educational facilities due to the impact of the violent conflict in this part of the country and were thus more likely to turn towards self-employment as a survival strategy.

Equal opportunities in vocational and technical training

In relation to this survey technical and vocational education, a higher proportion of youth from all categories (55 per cent) stated that men and women have equal opportunities as against 38 per cent who stated that they do not have equal opportunities for technical and vocational training. It is worth noting the difference between those who think that there are unequal opportunities in formal education (12.4 per cent) and those who think that there are unequal opportunities in vocational and technical training (38 per cent). A significantly higher proportion of young people believe that there are men and women who do not have equal opportunities for vocational and technical education.

Ethnic variations with regard to the perceptions of equal opportunities for men and women in technical and vocational education are also noteworthy in this survey. For instance, a significant proportion of Sinhalese youth (a range of 67 to 75 per cent from the different categories) stated that there are equal opportunities for men and women in vocational and technical education. However, the percentages are comparatively lower for Tamil youth (a range of 35 to 52 per cent from all categories) and for Muslim youth (a range of 35 to 52 per cent from all categories). The highest percentages are from the schooling category of youth, perhaps because they have not yet had experiences of the vocational and technical training sector (see Table 3.5 below).

As for gender differences, it is evident from the data of this survey that a significant proportion of men (45.4 per cent) perceived that there are equal opportunities for men and women in technical and vocational education compared to women (30.4 per cent). In other words, a large majority of women perceive an unequal distribution of opportunities between men and women.

Table 3.5: Opinions of all groups on equal opportunities in vocational and technical training (%)

Groups	Have equal opportunities		Do not have equal opportunities			Not sure			Do not know			
All groups	55.0		38.0			3.0			4.0			
In-school	63.0		31.0			2.2			3.0			
Job-seekers	46.0		49.0			3.0			3.0			
Self-employed	56.0		38.0			3.0			3.0			
Employed	54.0		35.0			3.0			8.0			
Gender	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women		
In-school	62.0	64.5	32.0	46.0	3.0	2.0	3.4	3.2				
Job-seekers	45.4	30.4	49.0	48.0	1.4	4.1	4.2	1.8				
Self-employed	58.3	2.0	36.0	4.0	3.1	3.0	2.7	3.7				
Employed	51.5	3.2	36.0	2.0	2.6	4.0	10.0	5.4				
Ethnicity*	S	T	M	S	T	M	S	T	M	S	T	M
In-school	75.0	55.0	52.0	21.0	37.0	44.0	4.0	2.0		1.5	5.3	4.0
Job-seekers	67.0	35.0	18.0	27.0	58.0	80.0	5.0	1.4		1.5	5.6	2.2
Self-employed	71.0	49.0	35.0	28.0	41.0	58.0		5.1	5.6	2.0	5.1	1.4
Employed	72.0	42.0	35.0	22.0	39.0	55.0	1.0	11.3	2.0	4.5	11.3	8.1

* S- Sinhala, T-Tamil, M-Muslim

Source: STWT (2003)

The implications of the above patterns are quite significant. It appears that formal education is largely perceived as being available for all citizens, irrespective of gender and ethnicity. Vocational and technical training opportunities however seem to be more unequally distributed in terms of availability and access. As many vocational or technical training institutes are funded by foreign donor organizations through respective ministries, political interference could be a reason for the situation. However, the reasons for the perceived gender inequality are less clear. It could be linked to the type of courses offered. Although the survey results do indicate important areas of intervention, they are not providing necessary information to fully understand the reasons behind these patterns. Further research on the above aspects would be of urgent importance.

Opinions of schooling youth

In relation to technical and vocational education, a majority of schooling youth (63.1 per cent) stated that men and women have equal opportunities as against 31.3 per cent who stated that they do not. However, it is worth mentioning here that the proportion of youth who think that they do not have equal opportunities for technical/vocational education is 31.3 per cent compared to that of formal education (9.3 per cent). It is interesting that a higher proportion of younger youth (33.1 per cent) perceived unequal opportunities compared to older youth (19.0 per cent).

Ethnic variations with regard to the perceptions of equal opportunities for young men and women in technical and vocational education are also noteworthy. For instance as the figures of this survey shows, a significant proportion of Sinhalese youth (74.5 per cent) stated that both young men and women have equal opportunities for technical/vocational education compared to Tamil (55 per cent) and Muslim (52 per cent) youth (see Table 3.6). An interesting observation is the remarkably high percentage of perceived equal opportunities (92 per cent) in the Monaragala District, an area considered to be one of the remotest and poorest areas in Sri Lanka. Nonetheless, this may be due to the presence of large number of NGO's providing vocational training in this area, perhaps contributing to the above.

Table 3.6: Opinions of schooling youth on equal opportunities in technical/ vocational education (%)

Groups	Have equal opportunities	Do not have equal opportunities	Not sure	Do not know
In-school	63.1	31.3	2.2	3.3
Men	61.8	32.2	2.6	3.4
Women	64.5	30.4	1.8	3.2
Age-15-19	60.8	33.1	2.3	3.8
Age-20-24	79.3	19.0	1.7	-
Sinhala	74.5	20.5	3.5	1.5
Tamil	55.3	37.3	2.0	5.3
Muslim	52.0	44.0	-	4.0
Colombo	55.4	34.6	3.8	6.2
Kurunegala	67.5	28.8	1.3	2.5
Matara	78.0	18.0	4.0	-
Monaragala	92.0	8.0	-	-
Hatton	63.3	36.7	-	-
Batticaloa	43.3	53.3	-	3.3
Jaffna	56.0	34.0	4.0	6.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Opinions of job-seeking youth

It is important to note that opinions are, on the whole, divided on the issue of equality in available opportunities for vocational or technical training in Sri Lanka (44.4 per cent perceiving equality against 46.9 per cent perceiving inequality). What is particularly revealing is the fact that the proportions of job seeking youth confirming equal opportunities are not very high in many districts. Almost 80 per cent of Hatton youth perceive unequal opportunities for men and women in vocational and technical education.

Also interestingly, 79 per cent of Muslim job-seeking youth perceive unequal opportunities for men and women in vocational and technical education. It would be important to investigate not only the spatial distribution of training institutes and their access mechanisms but also to map out a profile of the programmes and courses they offer.

Table 3.7: opinions of job-seeking youth on equal opportunities in technical and vocational education (%)

	Have equal opportunities	Do not have equal opportunities	Not sure	Not know
Job seekers	44.4	46.9	2.7	2.9
Men	45.4	49.1	1.4	4.2
Women	46.4	47.7	4.1	1.8
Colombo	30.2	63.8	6.0	-
Kurunegala	33.8	63.8	2.5	-
Matara	78.0	16.0	-	6.0
Monaragala	88.0	10.0	2.0	-
Hatton	20.0	80.0	-	-
Batticaloa	35.0	56.7	3.3	5.0
Jaffna	56.0	30.0	-	14.0
Sinhala	66.5	27.0	5.0	1.5
Tamil	35.2	57.7	1.4	5.6
Muslim	18.3	79.6	-	2.2

Source: STWT (2003)

Opinions of employed and self-employed youth

The findings of this survey shows that the employed and self-employed youth are comparatively more convinced that they have equal opportunities in technical/ vocational training than the job-seeking youth. For this category of youth in particular there is still no significant gender difference. Among employed youth, the number of women who perceive equal opportunities for men and women is even higher than for men. For the self-employed youth this picture is slightly different, with less women than men perceiving equal opportunities for both sexes.

Table 3.8: Opinions of employed and self-employed youth on equal opportunities in technical/ vocational education (%)

	Have equal opportunities	Do not have equal opportunities	Not sure	Do not know
Employed				
Men	51.5	36.1	2.6	9.7
Women	57.0	33.6	4.0	5.4
Sinhala	72.5	22.0	1.0	4.5
Tamil	42.4	39.1	7.3	11.3
Muslim	35.4	54.5	2.0	8.1
Self-employed				
Men	58.3	35.9	3.1	2.7
Women	53.4	40.3	2.6	3.7
Sinhala	70.5	27.5	-	2.0
Tamil	48.6	41.2	5.1	5.1
Muslim	35.2	57.7	5.6	1.4

Source: STWT (2003)

3.3 Difficulties for youth to find a decent job

This section examines the interviewed youths' own assessment of their situation in terms of how easy or difficult they think it will be for them to find a decent job with their current educational achievement. In the current Sri Lankan labour market, employment opportunities are very competitive and getting a decent job is difficult in general. Unemployment in the recent years shows an upward movement and the creation of more employment opportunities in the government sector is no longer feasible since that sector is already over staffed. The private sector on the other hand has a limited capacity to create new employment opportunities at present. Additionally, the qualifications required for private sector vacancies often do not match with the qualifications that the new entrants into the labour market possess.

Difficulty to find a decent job for oneself

Perceptions of schooling youth

Corresponding to the question of how easy it is for schooling youth to find a decent job with their current educational status, a clear majority of respondents stated that it is difficult for them to find a decent job. If we combine the 'very difficult' and 'difficult' responses, nearly three quarters of the sampled population of schooling youth do not think that they can easily find a decent job with their current educational achievement (see Table 3.9). There are no gender variations in relation to this question.

The educational variations in relation to the above question are noteworthy. For instance, the difficulty to find a job increases with better educational attainment. Furthermore, as the figures of this survey shows even 77 per cent of youth who have received vocational training perceive it as very difficult to find a decent job. On the other hand, youth who have undertaken technical training seems to have greater confidence in their ability to find jobs, with higher percentages than all other categories of youth (see Table 3.9). This would be another area worthwhile to investigate further. A mapping of type and training offered by existing vocational and technical training institutions would probably be very helpful to better understand the above pattern.

Table 3.9: Perceptions of schooling youth on how difficult it is to find a decent job (%)

Groups	Very easy	Easy	Very difficult	Difficult	Not sure	Do not know
In-school	0.7	24.7	13.6	59.3	1.3	0.2
Men	1.3	24.5	13.7	58.8	1.3	0.4
Women	-	24.9	13.4	59.9	1.4	-
Colombo	0.8	30.8	11.5	53.8	1.5	0.8
Kurunagala	1.3	26.3	17.5	53.8	1.3	-
Matara	-	16.0	10.0	74.0	-	-
Monaragala	-	26.0	12.0	62.0	-	-
Hatton	3.3	20.0	6.7	70.0	-	-
Batticaloa	-	20.0	30.0	46.7	3.3	-
Jaffna	-	22.0	2.0	74.0	2.0	-
Sinhala	-	23.5	12.5	62.5	1.5	-
Tamil	0.7	24.7	8.7	64.0	1.3	0.7
Muslim	2.0	27.0	23.5	46.5	1.0	-
Primary	-	33.3	66.7	-	-	-
Secondary	0.4	25.0	14.7	58.0	1.3	0.4
GCE O'L passed	0.7	25.5	12.5	58.9	2.3	-
GCE A'L passed	-	20.0	15.0	65.0	-	-
Technical training	11.1	44.4	-	44.4	-	-
Vocational training	-	19.2	3.8	76.9	-	-

Source: STWT (2003)

Perceptions of job-seeking youth⁶

It is also interesting to see that, although more job-seeking youth perceive that it is difficult to find a decent job (25 per cent against 14 per cent in-school youth), there is no difference in their perceptions about gender differences when it comes to finding a job. This confirms the hypothesis that employment related gender discrimination might appear less at the educational stage or at the stage of entering the job market, but eventually more at a later time when it comes to career options within the job or issues related to balancing family responsibilities with work duties. However, as the sample covers only youth below the age of 25, most of the youth might also not have had many experiences in this regard.

It is surprising that a comparatively higher percentage (26.7 per cent) of youth from Hatton (the area where there were the most perceived unequal opportunities for men and women in formal education and in vocational and technical education) stated that they would find it easy to find a job. However, it is not clear from the question asked what type of employment they have in mind. Latest studies indicate a labour shortage in the plantation sector (Emmanuel et al. 2004), which explains that there might be no problem to find traditional employment in this sector. However, as the same study points out, more and more youth in the plantation sector would prefer to find employment outside the estate sector. Although the gap between aspirations and opportunities might not have been very large

⁶ The statistics given in this chapter are from the ILO School-To-Work Transition Survey if not otherwise specified.

in the past, this might change very rapidly now with improved educational facilities being provided in the plantation sector and higher mobility of Tamils due to the peace process.

Alarmingly, 95 per cent of Batticaloa youth felt it would be difficult or very difficult to find a job, followed by 84 per cent youth from Jaffna expressing the same. This clearly shows that youth living in the conflict-affected Northern and Eastern parts of the country are facing much greater difficulties to secure decent employment.

Table 3.10: Perceptions of job-seeking youth on how difficult it is to find a decent job (%)

Groups	Very easy	Easy	Very difficult	Difficult	Not sure	Do not know
Job-Seekers	0.4	12.9	24.5	60.8	1.1	0.2
Men	0.4	11.2	22.9	64.6	0.4	0.4
Women	0.4	14.6	26.1	57.1	1.8	-
Sinhala	1.0	13.0	25.0	59.5	1.5	-
Tamil	-	14.8	24.2	60.4	-	0.7
Muslim	-	10.1	24.2	63.6	2.0	-
Colombo	-	13.1	27.7	58.5	0.8	-
Kurunegala	-	12.7	19.0	67.1	1.3	-
Matara	2.0	16.0	12.0	68.0	2.0	-
Monaragala	2.0	10.0	20.0	64.0	4.0	-
Hatton	-	26.7	20.0	53.3	-	-
Batticaloa	-	5.0	45.0	50.0	-	-
Jaffna	-	14.0	20.0	64.0	-	2.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Perceptions of employed and self-employed youth

Nearly 50 per cent of the employed respondents - both men and women - said that getting a decent job was 'difficult' while another 25 per cent found it 'very difficult' confirming the general tendency in the Sri Lankan labour market. Only 7 per cent of the sample believed that they could get a decent job very easily. Around 36 per cent of the employed respondents from the Sinhalese community found it 'easy' to get a job while less than 20 per cent of the Tamil and Muslim communities said it was 'easy'. Similarly, 41.5 per cent of the Sinhalese said it was 'difficult' to find a job while more than 60 per cent of respondents from the Tamil and Muslim communities found it 'difficult'.

These results show a basic ethnic dimension in the Sri Lankan labour market scenario. The majority community can find decent jobs relatively more easily than the minority communities. The reasons for this scenario might be complex and politically sensitive which cannot be treated within the scope of the current study. Nevertheless, one can easily argue that the lack of Sinhala (and not only English) language skills makes it difficult for the minorities to find decent jobs. This may, however, be an oversimplified explanation and only a more careful investigation could bring out more concrete reasons.

The picture is largely the same when looking at the self-employed youth, although it is interesting that especially the self-employed Sinhalese youth find it much more difficult to find a job as compared to their employed counterparts (67.5 per cent as compared to 41.5 per cent among the employed youth). The other ethnic communities do not show such a difference, indicating that eventually a larger number of Sinhalese youth took up self-employment as a means to avoid unemployment, rather than following their genuine choices. This might be to a lesser extent the case among the Tamil and Muslims.

Another interesting aspect among self-employed youth is the comparatively higher number of youth from Sinhalese rural districts (Kurunegala, Matara, Moneragala), who find it difficult to secure a decent job (up to 90 per cent of them). Again this can be seen as an indicator that access to education and training is not necessarily translated into desired employment, especially among self-employed youth. This might underline the general observation that many training programmes for self-

employment might either not match the local market requirements or doesn't tally with socio-cultural values.

Table 3.11: Perceptions of employed and self-employed youth on how difficult it is to find a decent job (%)

	Very easy	Easy	Very difficult	Difficult	Not sure	Do not know
Employed						
Men	5.7	17.2	24.2	50.2	2.6	-
Women	7.2	16.2	20.3	55.0	0.9	0.5
Sinhala	14.0	21.5	21.0	41.5	2.0	-
Tamil	0.7	12.7	23.3	60.7	2.0	0.7
Muslim	-	13.1	23.2	62.6	1.0	-
Self-employed						
Men	1.2	12.0	19.8	66.7	-	0.4
Women	1.0	7.3	22.0	68.6	1.0	-
Sinhala	2.0	8.0	22.0	67.5	0.5	-
Tamil	0.6	11.2	19.7	67.4	0.6	0.6
Muslim	-	12.7	19.7	67.6	-	-

Source: STWT (2003)

Perceived gender discrimination in the access to find a decent job

The question of access to decent work was further probed not only in regard to one-self, but also regarding the perceptions of young people whether they feel that either men or women in general have it easier or more difficult to find appropriate employment. This could be another field to indicate to what extent (based on perceptions of the youth) gender based discrimination matters in Sri Lanka.

Perceptions of schooling youth

In relation to the question of 'whether the youth think that generally it is easier or harder for young women compared to young men to find jobs?' 35 per cent of the respondents revealed that it is 'easier for young men' while 34 per cent stated that it is easier for 'young women' and another 20 per cent mentioned that irrespective of gender differences, both men and women could find a job.

There are some clear gender differences in the way in which youth have responded to the above question. For instance, more men stated that it is easier for women to find job (37 per cent) compared to women. On the other hand, more female youth have the opposite view (39 per cent) at this point of their life cycle. It is also interesting that many of those with primary education (66.7 per cent) stated that it is easier for men to find jobs whereas 62.5 per cent of those with technical training believed that it is easier for women to find jobs. With the exceptions of Colombo and Matara, it is perceived comparatively easier for men to find jobs than women among in-school youth. It is not clear from the data collected why schooling youth in Colombo and Matara perceive see women relatively better equipped to secure a decent job.

Table 3.12: Perceptions of schooling youth on gender differences of how difficult it is to find a decent job (%)

	Easier for young women	Easier for young men	No difference	Depends on what	Do not know
In-school	33.6	35.0	19.8	3.9	7.7
Men	36.6	31.3	20.7	4.4	7.0
Women	30.5	39.0	18.8	3.3	8.5
Colombo	37.0	21.3	26.8	3.9	11.0
Kurunegala	32.1	43.6	10.3	3.8	10.3
Matara	42.6	31.9	21.3	-	4.3
Monaragala	25.0	39.6	12.5	6.3	16.7
Hatton	40.0	40.0	13.3	6.7	-
Batticaloa	30.0	48.3	20.0	-	1.7
Jaffna	28.0	36.0	26.0	8.0	2.0
Sinhala	36.5	33.3	15.1	3.6	11.5
Tamil	34.0	34.0	23.3	5.3	3.3
Muslim	27.6	39.8	23.5	2.0	7.1
Primary	-	66.7	33.3	-	-
Secondary	31.7	38.0	19.5	2.7	8.1
GCE O'L passed	33.6	34.3	18.9	4.9	8.4
GCE A'L passed	32.4	29.7	18.9	10.8	8.1
Technical training	62.5	-	37.5	-	-
Vocational training	46.2	30.8	19.2	-	3.8

Source: STWT (2003)

Perceptions of job-seeking youth

There are some clear shifts of opinion between schooling youth and job-seeking youth, although the general consensus remains more or less similar. However, it is noteworthy that in nearly all locations a larger number of youth interviewed does perceive better chances for women to find a job than men. This is even reflected in a higher percentage of women following this opinion (43.4 per cent as against 35.8 per cent men). However, one may have to be careful again, as the data does not reveal the type of “decent work” the interviewed youth might have had in mind. In the absence of a longer discussion on “decent work” many youth might have rather referred to better job opportunities as such, and in the case of women this could also include employment in the Middle East or the garment sector (where the chances for women are indeed better to find a job, leaving aside the question about the quality of this employment).

Table 3.13: Perceptions of job-seeking youth on gender differences on how difficult it is to find a decent job (%)

Groups	Easier for young women	Easier for young men	No difference	Depends	Do not know
Job-seekers	39.8	32.9	21.1	0.4	5.8
Men	35.8	33.8	22.5	0.5	7.4
Women	43.4	32.2	19.8	0.4	4.1
Colombo	46.2	20.8	23.1	0.8	9.2
Kurunegala	28.8	48.8	18.8	-	3.8
Matara	54.0	20.0	22.0	-	4.0
Monaragala	34.0	36.0	24.0	-	6.0
Hatton	26.7	43.3	26.7	-	3.3
Batticaloa	43.3	35.0	13.3	1.7	6.7
Jaffna	36.0	40.0	22.0	-	2.0
Sinhala	43.5	28.5	22.5	-	5.5
Tamil	38.9	33.6	22.1	1.3	4.0
Muslim	34.0	40.0	17.0	-	9.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Perceptions of employed and self-employed youth

Interestingly, there seemed to be fairly similar breakdown of opinions with regard to the perceptions of employed youth. 36.6 per cent and 36.3 per cent of employed men and women respectively said that finding a job was easier for women while 33.9 per cent and 32.7 per cent of employed men and women respectively believed it was easier for men. Around 20 per cent answered that gender makes no difference in finding a job (see Table 3.14).

It appears that youth generally perceive women to find it easier to find a job. However, this result has to be interpreted with caution. Women from this particular age group might have some advantage in getting a job but for women beyond this age limit it may be difficult because an employer might consider the woman candidate's age, her intention to getting married and having children in the near future before he or she decides whether to offer the job. Making a general conclusion from this result can therefore be difficult and misleading.

The sample of self-employed youth does not show any significant differences, with the exception of a much larger number of self-employed men being of the opinion that it is easier for young women to find a decent job. This again could be interpreted that a larger number of young men working on their own account, does not do this voluntarily, which could result in stronger feeling that their female counterparts might have better chances for formal employment (even if this is in the form of garment factory work). This could be further confirmed by the fact that this opinion is mainly shared among youth from Colombo, Kurunegala and Matara, all in the close vicinity to major garment factory areas.

Table 3.14: Perceptions of employed and self-employed youth on gender differences on how difficult it is to find a decent job (%)

	Easier for women	Easier for men	No difference	Depends	Do not know
Employed					
Men	36.6	33.9	19.8	3.5	6.2
Women	36.3	32.7	21.5	3.1	6.3
Sinhala	37.5	33.5	24.0	1.5	3.5
Tamil	33.1	30.5	21.2	7.3	7.9
Muslim	39.4	37.4	13.1	1.0	9.1
Self-employed					
Men	50.2	25.1	15.1	4.2	5.4
Women	33.7	37.4	20.0	3.2	5.8
Sinhala	51.5	21.5	15.0	2.0	10.0
Tamil	35.8	40.3	18.2	5.1	0.6
Muslim	36.6	31.0	21.1	5.6	5.6

Source: STWT (2003)

Recruitment strategies of employers for men or women

As part of the "School-to-Work" transition survey, attitudes of a selected number of employers and managers, regarding employment opportunities for youth in their respective companies, have been collected as well. 30 enterprises were selected from the Colombo Metropolitan Area, and another 20 from Moneragala (rural) and Hatton (estate). For the analysis the enterprises are differentiated between "big enterprises", employing more than 50 paid employers, and "small enterprises", having less than 50 paid employers (the minimum size, however, for an enterprise was defined with at least 5 paid workers). 40 per cent of the selected enterprises belong to the "big" category, while the balance 60 per cent belong to the "small" group. The majority of the big enterprises are located in Colombo.

The gender of the applicant was considered to be a very important characteristic in 46.7 per cent of small enterprises and in 21.1 per cent of the big enterprises. Marital status was not considered

to be the most important characteristic. Nonetheless, 10 per cent of small enterprises and 15.8 per cent of large enterprises felt that this was an important characteristic to consider.

Apart from the important characteristics the employers looked for in hiring workers, they were asked 'if you could choose, would you prefer to hire a *'young woman'*, *'young man'* or *'wouldn't matter'*. A considerable proportion of big enterprises did not consider gender (nearly 65 per cent). However, small enterprises showed a significant by greater preference for a particular gender for employment.

Table 3.15: Percentage of enterprises by preferred type of persons for employment

	Small enterprises	Big enterprises	Total
Young women	23.1	5.9	16.3
Young men	34.6	29.4	32.6
Wouldn't matter	42.3	64.7	51.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Equal opportunities for promotions for men and women

With regard to the above indication, it was thought important to briefly explore the area of job promotions, as gender discriminations may be revealed here. Almost half of sample of employed men (43.2 per cent) believed that there were greater opportunities for men for job promotions. Interestingly, only 18.4 per cent of women perceived an advantage for men in job promotions. Around 24 per cent of the men think that men and women have equal opportunities for promotions whereas 39 per cent of the women feel the same. This means that more women perceive equal opportunities in career promotions.

Again, given that this is a group of young people who had just begun to work; their perceptions might be different from those already engaged in employment for a longer period of time. Moreover, only 4.4 per cent of the men believe that women have greater opportunities in getting promotions while 23.8 per cent of the women share such an opinion. There can be gender discrimination particularly when it comes to promotions to high-ranking posts.

Table 3.16: Perceptions of employed youth of equal opportunities for men and women in job promotions (%)

	Equal opportunities for both	Greater opportunities for men	Greater opportunities for women	Do not know	Depends on ability/cleverness	Total
Male	24.2	43.2	4.4	27.8	0.4	100.0
Female	38.6	18.4	23.8	18.8	0.4	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

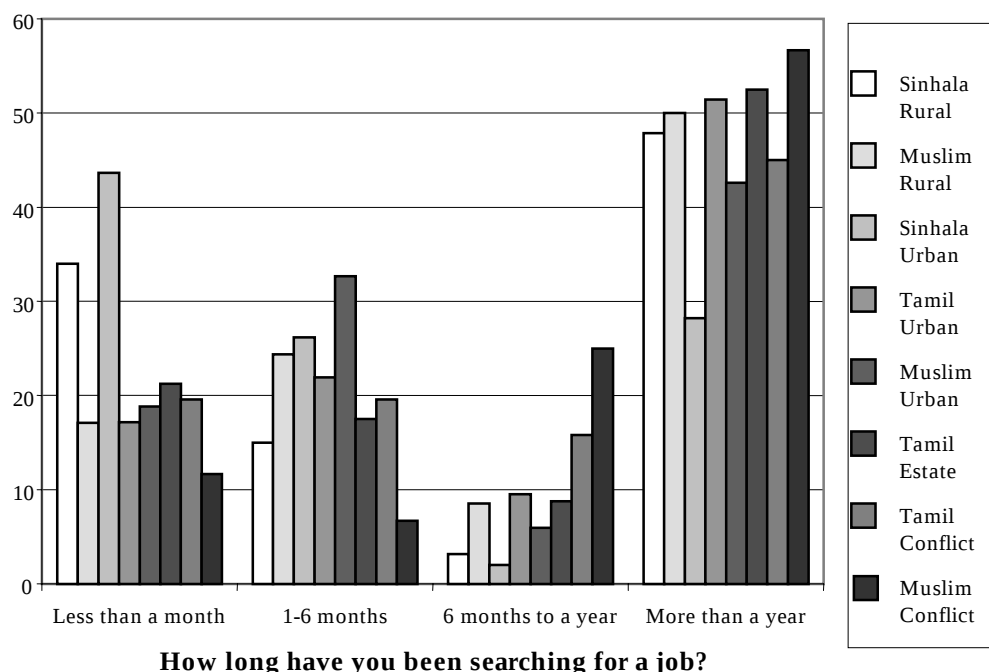
3.4 Reflections of equal opportunities in the search for employment

Equal opportunities in length of search for employment

In order to estimate how long young people look for work once the search begins, the question that how long have you been looking or did you look for a job was asked of job-seekers, self-employed and employed youth. There are marked differences between the Sinhalese in the urban area of Colombo and other ethnic groups both within Colombo and in other parts of Sri Lanka such as the rural and conflict-affected areas. The biggest differences are noted between the urban Sinhalese and the Muslims living in the conflict-affected area of Batticaloa. There was a larger proportion of

Batticaloa Muslims (approx. 58 per cent) who had been searching for work for over a year as compared to 25 per cent of Colombo-based Sinhalese.

Figure 3.1: Length of time spent searching for job within sector and ethnicity by %



Source: STWT (2003)

Figure 3.1 clearly shows some of the different experiences of young people in the length of time they spend searching for employment based on location and ethnicity. Generally, there is a sharp decline in the number of people searching for a job during the first year of searching, but after this period, the number rises sharply again. This indicates that almost half of the young population remain unemployed or under-employed for more than a year. This is an extensively long period of time to continue to search for employment.

The National Youth Survey showed that nearly 77 per cent of the unemployed youth waited for more than a year to find a job (Lakshman 2002). The findings of the School-to-Work-Transition surveys further confirm this pattern: around 60 per cent of the job seekers are searching for a job for more than a year. From the youth who are now working, 37 per cent of the self-employed youth had been looking for a job for more than one year before choosing self-employment and approximately 40 per cent of the young employees were also searching for more than one year.

Additionally, the percentage of people who found a job within a month is lowest for Muslims living in the conflict-affected areas. Thus, the search for employment may be particularly frustrating for this group of young people as large numbers of Batticaloa Muslims may spend long periods of time looking for work. The lowest numbers of people searching for a job occur between six months to a year for most groups, with the percentage of people looking for work falling roughly from 15-45 per cent to 2-10 per cent within a year (again this pattern differs for Muslims living in conflict-affected areas). The sharpest declines are for Sinhalese rural and urban youth. In general, 45-58 per cent of youth (with the exception of Sinhalese urban youth) have spent more than a year in searching for work.

Long unemployment periods among youth also carry serious social and economic implications. Not only are unemployed youth predominantly supported by their parents, thus causing further economic burden on families who often invested significantly into their children's education while expecting that this investment will support the upward social mobility of the whole family one day.

The parental support of children's education is also shown in the "School-to-Work-Transition" survey: in 84 per cent of all cases parents paid for the education of their children, followed by another 11 per cent being financially supported by relatives, 3 per cent having supported themselves and only 2 per cent received support by other sources such as the government or employers. It is also important to consider the level of expectations on behalf of the parents that this investment puts on the young people. The National Youth Survey 1999/2000 highlights this dilemma through statements made by youth such as:

My poor parents think that at least the children will one day come into some kind of position in future with the help of education. I am the eldest child in the family. Therefore, my parents have hope and expectations laid on me. (Weligama youth, female, 18 yrs., Gr. 9)

Perceived importance of job-seeking methods

Questions on a number of different job-seeking strategies were included in the survey to better understand how they were perceived by the respondents, and also to identify what strategies had resulted in the current employment of young men and women. Firstly, respondents in the categories of job-seeking, self-employed and employed were asked to list the strategy they consider to be the most important for finding work.

Although a ranking of the three important categories was done in the survey, this chapter includes only the strategy perceived to be the most important one for seeking employment. For pragmatic purposes, it was assumed that each strategy has no overlap with the other strategies included in the list. The main strategies listed in the survey are through private employment agencies, government employment services, labour contractors, advertisements, direct recruitment, friends, job fairs, political contacts, relatives and through the current education or training institutions.

Perceptions of job-seeking youth

Looking at the main methods of finding a job for job-seeking youth, the highest number of youth mentioned contacts through friends. It is interesting that while 15 per cent of the in-school youth considered searching for a job through friends, the number has now increased to nearly 33 per cent. Addressing relatives or looking through advertisements on the other hand has slightly decreased compared to the in-school youth. This shows very clearly that youth are not aware of private or governmental service providers to support them in their job-seeking strategies or that they do not have sufficient trust in the usefulness of such places. However, it could also be speculated that many youth might prefer the emotional security to be recommended to a working place rather than facing completely open interview situations or unknown working conditions.

The methods most frequently mentioned amongst men and women were finding jobs through friends, relatives and advertisements with sharp declines in general with regard to all other items mentioned in the survey. This is certainly in keeping with the highly social and informal nature of Sri Lankan cultures. However, findings from the National Youth Survey conducted in 2000⁷ that job searching is a highly politicized arena has not been supported by this data.

⁷ The National Youth Survey 2000 found that large proportions of youth believed that politicians granted jobs to youth in return for votes or canvassing. Hence, political contacts were seen to be an important consideration in job-seeking (Mayer, 2002).

Table 3.17: Perceptions of job-seeking youth on important job-seeking methods (%)

Groups	Educational or training institution	Government employm.. Service	Political contact	Private employm. Agent	Advertisements	Friends	Relatives	Labour Contractor	Other
Job-seekers	6.3	4.5	3.1	6.0	22.5	32.8	21.2	2.9	0.7
Men	5.8	2.7	4	6.3	21.1	37.7	18.8	2.7	0.9
Women	6.7	6.2	2.2	5.8	24	28	23.6	3.1	0.4
Colombo	7.8	1.6	3.1	6.3	18.8	39.1	20.3	2.3	0.8
Kurunegala	7.5	5.0	1.3	8.8	26.3	28.8	20.0	2.5	-
Matara	4.0	4.0	8.0	2.0	24.0	40.0	18.0	-	-
Monaragala	8.0	18.0	8.0	4.0	26.0	22.0	14.0	-	-
Hatton	-	-	-	3.3	20.0	16.7	40.0	16.7	3.3
Batticaloa	6.7	1.7	1.7	8.3	15.0	36.7	26.7	1.7	1.7
Jaffna	4.0	4.0	-	6.0	32.0	32.0	18.0	4.0	-
Sinhala	7.0	8.5	6.0	3.0	30.0	29.5	15.5	0.5	-
Tamil	4.8	2.0	-	8.2	22.4	32.0	24.5	4.8	1.4
Muslim	7.0	-	2.0	9.0	8.0	40.0	28.0	5.0	1.0
Primary	-	-	3.6	17.9	7.1	32.1	35.7	3.6	-
Second.	5.0	2.0	2.0	6.5	12.4	42.8	24.9	4	0.5
O'level	6.5	4.3	5.8	4.3	33.8	23.7	18.7	2.2	0.7
A'level	12.9	14.5	1.6	3.2	37.1	17.7	11.3	1.6	-

Source: STWT (2003)

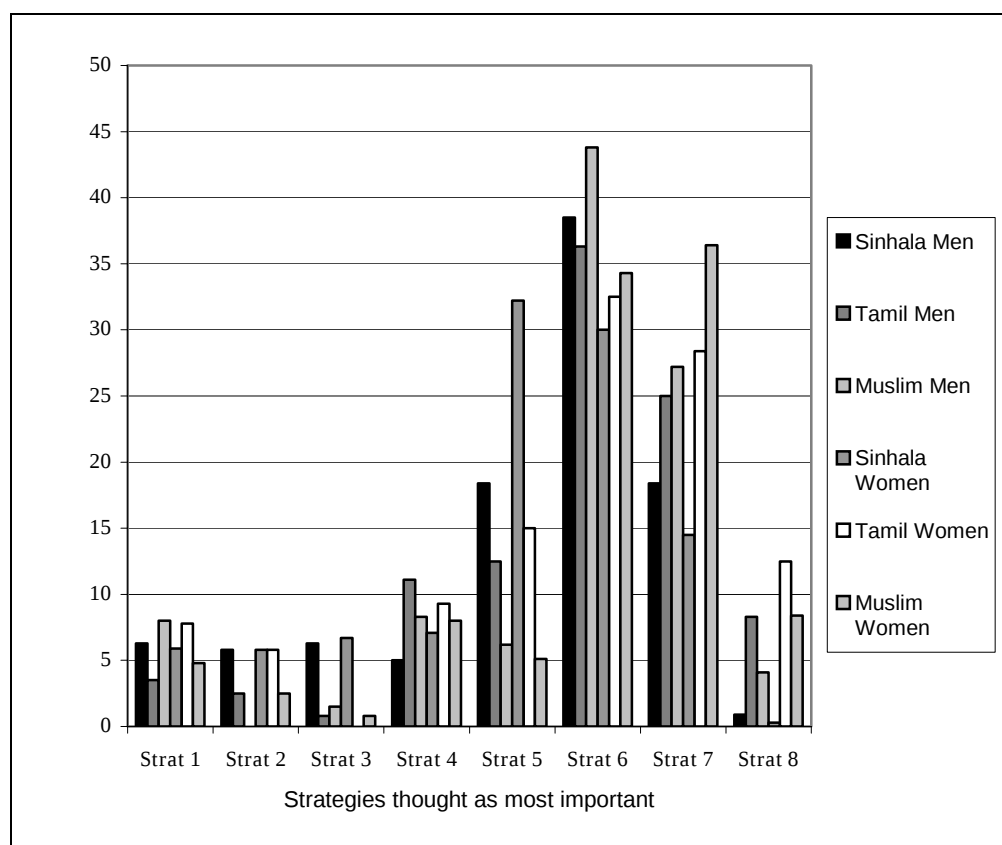
In this “School-to-Work-Transition” survey the use of political contacts was barely mentioned by all interviewed youth groups. However, the importance of social contacts through family and relatives may include linkages to political stakeholders. Young people themselves might not always be in the position to directly draw on political contacts. However, their adult family members (or those of their friends) might rather be in a position to do so. In any case contacts, whether of political or private nature, appears to be the foremost important asset in order to find a job (see Table 3.17).

Another unexpected finding is that job-seeking through contractors and private agents is not given more prominence, particularly amongst rural-based women, given there are large numbers of migrant and factory women workers in Sri Lanka who are assumed to be primarily recruited through private employment agencies. Perhaps many of these women were not captured by the survey, (particularly if their recruitment was successful) but more possibly as a result of sampling bias towards younger respondents.

Importance of job-seeking methods by gender and ethnicity

The breakdown of data according to the selected youth groups does not reveal significant differences regarding the job-seeking methods. However, the analysis of job-seeking methods by gender and ethnicity reveals some interesting patterns. As mentioned earlier, the sample of youth in the age 15-24 might be too short in the Sri Lankan context to detect bigger differences between youth who have made their first job-seeking experiences and youth who might already tried several methods over a longer period of time. On the other hand, ethnicity and gender are generally categories that matter in the Sri Lankan context.

Figure 3.2: Strategies identified as most important by gender and ethnicity %



Strategy 1: Current Institution; Strategy 2: Govt. service; Strategy 3: Political contacts;
 Strategy 4: Private agents; Strategy 5: Advertisements; Strategy 6: Friends;
 Strategy 7: Relatives; Strategy 8: Contractor

Source: STWT (2003)

As has been already mentioned, the above figure supports the general notion that young men and women markedly prefer to search for employment through friends, relatives and advertisements, with the heaviest bias on finding jobs through friends (30-42 per cent). With regard to the different ethnic experiences, it appears that there are similarities in preferences between men and women of particular ethnicities, except for Sinhalese men and women on the issue of finding jobs through advertisements. Unlike many young people of other ethnicities, Muslim men and women do not perceive advertisements to be an important strategy of finding employment.

The graph also shows that there are some clear differences between the strategies employed by the Sinhalese and the Muslim women. The lines shift decidedly away from one another in relation to the most popular three methods (advertisements, friends and relatives). Whilst Sinhalese women seem to rely particularly on advertisements and friends, Muslim women appear to be relying primarily on friends and relatives.

The graph also shows that most men of all ethnicities mainly value one strategy (that of finding work through friends) as the most important (as indicated by the narrow single peak), whilst almost equal proportions of women amongst all ethnicities appear to value mainly two strategies, either finding jobs through friends and relatives or through friends and advertisements (indicated by the plateau at the top of each line). Most young men and women in Sri Lanka seem to be relying mainly on informal means of finding work, except for the 30 per cent of Sinhalese women who value advertisements as the most important strategy of finding work.

Of the formal channels for the job search, percentages between 4-12 per cent of different groups of youth have listed private employment agencies and labour contractors as the most important method of finding a job (particularly favoured by Tamil and Muslim men and women). A small percentage of Sinhalese men and women see the government employment services and political contacts as the most important strategy, whilst these strategies do not appear at all for Muslim men, and Tamil men and women.

It would be interesting to know what types of government and private employment agencies are approached by different sub-groups of youth. One may presume that many of the Sinhalese migrant workers enlist themselves with the government employment services for work abroad whilst Tamil and Muslim migrant workers may do so by enlisting the help of private agent and labour contractors.

Another interesting point would be to know why young people believe that the most important job-seeking strategy is 'through friends'. Perhaps asking friends or family allowed the young person to know more about the job at hand and could then judge more accurately whether this was a job which they would like to do, or one for which they had competencies. It may also be that recommendations by employees already working in a particular company, agency or institution were given greater preference by employers.

One could also question as to how the friends of young people come to know about available employment opportunities. Are they working men and women who have knowledge of positions vacant within the industries in which they work? These would certainly have implications for the future strengthening of strategies employed by young people in their search for employment.

It is also important to reflect further on the fact that job-seeking strategies are largely followed through friends and family. Professional guidance is either not available or not seen as useful on behalf of a majority of job-seeking youth. This would require urgent attention in order to improve job-seeking strategies and to raise awareness on alternative employment avenues.

Successful job-seeking methods

Experiences of employed youth

Around 64 per cent of young employees have been recruited through recommendations of their friends or relatives. In a more formal business set up one may not expect personal contacts to play a major role in recruiting employees. Nevertheless the survey results prove otherwise in Sri Lanka. It is interesting to note that even in the metropolitan city of Colombo nearly 78 per cent of young employees in the sample population have been recruited through recommendations of relatives and friends. The survey yields similar results for all districts with the highest of 92 per cent for Jaffna district (see Table 3.18).

Table 3.18: Successful job-seeking methods used by employed youth

Methods	Men	Women	Total
Directly Recruited by Employer	25.6	22.0	23.8
Individual Agent/Contractor	2.6	3.6	3.1
Private Agency	3.1	1.8	2.4
Recommendation of Friends/ Relatives	63.0	64.6	63.8
Answering an Advertisement	1.3	1.3	1.3
Through Education/ Training Institute	1.3	2.2	1.8
Through Political Contacts	0.4	0.9	0.7
Government Employment Service	0.9	1.8	1.3
Job Fairs	0.9	0.4	0.7
Other	0.9	1.3	1.1
Percentage	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total	227	223	450

Source: STWT (2003)

Nearly one fourth of the employees in the sample got their jobs through the second most popular channel – direct recruitment by the employer. There are no significant gender differences in the methods of recruitment but more women have used the first method and more men have used the second method. More formal recruitment methods – such as government employment services, job fairs, advertisements and private recruitment agencies – have only played a marginal role in the recruitment of young employees.

Another interesting finding in the sample is the less significance of political interference in recruitments. Only 0.7 per cent of the sample has used this channel to get an employment. Although it cannot be generalized that political influences have now become less significant in the recruitment process in Sri Lanka, -since the current sample included only a particular age group of 15 years and 24 years which is, of course, a small fraction of total number of employees- it is certainly a positive indication of a move towards good governance.

Perhaps the decline in government sector employment creation could be one of the reasons for this trend. By casual observation one could see that not many young job seekers standing in queues to meet politicians in order to get recommendation letters for the existing vacancies in the government sector – which was a common scene in the 1970s and the 1980s. Yet, the recommendations of friends and relatives have a very strong influence in the recruitment process that reflects labour market distortions.

Experiences by gender, sector and ethnicity

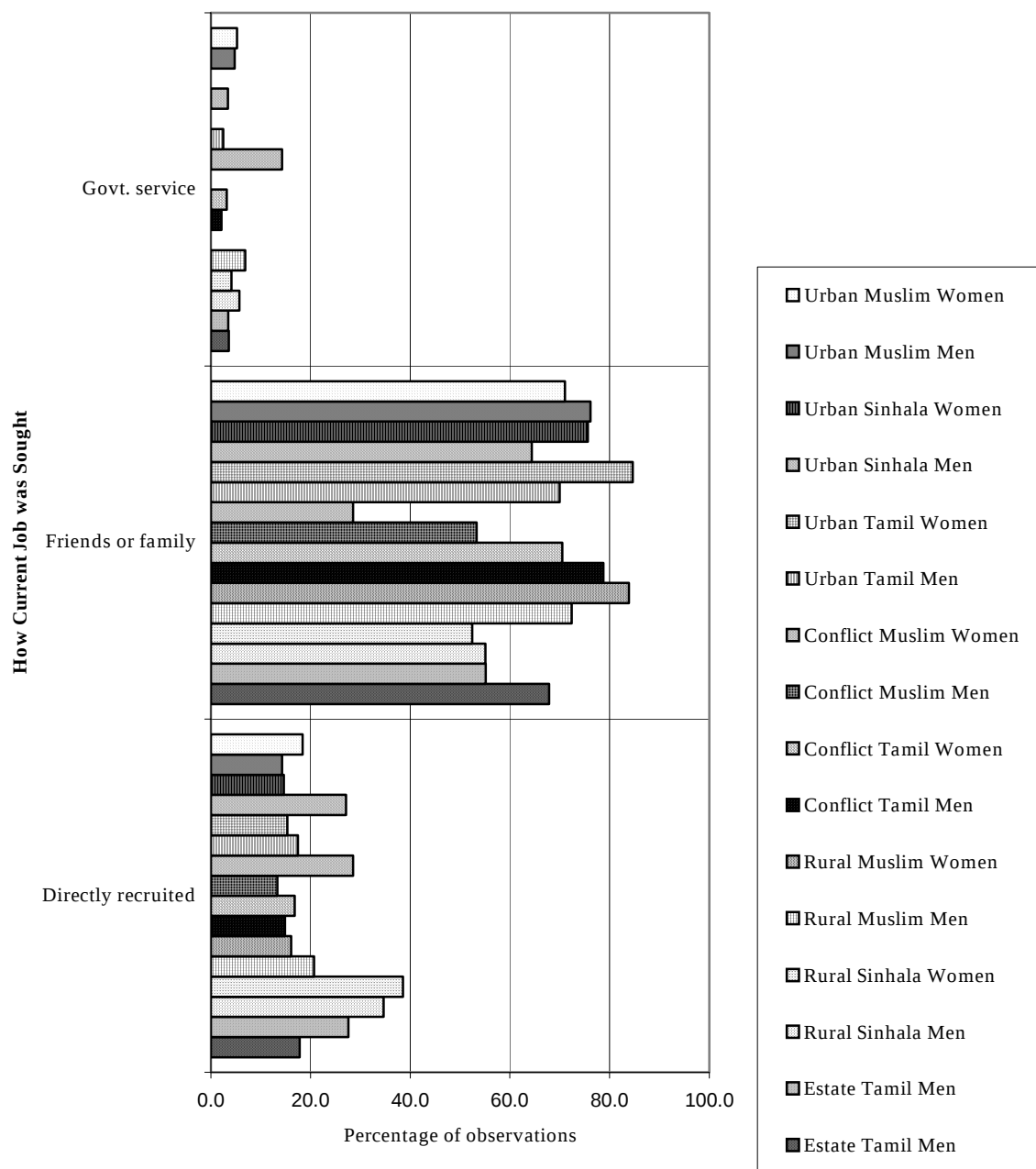
Again the STWT survey revealed interesting results when the data was segregated by ethnicity, geographical location, sector and gender. The findings from the three most popular strategies to secure a job are presented below in Figure 3.3. The figure shows the perceptions of young people regarding the most important strategy for job seeking, e.g. through friends or family. Large percentages of young people of different ethnicities and in geographical location noted that their current job had been found through friends or family members (approx. 28-85 per cent). The next most common way in which their current job had been sought was through direct recruitment (approx. 18-39 per cent). Although relevant for only some categories of young people, government employment services had been the main way of having sought their current job for a smaller percentage of young people (3-15 per cent).

Furthermore, the high rates through which people have found their jobs through the friends and relatives reveal that these strategies are the means through which most people find work. The very low rates of having work through other strategies (such as private agents, labour contractors, education and training institutes, advertisements, etc. which are not featured here) indicate that these certainly do not meet the needs of young people in their search for employment, and that there is scope for improving the availability and credibility of these strategies as well.

However, these findings do not necessarily mean that young people can find jobs only through their friends or family. Perhaps for a variety of reasons, many young people may prefer to take on jobs in industries where their friends currently work or which has been recommended through them as speculated before. Furthermore, it is not clear whether the job is recommended to young men and women by friends but that formal application and recruitment processes are still undertaken by the young man or woman in question in order to formally secure the position. This area certainly needs further study.

The pattern of job-seeking through friends or family seems to be relatively less prevalent among young Muslim women in Batticaloa in comparison to people from other ethnic backgrounds or in other areas. As can be seen from the graph, almost equal proportions of Muslim women had found their current job through friends or family (28 per cent), direct recruitment (28 per cent) or government service (15 per cent). This is particularly surprising given that most Muslim women perceived that the strategy of seeking jobs through friends or family as the most important.

Figure 3.3: Strategies by which current job had been sought by gender and ethnicity by %



Source: STWT (2003)

Recruitment and training strategies of employers

Large enterprises filled their vacancies mainly through advertisements, while two out of five small enterprises depended on advertising, as they filled their vacancies through acquaintances (through relatives and friends of employees, managers and owners of the enterprise) and through promotions. Most of the big enterprises were located in and around Colombo and as a result Colombo based enterprises relied more on advertising than those outside Colombo.

Table 3.19: Percentages of enterprises by method of filling vacancies (%)

Method	Small enterprises	Big enterprises	Total
Advertisements	40.0	100.0	63.30
From education/training institution	3.3	-	2.00
From government employment service	3.3	-	2.00
From private employment agent	3.3	-	2.00
Relatives or friends of owners/managers	20.0	-	12.20
Relatives or friends of employees	16.7	-	10.20
Promoting employees who are already in the enterprise	10.0	-	6.10
Others, specify	3.3	-	2.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.00

Source: STWT (2003)

Employers/managers were also asked about their contracts with training institutions to train their employees. Only 1/4th of the enterprises, big or small, had such contracts. The majority had no such contracts as shown in Table 3.20.

Table 3.20: Percentage of enterprises by having contracts with training institutions (%)

	Type of enterprise		Total
	Small enterprises	Big enterprises	
Yes	26.7	26.3	26.5
No	73.3	73.7	73.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Providing chances to employees to participate in internships is one way of improving the quality of employees, which in turn improves the quality of the production in enterprises. A majority of the big enterprises when compared with smaller ones had provided internship programmes. However, half of the small enterprises had also provided internships as shown in Table 3.21.

Table 3.21: Percentage of enterprises by ever participating in internship programmes

	Small enterprises	Big enterprises	Total
Yes	50.0	68.4	57.1
No	50.0	31.6	42.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Socio-cultural factors impinging on equal opportunities for work

Questions related to the best age to start working or to get married could be important to understand gender related differences in regard to access to education and employment, especially if the respective age for women would be very low. However, the Sri Lankan findings show a rather positive picture, with comparatively high age to start working or to get married.

The perceptions on the **best age to start work** for men and women are given in Table 3.22. The best age to start working for men seems to be less than that for women. It seems that the youth, both men and women preferred to be employed before the age of 25 years. This pattern was evident in almost all the districts. The perceptions of the **best age to get married** are given in Table 3.23, for both men and women. Women preferred to marry much earlier, before age 25, while men preferred to get married after age 25. In this case also this pattern existed in all the districts. However, compared to other developing countries, the age for marriage is clearly much higher. This also explains the much longer period of women continuing their education and the generally higher age of women before they get their first child.

Table 3.22: Percentage of respondents by best age to start work and gender (%)

Best age to start work	Colombo	Kurunegala	Matara	Monaragala	Hatton	Batticaloa	Jaffna	Total
Men								
<20	57.8	52.2	51.0	56.5	47.1	50.0	44.5	52.7
20-24	38.9	45.3	43.5	39.0	48.7	42.9	45.0	42.4
25+	3.3	2.5	5.5	4.5	4.2	7.1	10.5	4.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Women								
<20	37.1	32.1	33.0	32.5	25.4	26.3	28.5	32.1
20-24	57.9	63.2	59.0	60.5	66.1	62.3	60.5	60.7
25+	5.0	4.7	8.0	7.0	8.5	11.4	11.0	7.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Table 3.23: Percentage of respondents by district and gender on best age to marry

Best age to marry	Colombo	Kurunegala	Matara	Monaragala	Hatton	Batticaloa	Jaffna	Total
Men								
<20	1.2	0.3	1.0	4.0	0.0	0.8	2.0	1.3
20-24	23.0	17.7	19.5	23.0	17.8	16.9	5.5	18.6
25+	75.9	82.0	79.5	73.0	82.2	82.2	92.5	80.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Women								
<20	11.5	10.1	4.5	8.0	10.2	14.0	5.0	9.6
20-24	61.6	58.2	55.0	58.0	47.5	54.2	43.5	55.9
25+	26.9	31.6	40.5	34.0	42.4	31.8	51.5	34.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Young people in Sri Lanka from both sexes also share to a considerable amount the opinion that women and men should have equal responsibilities for household work (around 60 per cent for all groups interviewed and more or less equally expressed by men and women). It is, however, not possible through this data to verify, in how far these opinions are put into practice in their later life.

4. Employment and entrepreneurship: Experiences and opinions of Sri Lankan youth⁸

4.1 Introduction

One of the key objectives of economic development is to create more employment and thereby increase the income and living standards of the people. The perceptions and opinions of young employees on their respective employment are very important because this particular segment of employees will remain in the labour force – generating income by engaging in productive activities - at least for the next 30 years. Their well being, contentment and satisfaction are critical for the economy as well as for the population in general.

A working person in the Sri Lankan context is defined by The Industrial Disputes Act No. 43 of 1950 as *'any person who has entered into or works under a contract with an employer in any capacity whether the contract is expressed or implied, oral or in writing and whether it is a contract of service or of apprenticeship or a contract personally to execute any work or labour and includes any person ordinarily employed under such contract whether such person is or is not in employment at any particular time'* [Handbook of Labour Relations, 1997:3]. 'The existence of a contract is *sine qua non* for identifying a working person. The legal basis of the employment relationship is usually the exchange of promise to work in return for a promise to pay wages' [Handbook of Labour Relations, 1997:11].

This attempt to understand the perceptions and experiences of employment and entrepreneurship in Sri Lanka focuses on the following issues. Firstly, which employment sector do youth in Sri Lanka prefer from those prevailing in the country? Such preferences might change as the employment status changes because people become more aware of alternative options as well as develop a greater criticism of the experience of working in a particular employment sector. These preferences might also differ amongst the various ethnic groups in Sri Lanka as well as geographical location because the availability of options may also differ. Secondly, it is important to understand what characteristics youth appreciate in a job as this can provide some guidance on how jobs can be made more attractive. In the same vein, it is necessary to obtain the perspective of employers not only to the match between the two perspectives but also because it may help to identify further concerns of youth with regard to characteristics of work.

Further aspects to investigate are the expectations with regard to minimum income as well as reasons why youth accept employment or stop further education. As a final aspect to understanding how youth intend to progress further, a brief look at their goals will be examined. In relation to entrepreneurship, reasons for starting self-employment, how self-employment was financed and what kinds of training opportunities have been provided and what further kinds of assistance are required are examined.

Providing a clear definition for the concept of 'decent job' is somewhat difficult. Different analysts define the concept differently to suit their analysis. Nevertheless, there have been some common grounds on which one can provide a broader definition for a decent job. The ILO has proposed a decent work agenda which promotes opportunities for men and women to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. The organization has established four central pillars for decent work: firstly the promotion of fundamental principles and rights at work for all workers, national and non-national, irrespective of where they work; secondly the creation of productive and remunerative employment; thirdly, the extension of social protection especially to vulnerable groups of workers, and finally, the organization and representation of workers and employers in social dialogue institutions and processes.

In Sri Lanka, during the last 115 years there are 48 major legislation were formulated with amendments to safeguard the interests of the employees [Ekanayake 2001]. Although some of the

⁸ This chapter has been mainly written by M. Ganeshamoorthy and Maleeka Salih

legislation obsolete, others are still in use. Legal provisions in Sri Lanka with regard to labour, largely intend to install the basic characteristics of a decent job. In the present study, however, the definition for a decent job has been used in a broader way. The respondents were not given a clear-cut definition for a decent job. Instead they were asked to make their own decision on what they think about a decent job.

4.2. The different sectors of employment in Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan employees are categorized in the following ways:

1. Government Servants/ State Officers/ Public Officers
2. Provincial Public Service
3. Employees of Public Corporations (Private sector)
4. Domestic work
5. Plantations
6. Industrial Sector
7. Mercantile Sector
8. Co-operatives
9. Private Transport

Table 4.1: Status of employment in Sri Lanka 1990-2002 (%)

Period	Public Sector employees	Private sector Employees	Employers	Self Employed	Unpaid Family Workers	Total
1990	21.5	33.7	1.8	29.2	13.8	100
1994	16.4	44.3	2.3	27.2	9.8	100
1995	15.6	44.3	2.5	28.3	9.4	100
1996	15.0	45.8	2.3	26.8	10.0	100
1997	15.1	44.3	2.3	28.8	9.4	100
1998	14.5	41.2	1.9	28.9	13.6	100
1999	14.4	43.1	2.0	28.3	12.2	100
2000a	13.4	42.9	2.4	28.4	13.0	100
2001b	13.9	44.8	2.3	28.5	10.5	100
2002b	13.2	45.1	2.9	28.0	10.8	100

a. average of four quarters

b. average of three quarters

[Source: Central Bank Annual Report 2002, Table 7.3]

Self employed and own account workers are however not included in the above categorization. Of these 9 employment sectors the Government sector typically constitutes the single largest category of employees. Table 4.1 shows the status of employment in Sri Lanka putting together the first three sectors into a single category of public sector employees and the rest into the category of the private sector workers. The data indicate that the percentage of public sector employment has come down from about 22 per cent in 1990 to about 13 per cent in the year 2002 whereas the percentage of employees in the private sector has had a steady increase from about 34 per cent to 44 per cent during the same period. The percentage of the self employed remained almost unchanged

within the range of 27-29 per cent and the percentage of unpaid family workers show some fluctuations between the range of 9- 14 per cent during the period under consideration.

As has been discussed elsewhere, the government policy of reducing the size of the public sector has led to the decline of the share of the public sector employment during the last decade and the share of the private sector has increased significantly. Table 4.2 provides basic information regarding labour force and employment in Sri Lanka. The Labour force shows a steady increase of 18 per cent during the period of 1993-2002, whereas employment statistics record a 24.3 per cent growth during the same period. This means that more jobs have been created to absorb the people in the labour force. Unemployment rate (unemployed as a percentage of labour force), which was at 13.8 per cent in 1993, has come down to 9.2 per cent in 2002. Labour force consists of around 50 per cent of the household population and this ratio did not change significantly during the period concerned.

Table 4.2: Labour force, employment, unemployment and labour force participation

Period	Household population [age 10 years and above] '000 persons	Labour force '000 persons	Employed '000 persons	Unemployed '000 persons	Labour force participation rate [Labour force as a % of household population]		
					Male	Female	All
1993	12,278	6,032	5,201	831	65.3	33.1	49.1
1994	12,493	6,079	5,281	798	65.4	32.0	48.7
1995	12,736	6,106	5,357	749	64.4	31.7	47.9
1996	12,831	6,242	5,537	705	65.9	31.6	48.6
1997	12,871	6,266	5,608	658	65.7	32.0	48.7
1998	12,882	6,660	6,049	611	67.3	36.4	51.7
1999	13,169	6,673	6,082	591	67.7	34.1	50.7
2000	13,572	6,827	6,310	517	67.2	33.9	50.3
2001	13,870	6,773	6,236	537	66.3	31.9	48.8
2002a	14,178	7,121	6,467	654	67.6	33.5	50.2

a. Average of three quarters

[Source: Central Bank Annual Report 2002, Table 7.2]

4.3 Youth preferences for sector of employment

Preferences of youth for employment sector have been a much-debated topic and one of great concern in the last few decades in Sri Lanka. This has largely been because of the impact of economic liberalization introduced in 1977, but also because of the relatively recent youth unrest in Sri Lanka, as has been described in the introductory chapter of this report.

The presentation of youth preferences for sector of employment is divided into two sections; namely, by employment status and by ethno-geographical identity. This has been done because policies will have to address these issues very specifically as grievances related to differential ethno-geographical treatment have fuelled the ongoing armed struggle in the North-East of Sri Lanka, whilst geographic discriminations had been the main cause for conflict in Southern Sri Lanka.

Employment status and preferred employment sector

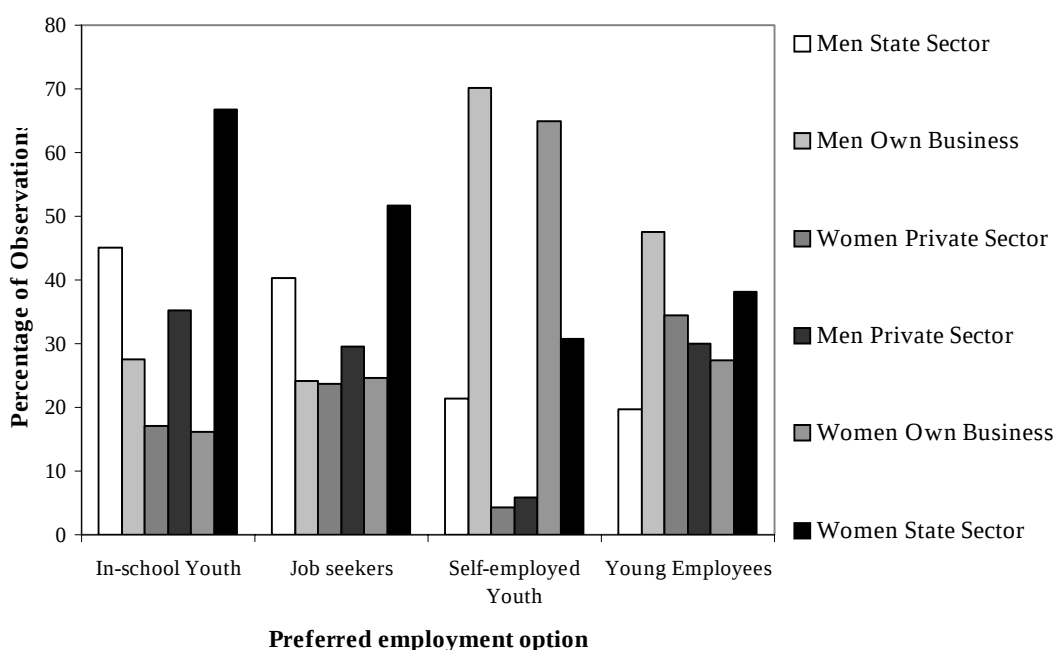
The figure below shows that the option of working in the government or public (state) sector was most appealing to schooling and job-seeking youth, both men and women. The most preferred option for young employed men is to own their businesses (48 per cent) whilst young employed women would prefer to work in the public or state sector (38 per cent). Almost 45 per cent of schooling men and 65 per cent of schooling women would prefer to work for the state. The comparative figures for job-seeking men and women are 40 per cent and 53 per cent respectively. For self-employed young men and women, the preferred option overwhelmingly is to own their businesses

(72 per cent and 68 per cent approximately). The highest inter-group variations were noted within the self-employed youth group (5-72 per cent).

While the preferences of self-employed young people appear to match their interests, about 32 per cent of self-employed women, and 48 per cent and 38 per cent of employed men and women, respectively, would prefer to work in a sector different to the one in which they are currently employed. The fact that the preferences differ markedly between job-seeking youth on the one hand and self-employed/employed youth (more so for men than women) may indicate that the job-seeking youth have particular preferences that make it difficult for them to find work of their preference, i.e. employment within the state sector. In other words, those men who are currently self-employed or employed may have taken up these activities because they have always preferred to own their business or engage in the private sector.

Additionally, one may presume that exposure to and participation within the labour market has had a transforming impact on young men and women. They may have realized through experience that jobs in the public sector are difficult to acquire and may have changed their preferences to something more realistically available in the short-run, although the rates of change in preference differed between men and women. This latter may be an indication of the gender-insensitivity of the private sector in which many of these young women are engaged in, with lesser options for promotion and greater vulnerability to being laid off work if women decide to have children. The lack of understanding about why certain groups of people would prefer some options to others makes it difficult to explore how to link existing labour market opportunities to the preferences stated by young people in the survey.

Figure 4.1: Preferred employment options by economic status of youth and gender



Source: STWT (2003)

Preferences of schooling youth

With regard to preferred sector of employment, it is significant that more than half of schooling youth preferred to work in the government sector (53 per cent), while another 21 per cent of youth preferred to start their own business. Only 18 per cent would like to work in either small or large private companies. The disaggregated data shows certain significant variations in social and other divisions. For instance, 63.1 per cent of young women preferred government jobs with only 15.2 per cent of them opting for self-employment. On the other hand, nearly 28 per cent of young men opted for self-employment while another 22 per cent preferred to work either in small or large private companies. A significantly higher proportion of Muslim youth preferred to start their own business (33 per cent) in comparison to their Tamil (16.7 per cent) and Sinhalese (19.5 per cent) counterparts.

Preference for the government sector is also high among youth from rural districts and the estate sector where private sector opportunities are also less available. It is interesting that significant proportion of youth from Batticaloa (65 per cent) prefers government jobs, indicating perhaps the greater security associated with a government job in a region where agricultural and business oriented activities were severely interrupted due to the violent civil war. Interest in government jobs also increases with more education. The highest percentage is reported from those with A/L's (55 per cent). On the other hand, those with primary education tend to have a much greater preference for private sector work (66 per cent).

Table 4.3: Preferences of schooling youth on sector of employment (%)

GROUPS	Own business	Government/ public sector	Multinational corporation	Large private company	Small private company	Other
In-school	21.4	53.3	2.4	11.9	5.9	4.2
Men	27.5	45.1	3.4	14.6	6.4	3.0
Women	15.2	63.1	1.4	9.2	5.5	5.5
Colombo	23.8	43.1	3.1	12.3	6.9	10.8
Kurunagala	16.3	61.3	1.3	15.0	6.3	-
Matara	28.0	42.0	2.0	20.0	4.0	4.0
Monaragala	26.0	60.0	2.0	12.0	-	-
Hatton	6.7	73.3	3.3	6.7	6.7	3.3
Batticaloa	25.0	65.0	1.7	8.3	-	-
Jaffna	18.0	50.0	4.0	6.0	18.0	4.0
Sinhala	19.5	54.5	1.5	16.5	3.0	5.0
Tamil	16.7	57.3	3.3	8.7	10.7	3.3
Muslim	33.0	47.0	3.0	8	5.0	4.0
Primary	-	33.3	-	33.3	33.3	-
Secondary	24.1	55.4	2.2	6.3	7.1	4.9
O'L passed	18.5	54.1	4.1	15.8	3.4	4.1
A'L passed	20.0	55.0	-	15.0	7.5	2.5

Source: STWT (2003)

Preferences of job-seeking youth

The percentage of job-seeking youth who preferred to work for the state sector is 42.4 per cent as compared to 53.3 per cent of schooling youth, indicating a slight decline for this preference. There are no notable gender differences, although there is a slight preference amongst women for the state sector as compared to men (46.3 to 38.6 per cent).

The highest preference for the state sector came from Monaragala job-seeking youth at 56 per cent whilst the lowest came from Batticaloa at 33.3 per cent. The highest preference for starting own business came from Jaffna at 34 per cent whilst the lowest came from Hatton at 13.3 per cent. On the other hand, Hatton job-seeking youth showed considerable preferences for state sector (40 per cent) and working for a large private company (30 per cent). The latter figure is high compared to youth

from other districts who would prefer to work for a large private company, with percentages ranging from 2 per cent (in Monaragala) to 16 per cent (in Matara).

A comparatively high proportion of youth in Kurunegala preferred to work in the state sector compared to youth from Kurunegala who preferred to own their businesses (50 per cent against 18.8 per cent). When comparing these figures to schooling youth, the percentage of Jaffna youth who preferred to start their own businesses increased from 18 to 34 per cent. The percentage of primary educated youth has increased to 17.2 per cent in this category as compared to schooling (0 per cent).

Table 4.4: Preferences of job-seeking youth on sector of employment (%)

Groups	Start my own business	Work for government/public sector	Work for a large multinational corporation	Work for a large private company	Work for small private company	Other
Job-seekers	23.3	42.4	2.4	11.8	11.3	8.7
Men	24.2	38.6	3.6	14.3	11.7	7.6
Women	22.5	46.3	1.3	9.3	11.0	9.7
Colombo	20.8	40.0	2.3	12.3	11.5	13.1
Kurunegala	18.8	50.0	3.8	10.0	11.3	6.3
Matara	24.0	38.0	-	16.0	16.0	6.0
Monaragala	32.0	56.0	2.0	2.0	4.0	4.0
Hatton	13.3	40.0	-	30.0	10.0	6.7
Batticaloa	23.3	33.3	1.7	11.7	15.0	15.0
Jaffna	34.0	40.0	6.0	8.0	10.0	2.0
Sinhala	21.5	53.0	2.5	7.5	8.5	7.0
Tamil	20.8	38.9	2.7	16.8	12.8	8.1
Muslim	30.0	27.0	2.0	13.0	15.0	13.0
Primary	17.2	24.1	-	10.3	31.0	17.2
Secondary	29.4	34.8	1.0	11.9	11.9	10.9
GCE O'level passed	21.4	47.1	5.0	10.7	11.4	4.3
GCE A'level passed	9.7	61.3	3.2	14.5	3.2	8.1

Source: STWT (2003)

Preferences of employed youth

The changes that took place between schooling and job seeking appeared to be strengthened in employment. State sector employment further decreased as a preference from 38.6 per cent in the job-seeking category to 27.8 per cent whilst starting own businesses became increasingly preferred from 23.3 per cent to 36.7 per cent. The changes have mainly come from a shift in the preferences of employed men. The percentage of men who preferred to own their businesses increased from 24.2 per cent in the job-seeking category to 46.9 per cent in the employed category, although the preferences of women remained fairly constant in relation to this option. However, a comparatively smaller percentage of women had shifted in their preference from working for the state to working in a large private company. 36.3 per cent of employed women preferred to work for the state compared to 46.3 per cent of job-seeking women, although 17.5 per cent of employed women preferred to work for a large private company compared to 9.3 per cent of job seeking women.

With regard to district variations, the percentages of employed youth preferring to own their businesses range from 23.3 per cent (in Hatton) to 48 per cent (in Monaragala). This is in comparison with a range of 13.3 per cent (in Hatton) to 34 per cent (in Jaffna) in the job-seeking category. Significant decreases have been noted in reference to state sector employment; 56 per cent of job-seeking youth in Monaragala preferred state sector employment compared to 34 per cent of employed youth in Monaragala.

Similarly, 39.3 per cent of primary educated employed youth preferred to start their own businesses compared to 17.2 per cent of job-seeking primary educated youth. This may indicate a deep dissatisfaction with working conditions or future prospects or it may indicate a greater confidence to be able to successfully launch and maintain a self-initiated business scheme after having taken part in the labour market. Increases amongst groups with GCE O/L and A/L have also been noted with 24.5 per cent of A/L educated youth and 35.3 per cent of O/L educated youth preferring to start own businesses in comparison to 9.7 and 21.4 per cent respectively.

Table 4.5: Preferences of employed youth on sector of employment (%)

Groups	Start own business	Work for government/ public sector	Work for large multinational corporation	Work for large private company	Work for large private company	Other
Employees	36.7	27.8	4.0	13.8	13.6	4.0
Men	46.9	19.5	4.4	10.2	15.5	3.5
Women	26.5	36.3	3.6	17.5	11.7	4.5
Colombo	34.1	31.0	3.9	12.4	14.7	3.9
Kurunegala	36.3	23.8	7.5	11.3	18.8	2.5
Matara	44.0	26.0	0.0	18.0	8.0	4.0
Monaragala	48.0	34.0	2.0	4.0	6.0	6.0
Hatton	23.3	30.0	3.3	23.3	16.7	3.3
Batticaloa	38.3	23.3	1.7	18.3	11.7	6.7
Jaffna	32.0	26.0	8.0	16.0	16.0	2.0
Sinhala	38.5	34.5	3.0	10.0	9.5	4.5
Tamil	31.8	25.8	4.6	19.9	14.6	3.3
Muslim	40.8	17.3	5.1	12.2	20.4	4.1
Primary	39.3	16.1	4.5	17.0	21.4	1.8
Secondary	39.2	25.2	3.5	9.1	18.9	4.2
GCE O/L Passed	35.3	35.3	5.9	11.8	6.9	4.9
GCE A/L Passed	24.5	46.9	4.1	16.3	2.0	6.1

Source: STWT (2003)

Preferences of self-employed youth

The preference shown by a majority of self-employed youth to start their own business is significant. This is more pronounced among men than among women. What is also significant is the fact that a significant proportion of self-employed youth (26 per cent) wished to find a job in the state sector. The pattern is particularly evident in more disadvantaged rural areas like Monaragala, Hatton and Kurunegala, where opportunities for lucrative business activities may be rare. Moreover, disadvantaged youth are unlikely to have the capacity to embark upon such business.

Furthermore, it is important that there are no notable differences in the percentages of preference for the state sector either amongst men or women when comparing the employed category of youth to the self-employed category. However, there are greater inter-district variations with regard to preferences for the state sector employment between the employed and self-employed categories. The percentage in preference for the state sector employment ranges from 13.8 per cent (in Colombo) to 50 per cent (in Hatton), compared to 23.3 per cent (in Batticaloa) to 34 per cent (in Monaragala). The corresponding range of percentages for preference for owning businesses is 36.7 per cent (in Hatton) to 77.7 per cent (in Colombo) in the self-employed category compared to 23.3 per cent (in Hatton) to 48 per cent in Monaragala in the employed category.

Table 4.6: Preferences of self-employed youth on sector of employment (%)

Self-employed youth	Start my own business	Government sector	Private sector	Other
Men	70.8	21.4	7.0	0.8
Women	63.5	30.7	5.3	0.5
Sinhala	70.0	27.5	2.0	0.5
Tamil	66.5	23.1	9.8	0.6
Muslim	64.8	23.9	9.9	1.4
Colombo	77.7	13.8	7.7	0.8
Kurunegala	65.0	30.0	5.0	-
Matara	70.0	26.0	2.0	2.0
Monaragala	60.0	40.0	-	-
Hatton	36.7	50.0	13.3	-
Batticaloa	71.4	21.4	5.4	1.8
Jaffna	66.0	22.0	12.0	-

Source: STWT (2003)

Experiences of self-employment

Reasons for starting self-employment activities

Promoting self-employment activities is crucial in reducing unemployment in Sri Lanka. Since the government sector is already over staffed and with the pressures mounting from international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF to have a smaller state sector, there is little hope that the government sector will be able to create more employment opportunities in the future. And the job creating capacity of the private sector is also limited at present. Encouraging self-employment activities, therefore, seems to be a practical option to address the unemployment problem although it has its own limitations and drawbacks.

Although many young people prefer to be employed in the State and private sectors, there is a cross section of people who prefer to work on their own. In order to identify the reason for selecting self-employment the current survey asked the self employed youth to select the most appropriate reason for their decision to be self-employed. And the vast majority of the self-employed stated that they prefer self-employment because they like to work independently. Nearly 62 per cent of self-employed men and 64 per cent of self-employed women gave this answer. A comparatively low 16 per cent expressed that they opted to be self-employed only because they could not find a salaried job.

Table 4.7: Reasons for choosing self-employment (%)

Reason	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	Male	Female	Total
Could not Find a Salaried Job	16.9	11.2	30.0	38.0	0.0	0.0	22.0	19.7	13.1	16.4
Preference for Independence	63.8	73.8	46.0	34.0	86.7	88.3	44.0	61.8	64.4	63.1
More Flexible Working Hours	9.3	8.7	14.0	22.0	0.0	0.0	6.0	8.1	9.9	9.0
Higher Income Levels	7.7	6.3	10.0	6.0	13.3	10.0	6.0	9.7	5.8	7.8
Other Reasons	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7	22.0	0.8	6.8	3.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100.0	100.0	100.0

D1 = COLOMBO, D2 = KURUNEGALA, D3 = MATARA, D4 = MONARAGALA, D5 = HATTON, D6 = BATTICALOA, D7 = JAFFNA

Source: STWT (2003)

More than 80 per cent of the respondents from Hatton and Batticaloa districts replied that their preference for more independence motivated them to be self employed. The possibility of getting high income yields and flexible working hours are another motivation for the preference for self-employment. 14 per cent of the respondents from Matara district and 22 per cent from Monaragala district have chosen self-employment because of flexible working hours. In all other districts this motive played a minor role. Higher income possibilities also attracted more young men and women into self-employment activities in Matara, Hatton, and Batticaloa district. Based on these results it is evident that there are three main reasons for young people to select self-employment: greater independence, higher income opportunities, and flexible working hours.

Sources of finance for Initiating self-employment

Although the decision to start a self-employment activity can be made very easily, finding resources for it could prove to be very difficult. Finding financial resources would be on the top of the list of hurdles one would face in starting self-employment. Hence the survey requested a group of self employed people to share their experiences in overcoming financial hurdles at the starting of a self-employment activity. For most of the self-employed, the required money came from three mainly informal, non-commercial sources: own savings, saving of the family and loans from family and friends. Taken together, these three channels account for nearly 70 per cent of the sources of finance. In other words, formal financial institutions do not seem to reach many of the actual and potential self-employed youth.

More than 30 per cent of the respondents started an economic activity using their own savings while 25 per cent have utilized family thrift funds and 13 per cent have taken loans from family members and friends. Formal organized financial sources have made a very small contribution in supplying necessary financial resources for the self-employed. The table below brings out a gender aspect that men are more reliant on family savings to begin a business activity whereas women rely more on own savings. More than 28 per cent of men have used family savings, while another 28 per cent have also used their own savings, whereas nearly 22 per cent of women relied on the former and 32 per cent on the latter. This result suggests that women are more self-reliant than men in finding finance to start a business.

Table 4.8: Source of finance for starting self-employment

	Self-employed		
	Men	Women	Total
No Money Required	17.4	22.5	19.9
Own Savings	27.8	32.5	30.1
Savings of Family members	28.2	21.5	24.8
Loan from family/Friends	12.0	14.1	13.0
Loan from Bank/Institution	3.1	1.6	2.4
Loan from Private Lender	6.9	5.8	6.4
Loan/Assistance from Government Institution	1.2	1.0	1.1
Funds from Saving/Credit Groups	0.4	0.5	0.5
Funds from Cooperative	0.8	0.0	0.4
Credit from Customer/Middlemen/Agent/Supplier	1.5	0.5	1.0
Other	0.8	0.0	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Types of assistance required by the self-employed

It is very clear that the promotion of self-employment is important, yet the self employed face many obstacles in starting and running of the economic activity. The present study asked the self employed the type of assistance that they require in order to improve their current activity and the responses are recorded below.

Table 4.9: Types of assistance required for improving self-employment activity

Districts	Financial [bank loans]	No help needed	Access to the market	Counselling and guidance	Equip- ments	Minimum price rule	New job opportunities	Un- specified	Total
Colombo	53.1	21.5	3.1	0.8	7.7	0.8	-	13.1	100.0
Kurunegala	76.3	20.0	3.8	-	-	-	-	-	100.0
Matara	82.0	6.0	4.0	2.0	6.0	-	-	-	100.0
Monaragala	82.0	14.0	2.0	-	2.0	-	-	-	100.0
Hatton	80.0	20.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	100.0
Batticaloa	80.0	18.3	1.7	-	-	-	-	-	100.0
Jaffna	68.0	6.0	-	2.0	10.0	2.0	4.0	8.0	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

The results are quite revealing, more than 70 per cent of the respondents prioritized financial assistance in the form of bank loans as the most important assistance they required. The single most important hurdle in starting a self-employment activity would be the lack of access to financial resources. As discussed earlier, many of the self-employed found the capital to start self-employment activities from own savings or family savings or loans from friends and relatives. Many did not use formal sources of finance. Getting financial resources from formal sources such as banks and lending institutions seems to be a difficult task. A lot of paper work has to be done and long procedures have to be followed; the borrower has to bring a guarantor, and/or to submit a guarantee document to the lender, in addition to the project plan of the self-employment activity. The process takes several months, by which time the borrower may abandon the idea of starting a self-employment activity. These practical hurdles in accessing credit sources could be the reason for the self-employed to rank financial assistance as their first priority. Particularly, more than 80 per cent of the self-employed in districts such as Matara, Monaragala, Hatton and Batticaloa said that they required financial assistance.

Social expectations and self-employment

However, many young people experience societal pressure to find employment that is in line with common status perceptions. Youth with O/level education or higher are often under pressure to find jobs perceived as appropriate by members of their local communities, even if they themselves would not mind taking up different employment avenues. Two similar statements from the National Youth Survey of youth from different parts of the country highlight this dilemma encountered by youth:

There is a saying that even if one supervizes a poultry farm, it must be a government poultry farm. The attraction of the government is that even after retirement, the government pays a pension. I think it is better to find your own self-employment. But our society does not respect the educated people who are not employed in the government sector. (Jaffna youth, 22 yr old; primary education; private sector employment; female)

Sri Lankan culture is such that it does not view self-employment as employment. It should not be like that. In marriage the male is required to have a stable job in the public or private sector; self-employment does not count very much to people (Hambantota youth, 22 yr old, A/L education, male).

The above statements reveal some important implications as to why social status of a job matters more than financial aspects alone. Beside personal choices about aspired characteristics of a job, societal values and classifications do have an impact on youth as well, especially as the question of appropriate employment is closely linked to the question of fulfilling the prerequisites to get married (with parental approval). This is true especially for male youth, whereas for female youth a good education (to provide good education to the children) is an important feature to achieve as a prerequisite to get married (Mayer/ Salih 2002).

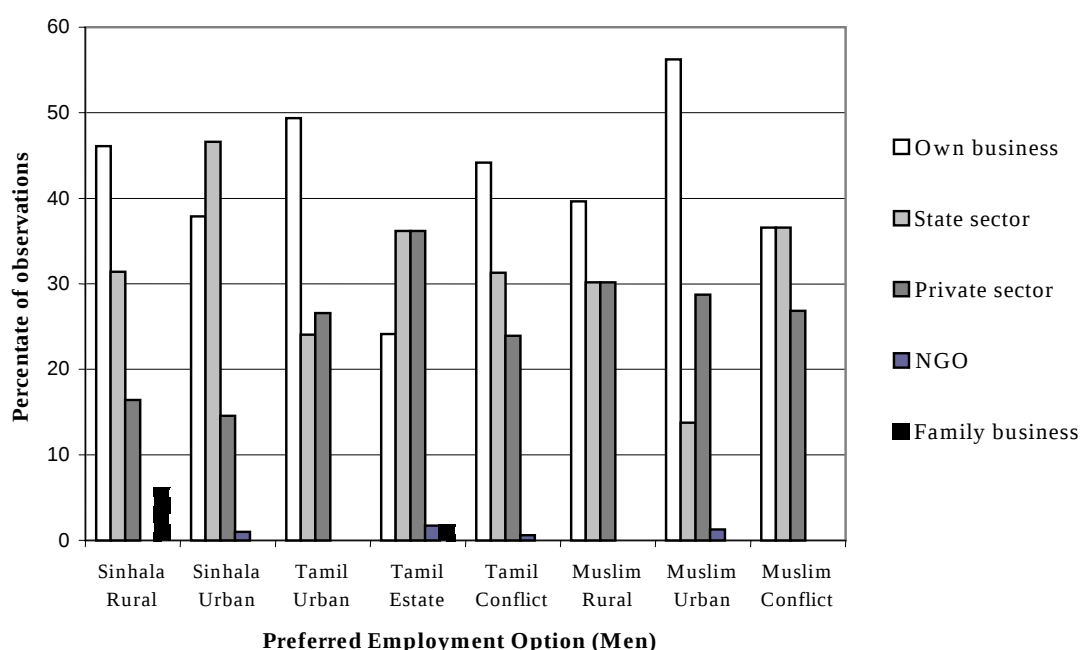
Job characteristics such as permanent employment, social security provisions, respectable social status etc. therefore receive much higher value than salary levels. As marriage constitutes an important milestone for youth in their transition to adulthood in Sri Lanka, these cultural factors with regard to employment aspirations of youth needs to be better understood in order to formulate a successful youth employment policy.

Ethno-geographical identity and preferred employment sector

Preferences of men

Figure 4.2 below shows the main preferences for employment by ethnicity and location for men. The data help to track the difference within each option across geo-ethnic dimensions. With regard to the option of starting own business, it can be seen that this is most preferred by Muslim men in the (Colombo) urban area, with a percentage of almost 58 per cent. The lowest preference for the option of starting own businesses was found amongst Tamil Estate men (23 per cent). Amongst men from other ethnicities and locations, percentages between 35-50 per cent preferred this option. It would certainly be interesting to know more about what young men perceived by the option ‘owning businesses’, particularly with regard to the scale and type of business and with regard to how it differed from participation in the private sector. Such information may be particularly useful for policy-makers, given that many self-employed youth felt that financial assistance in the form of bank

Figure 4.2: Preferred employment options of men by ethnicity and sector



Source: STWT (2003)

loans is the most useful support they need. Perhaps, certain loans can be tailored more towards meeting the requirements and needs of young people to assist them in exploring the option of owning a business.

With regard to the option of employment within the state sector, it is noted that the highest percentage of young men preferring this option was from the Sinhalese urban men (approx. 46 per cent), whilst the lowest preference for state sector employment was found amongst Muslim urban men. The range of percentages for men from other ethnicities and locations was 23-35 per cent. This is also interesting given the common perception that the most preferred option would be employment in the state sector, particularly for Sinhalese rural youth (Mayer and Salih, 2003). Another generally held assumption is that larger numbers of Sinhalese youth would prefer to take on the family businesses, particularly where farming is concerned (Jogarathnam and Niranjana, 2003). This has also not been supported by the data.

The highest percentage of men who would prefer to join the private sectors (i.e. private companies) comes from the Tamil estate sector (35 per cent). It is unclear why this may be the case, given that the working conditions within the dominant plantation companies are often not favourable, particularly at the level of manual work. On the other hand, this option may have been interpreted as joining an office-level position in existing private companies. It could also have been the only realistically available option to young men from the estate sector. The lowest percentages of preference to join the private sector come from Sinhalese rural and urban men (approx. 14-16 per cent).

Furthermore, it can be observed that there are clear inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic differences in relation to geographical location. While low numbers of Sinhalese rural and urban youth would prefer to be employed within private sector, most number of Sinhalese rural young men from the districts of Matara, Moneragala and Kurunegala would prefer to own their businesses (47 per cent) as compared to employment within the state sector (31 per cent). This may be linked to the comparably abundant development-funded micro-credit and vocational training schemes available in these rural areas. This pattern was reversed for Sinhalese urban men; a slightly greater percentage of young men in the Colombo district would prefer to be employed within the state sector (47 per cent) as compared to owning businesses (38 per cent).

Tamil men from Colombo (urban), Batticaloa (conflict) and Jaffna (conflict) districts share more or less similar levels of preferences, although they differ decidedly from Tamil men from the estate sector. Colombo-based Muslim men differ significantly in their preferences as compared to Muslim men living in rural (Kurunegala) and conflict-affected (Batticaloa) areas. Perhaps the differences in these preferences are linked to available opportunities for employment in the vicinity of these areas or to the socio-economic practices linked to these particular communities.

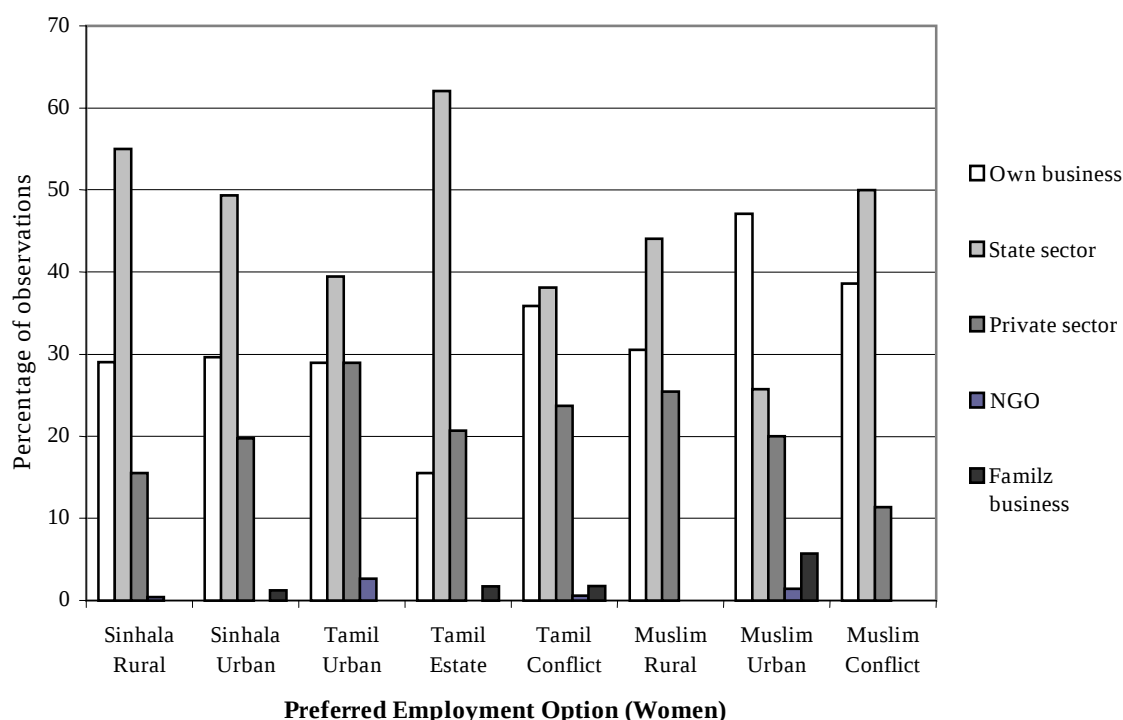
Preferences of women

The graph below shows the main preferences for employment by ethnicity and location for women. The data help to track the difference within each option across geo-ethnic dimensions. The patterns of preference for young women differ from those of young men (see Figure 4.3) in a number of ways. There was a greater preference for employment within the state sector amongst women as compared to men (with the exception of Muslim women living in urban areas). Furthermore, the preference for joining the private sector (i.e. private companies of small, large or multinational nature) is generally low in relation to the other two most popular options. The greatest difference amongst preferences was between Tamil men and women from the estate sector. 35 per cent of Tamil estate men preferred employment in the state sector as compared to 62 per cent of women.

With regard to the option of owning businesses, the highest percentage of preference for this option was found amongst Colombo-based Muslim women (48 per cent) whilst the lowest preference was found amongst Tamil women from the estate sector (16 per cent). In contrast, the highest preference for employment within the state sector comes from this last group of women (62 per cent). The lowest percentage of preference for state sector employment is found amongst Muslim urban women (25 per cent). Although lacking the same variation as shown for the two preferred option of state sector employment and owning businesses, the lowest percentage of preference to employment within the private sector comes from Muslim women living in the Batticaloa district (11 per cent)

whilst the highest preference comes from Tamil women living in the Colombo district (28 per cent). It is interesting to note that larger numbers of women across all groups preferred to own their businesses in comparison to engaging with the private sector, although this is ostensibly the sector offering the highest proportion of employment for women, although in low-paid, poor working conditions. It is certainly necessary to further explore what type and scale of business is preferred by these women and what types of problems they have experienced or perceive with regard to employment within the private sector.

Figure 4.3: Preferred employment options of women by ethnicity and sector



Source: STWT (2003)

With regard to inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic differences amongst women living in different geographical locations, clear differences in preferences were noted amongst Tamil and Muslim women. Both rural and urban Sinhalese women shared more or less the same rates of preferences for the different options. However, amongst Tamil women, there were marked differences in the percentage of preference for state employment between the women living in urban and conflict-affected areas and those living in the estate areas (a gap of 20 per cent, and a corresponding low rate of preference for owning businesses). Muslim urban women differed from those living in the rural areas (Kurunegala district) and conflict-affected areas (Batticaloa district), with regard to their greater preference to owning businesses.

4.4 Desired characteristics in work

Many youth also have particular expectations as to what they are looking for in a job. In a survey on employment aspirations of youth between 15-29 years old (Mayer 2002), conducted in 1999 in Colombo and Hambantota districts, 65 per cent of the youth from Colombo mentioned “good work environment” and “job security” as the most important characteristics of a good job (against only 35 per cent mentioning “high income” as important). The figures for Hambantota were nearly the same: 67.3 per cent and 32.7 per cent respectively. Qualitative citing from the National Youth Survey reiterates this situation:

A good job includes a bonus, a reasonable salary, job security and well treatment. It is good if there are permanent jobs in the private sector. But if they get fed up with an employee out of a small reason they chase the employee away. In the private sector there are many rules, regulations and difficulties. They always concentrate on the beneficial output. I do not like a job with pressure. They don't think of the person. (Weligama youth, female, 19 yrs., O/L educated)

The “School-to-Work-Transition” survey also confirms the above picture. When asked about what is important for a job, only 6.7 per cent of the youth interviewed mentioned high income. Factors such as “being able to work independently” (32.1 per cent) or “work place is close to home” (13 per cent) or “steady job/ job security” (12.7 per cent) figured much more prominently.

Preferences of schooling youth

This section covers a brief examination of job characteristics that schooling youth look for when considering a job in the future. As to the question of what are the very important characteristics of the job that they might look for in the near future (after finishing their education), the majority of respondents mentioned the importance of working independently without supervision in the job that they look for (24.4 per cent), while another reasonable proportion of respondents mentioned the job security factor (16 per cent). Nearly 14 per cent of respondents stated the importance of using their skills and abilities, while 12 per cent mentioned the importance of close proximity to home and another 10 per cent good promotion prospects. It is noteworthy that only 3.3 per cent of the respondents mentioned the fact that they could earn a lot of money as an important characteristic of the job they aspire.

There are no notable gender differences except for two slight differences. A slightly higher proportion of men stated the importance of a clear career path in comparison to women (12.9 to 6.9 per cent). On the other hand, more women mentioned the importance of close proximity to home (16.1 per cent) as against men (7.7 per cent). 28 per cent of Matara youth preferred job security compared to 6.7 per cent of Hatton youth. The survey clearly shows that schooling youth in Sri Lanka are more concerned about working conditions that are largely about issues such as “not being part of strict hierarchical structures”, “having long-term stability” and “job satisfaction” as well as “option to combine private life with work situation” (such as the desire to live close to the working place). The low interest in moving away from home for a job has been also confirmed through other questions in this survey focusing on the willingness of youth to migrate in order to find employment.

Table 4.10: Preferences of schooling youth on desired characteristics of a job (%)

Groups	Independent work	Job security	Able to use own skills	Close to home	Clear career path	Easy pace of work	Role in decision making	Can earn a lot	Good work environment	Other
In-school	24.4	16.2	13.6	11.8	10.0	6.9	4.9	3.3	2.2	6.7
Men	26.2	17.2	14.6	7.7	12.9	6.4	5.2	4.3	-	5.6
Women	22.6	15.2	12.4	16.1	6.9	7.4	4.6	2.3	4.6	7.8
Colombo	26.2	8.5	11.5	7.7	10.0	10.0	8.5	3.8	1.5	12.3
Kurunegala	26.3	20.0	5.0	18.8	13.8	5.0	5.0	1.3	1.3	3.8
Matara	22.0	28.0	16.0	12.0	6.0	10.0	-	4.0	-	2.0
Monaragala	26.0	14.0	12.0	14.0	10.0	6.0	4.0	10.0	-	4.0
Hatton	30.0	6.7	16.7	13.3	10.0	3.3	6.7	-	3.3	10.0
Batticaloa	25.0	20.0	21.7	5.0	15.0	3.3	1.7	1.7	5.0	1.7
Jaffna	14.0	22.0	20.0	16.0	2.0	6.0	4.0	2.0	6.0	8.0
Sinhala	23.5	18.5	12.0	11.5	12.0	8.5	4.0	5.0	1.0	4.0
Tamil	22.7	16.0	14.0	12.7	6.7	6.0	6.0	2.0	4.7	9.3
Muslim	29.0	12.0	16.0	11.0	11.0	5.0	5.0	2.0	1.0	8.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Table 4.11: Preferences of job-seeking youth on desired characteristics of a job (%)

Job seekers	Independent work	Close to home	Clear career path	Role in decision-making	Vacation time	Easy pace of work	Interesting job to do	High status job	Able to use own skills	Family-friendly	Job security	Good work environment	Earn a lot of money	Other, specify
Men	31.8	7.6	4.9	5.4	0.4	6.7	0.4	1.3	9.0	2.7	17.0	3.6	8.5	0.4
Women	23.0	17.3	2.2	2.2	1.3	8.8	1.3	1.3	13.7	2.2	11.9	8.0	6.2	0.4
Sinhala	24.5	15.0	3.0	3.5	1.5	8.0	1.0	0.5	11.0	1.0	14.5	5.5	10.5	0.5
Tamil	24.2	8.1	6.0	4.0	0.7	8.7	0.7	2.7	12.8	3.4	16.8	7.4	4.0	0.7
Muslim	38.4	13.1	1.0	4.0	-	6.1	1.0	1.0	10.1	4.0	11.1	4.0	6.1	-
Colombo	31.5	13.8	1.5	2.3	0.8	12.3	0.8	1.5	10.8	3.1	12.3	1.5	6.9	0.8
Kurunegala	32.9	17.7	3.8	2.5	-	5.1	1.3	-	12.7	2.5	11.4	3.8	5.1	1.3
Matara	26.0	6.0	2.0	4.0	6.0	8.0	2.0	-	14.0	-	14.0	4.0	14.0	-
Monaragala	28.0	12.0	-	6.0	-	6.0	2.0	-	4.0	-	20.0	10.0	12.0	-
Hatton	13.3	6.7	10.0	3.3	-	6.7	-	-	6.7	-	26.7	20.0	6.7	-
Batticaloa	25.0	13.3	3.3	6.0	-	5.0	-	-	16.7	3.3	11.7	10.0	5.0	-
Jaffna	20.0	10.0	10.0	4.0	-	6.0	-	8.0	12.0	6.0	16.0	4.0	4.0	-

Source: STWT (2003)

Preferences of job-seeking youth

In general, the preferences of job-seeking youth are mirror the preferences of schooling youth. There are no notable gender differences except for women having a greater preference for working closer to home than men (17.3 to 7.6 per cent). The percentage of men who preferred a clear career path in the schooling category is slightly less compared to the men in the job-seeking category who would prefer this (12.9 to 4.9 per cent).

The percentage of Muslims who preferred independent work is 38.4 per cent whilst 24.5 per cent of Sinhalese and 24.2 per cent of Tamils preferred this as the main characteristic. With regard to intra-district variations, 13.3 per cent of Hatton job-seeking youth preferred independent work compared to 26.7 per cent who preferred job security and 20 per cent who preferred a good work environment. The corresponding figures in the job-seeking category are 30 per cent, 6.7 per cent and 3.3 per cent.

Preferences of employed youth

The preferences of employed youth are in general similar to those of job seeking youth. No notable gender differences exist either between the responses of men and of women or between the job seeking and the employed categories. 45.5 per cent of Muslim youth preferred independent work compared to 36.4 per cent Tamil and 19 per cent Sinhalese youth. 22.5 per cent of employed Sinhalese youth preferred to work close to home compared to 9.3 per cent Tamil and 11.1 per cent Muslim youth.

However, some differences exist within district categories and between the employed and job-seeking categories when looking at district variations. 36.7 per cent of employed youth in Hatton preferred independent work compared to 13.3 per cent of job seeking youth. 16 per cent of employed youth in Matara preferred independent work compared to 26 per cent of job seeking youth. A significant increase is noted in the percentage of Jaffna employed youth preferring independent work when compared to job seeking youth (44 per cent to 20 per cent). Youth from different districts appear to have very different preferences when it comes to job security. Only 4.6 per cent of youth from Colombo and 6.7 per cent of youth from Hatton preferred job security compared to 20 per cent of youth from Matara and 24 per cent of youth from Monaragala.

Table 4.12: Preferences of employed youth on desired characteristics of a job (%)

Employed youth	Independent work	Close to home	Clear career path	Role in decision-making	Vacation time	Easy pace of work	Interesting job to do	High status Job	Able to use own skills	Family-friendly	Job security	Good work environment	Earn a lot of money	Other, specify
Men	33.9	11.5	5.7	5.3	2.6	7.0	2.6	1.3	5.7	-	11.5	2.2	10.1	0.4
Women	27.4	19.7	4.9	4.5	1.8	6.3	1.8	-	8.1	2.7	10.3	4.9	7.6	-
Sinhala	19.0	22.5	2.5	5.0	0.5	11.5	1.0	0.5	7.5	1.0	13.5	5.5	10.0	-
Tamil	36.4	9.3	8.6	5.3	4.6	1.3	4.6	1.3	4.6	0.7	11.9	3.3	7.3	0.7
Muslim	45.5	11.1	6.1	4.0	2.0	5.1	1.0	-	9.1	3.0	4.0	-	9.1	-
Colombo	30.0	13.1	2.3	6.9	3.8	8.5	3.8	0.8	5.4	3.1	4.6	6.9	10.8	-
Kurunegala	32.5	25.0	5.0	5.0	2.5	8.8	1.3	-	8.8	-	6.3	-	5.0	-
Matara	16.0	20.0	2.0	4.0	-	16.0	-	2.0	12.0	-	20.0	2.0	6.0	-
Monaragala	26.0	18.0	2.0	4.0	-	8.0	2.0	-	4.0	-	24.0	2.0	10.0	-
Hatton	36.7	13.3	10.0	-	10.0	-	6.7	3.3	-	3.3	6.7	-	10.0	-
Batticaloa	31.7	11.7	13.3	6.7	-	-	-	-	8.3	1.7	11.7	1.7	11.7	1.7
Jaffna	44.0	6.0	8.0	2.0	-	-	2.0	-	8.0	-	14.0	8.0	8.0	-

Source: STWT (2003)

Preferences of self-employed youth

Self-employed men and women predominantly stated that they preferred independent work as the main characteristic of work, with the overall percentage of youth stating all other characteristics decreasing. 44.8 per cent of self-employed men stated that they preferred independent work compared to 33.9 per cent of employed men. The corresponding figures for women are even more significant with 46.6 per cent of self-employed women stating that they preferred independent work compared to 27.4 per cent of employed women.

The percentage of Sinhalese youth who preferred independent work rose from 19 per cent in the employed category to 43 per cent in the self-employed category whilst it rose from 36.4 per cent of youth to 50.3 per cent for Tamil youth. With regard to inter-district variations, the percentages of preference for independent work ranged from 20 per cent (in Hatton) to 61.7 per cent (in Batticaloa). 46.9 per cent of Colombo youth in the self-employed category preferred independent work compared to 30 per cent in the employed category. Another significant shift has been in Matara where 16 per cent of employed youth preferred independent work compared to 36 per cent of self-employed youth. A similar shift has occurred in Batticaloa with 31.7 per cent of Batticaloa youth in the employed category stating that they preferred independent work compared to 61.7 per cent in the self-employed category.

Table 4.13: Preferences of self-employed youth on desired characteristics of a job (%)

Self Employed	Independent work	Close to home	Clear career path	Role in decision-making	Vacation time	Easy pace of work	Interesting job to do	High status job	Able to use own skills	Family-friendly	Job	Good work environment	Earn a lot of money	Other, specify
Men	44.8	11.6	5.0	1.9	1.9	1.2	2.3	-	7.3	1.5	8.1	5.4	8.5	0.4
Women	46.6	12.6	0.5	3.7	1.0	4.2	2.1	1.0	6.3	3.1	10.5	2.6	5.2	0.5
Sinhala	43.0	15.5	2.5	2.0	2.0	1.5	3.5	-	4.0	1.5	12.0	4.0	8.5	-
Tamil	50.3	9.6	4.5	2.3	0.6	3.4	1.1	1.1	8.5	1.1	7.3	3.4	6.2	0.6
Muslim	42.3	8.5	1.4	5.6	2.8	2.8	1.4	-	11.3	7.0	4.2	7.0	4.2	1.4
Colombo	46.9	17.7	1.5	3.8	0.8	3.1	3.1	-	6.2	4.6	6.2	4.6	1.5	-
Kurunegala	45.0	7.5	2.5	3.8	2.5	1.3	2.5	-	10.0	1.3	8.8	6.3	7.5	1.3
Matara	36.0	20.0	-	-	6.0	-	2.0	-	4.0	2.0	14.0	-	16.0	-
Monaragala	38.0	14.0	4.0	2.0	-	2.0	4.0	-	2.0	2.0	16.0	6.0	10.0	-
Hatton	20.0	6.7	3.3	6.7	3.3	3.3	-	-	16.7	-	16.7	10.0	10.0	3.3
Batticaloa	61.7	8.3	6.7	-	-	3.3	-	-	8.3	-	5.0	-	6.7	-
Jaffna	56.0	2.0	6.0	2.0	-	4.0	2.0	4.0	4.0	2.0	6.0	4.0	8.0	-

Source: STWT (2003)

Employers' perceptions of desired work characteristics

Employers/ managers were also asked about their perceptions on important aspects that young people considered when applying for jobs. With regard to small enterprises, the aspect most looked for was the distance of the place of work to their residence, whereas in the case of big enterprises it was 'interesting job' and promotional prospects.

Interestingly, not many employers assumed that youth considered the importance of being able to work independently, with only 10.5 per cent of big enterprises and 13.3 per cent of small enterprises stating that youth considered independence of work as an important aspect. 30 per cent of small enterprises stated that work being close to home was the most important aspect for youth, with a further 16.7 per cent stating good promotion prospects and job security. 26.3 per cent of big enterprises stated that work being interesting was the most important aspect for young people, with a further 21.1 per cent stating that having good promotion prospects was the most important aspect for

youth. 15.8 per cent of big enterprises stated that earning a lot of money was the most important aspect for youth.

As can be seen from the above perceptions, it appears that employers do not correctly perceive what is important to young people when they apply for jobs. When looking at what young men and women looked for in a job, aspects such as interesting job/work had drawn as few responses as 2.6 per cent and 1.8 per cent of employed men and women. Similarly, having good promotion aspects or a clear career path had drawn as few responses as 5.7 per cent and 4.9 per cent of employed men and women.

Table 4.14: Perceptions of employers on important aspects young people considered when applying for jobs (%)

	Small enterprises	Big enterprises	Total
Being able to work independently	13.3	10.5	12.2
Close to home	30.0	10.5	22.4
Good promotion prospects	16.7	21.1	18.4
Having an easy pace of work	10.0	-	6.1
Interesting job to do	-	26.3	10.2
Status of the job	-	5.3	2.0
Steady job/job security	16.7	5.3	12.2
Work environment	6.7	-	4.1
Earn a lot of money	3.3	15.8	8.2
Other, specify	3.3	5.3	4.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Main reason for accepting current job

The table below shows the main reasons why young people have accepted their current jobs, with the data broken down into sector, ethnicity and gender. The question was asked mainly of employed persons. The items were provided within the survey, with the young person required to indicate the most pressing reason for taking the job. In general, the three most popular reasons for young people of all ethnicities to accept their current job were for financial reasons, out of personal interest and lack of other options. It is however unclear how the inter-relationship or differentiation may be perceived or is in practice since many young people may have experienced a combination of both factors. In practice, financial necessity may prompt having to take whatever options exist, although the reason cited is the latter.

Choosing jobs for financial reasons were most common among young men from the estate and conflict-affected areas (24, 26 and 28 per cent respectively). For Batticaloa-based young Muslim men, the overwhelming majority of persons chose their current job due to financial reasons (27 per cent as compared to a mere 2.2 per cent of young men who had chosen their work due to personal interest or close to residence). This fits in with the earlier data stating that the number of Muslims in Batticaloa who took more than a year to find work was the highest amongst all groups. Similarly, choosing a job due to financial necessity was the highest amongst Tamil women living in conflict-affected communities such as Batticaloa and Jaffna (28 per cent), whilst this was lowest amongst young Muslim women in urban areas (7.7 per cent). It may be that the situation of conflict has made it necessary for young women in these areas to take on any work mainly out of economic difficulties. However, it is interesting to note that almost equal numbers of Muslim women had chosen work out of financial necessity as out of personal interest. For Sinhala rural and urban men and women, almost equal numbers of people have accepted work due to financial reasons, personal interest and lack of other options.

It is interesting that financial reasons play a major role in the choice of job given that this was not one of the most preferred characteristics of work as was shown in the previous section.

Table 4.15: Main reasons for accepting current job for men & women by ethnicity and location (%)

Men	Personal Interest %	Lack of other options %	Financial reasons %	Close to residence %	Parents' decision %	Women	Personal Interest %	Lack of other options %	Financial reasons %	Close to residence %	Parents' decision %
Tamil Estate	9	12	24	3	0	Tamil Estate	19	7	22	2	0
Sinhala Rural	19	17	14	2	1	Sinhala Rural	11	18	15	2	1
Muslim Rural	10	19	19	0	0	Muslim Rural	23	5	16	5	2
Tamil Conflict	18	8	26	1	1	Tamil Conflict	16	7	28	1	2
Muslim Conflict	2	0	28	2	0	Muslim Conflict	13	2	16	0	2
Tamil Urban	22	9	15	1	2	Tamil Urban	20	9	13	3	5
Sinhala Urban	18	14	16	3	3	Sinhala Urban	14	10	16	1	4
Muslim Urban	21	6	18	1	2	Muslim Urban	24	13	8	1	3

Source: STWT (2003)

4.5 Expectations of minimum income

Although not many young people had stated earning a lot of money as the most important characteristic of work, it is nonetheless an important aspect of employment and entrepreneurship ventures as was shown in the section on why people had accepted their current employment. For this reason, it was decided to further explore the financial aspect of employment and entrepreneurship by asking young people what would be their expectations of minimum income, given their educational background and training. The responses of job-seeking, employed and self-employed youth are considered below.

Expectations of job-seeking youth

What could be seen as an impact prolonged unemployment is perhaps a lower expectation in regard to the expected minimum income. Compared to the in-school youth, the monthly income for which youth would take up employment is even lower and more than half of the sample would work for less than Rs. 5,000.- per month. However, this does not indicate that they would take up any job being offered to them. As other answers in the survey indicate, issues such as independence of work and security do matter much more for young people and may enable them to compromise on the salary level. In fact, as we have seen above youth do not place much emphasis on income in comparison to other characteristics of employment.

Expectations of employed youth

A vast majority (87.5 per cent) of young employees in this particular sample are willing to accept a job if the salaries are between Rs. 5000 and Rs. 10,000. More women than men expected less than Rs 1,500 per month (13.1 per cent to 2.6 per cent) and less than Rs 1,500 per month (58.6 per cent to 34.4 per cent). It is of concern that that the whole women expected a lower minimum income than men.

A large percentage of respondents from the Sinhalese community seem to be looking for higher salaries. Nearly 55 per cent of the respondents from the Sinhalese community are willing to accept a job if the salary is between Rs. 5000 – Rs. 10,000, whereas 54 per cent from Tamil and 51 per cent from Muslim communities are willing to take up positions even for a lower salary range of Rs. 1,500 – Rs. 5000. A large number of respondents with GCE A' Levels or lesser qualifications are willing to work for lower salaries of less than Rs. 5,000 per month.

23.3 per cent of Batticaloa youth in the job-seeking category expected a minimum income of Rs. 1,500 per month although only 11.9 per cent of employed youth expected such an amount. The percentage of Muslims who expected a minimum of Rs. 1,500 per month dropped to 9.2 per cent in the employed category from 21.1 per cent in the self-employed category.

Table 4.16: Expectations of job-seeking youth on minimum income (%)

Groups	Less than Rs. 1,500 /month	Less than Rs. 5,000 /month	Less than Rs. 10,000 /month	Less than Rs. 15,000 /month
Job-seekers	12.1	54.6	31.8	1.6
Men	5.0	50.2	43.4	1.4
Women	19.0	58.8	20.4	1.8
Colombo	18.0	54.7	26.6	0.8
Kurunegala	5.1	54.4	38.0	2.5
Matara	-	52.0	46.0	2.0
Monaragala	-	32.0	64.0	4.0
Hatton	20.0	70.0	10.0	-
Batticaloa	23.3	55.0	20.0	1.7
Jaffna	14.0	70.0	16.0	-
Sinhala	0.5	46.2	50.3	3.0
Tamil	21.6	64.9	13.5	-
Muslim	21.2	55.6	22.2	1.0
Primary	27.6	55.2	13.8	3.4
Secondary	18.1	57.8	24.1	-
GCE O'level passed	4.3	57.6	36.0	2.2
GCE A'level passed	3.2	33.9	58.1	4.8

Source: STWT (2003)

Table 4.17: Expectations of employed youth of minimum income (%)

Groups	Less than Rs. 1,500 /month	Less than Rs. 5,000 /month	Less than Rs. 10,000 /month	Less than Rs. 15,000 /month	Less than Rs. 20,000 /month
Employees	7.8	46.3	41.2	4.2	0.4
Men	2.6	34.4	55.1	7.0	0.9
Women	13.1	58.6	27.0	1.4	0.0
Colombo	11.5	41.5	43.8	2.3	0.8
Kurunegala	2.5	40.0	51.3	6.3	-
Matara	0.0	46.0	48.0	6.0	-
Monaragala	0.0	42.0	50.0	6.0	2.0
Hatton	16.7	66.7	16.7	-	-
Batticaloa	11.9	49.2	35.6	3.4	-
Jaffna	12.0	58.0	24.0	6.0	-
Sinhala	0.5	37.5	54.5	6.5	1.0
Tamil	16.6	55.0	25.2	3.3	-
Muslim	9.2	51.0	38.8	1.0	-
Primary	13.4	53.6	32.1	0.9	-
Secondary	10.5	46.2	39.9	3.5	-
GCE O/L Passed	1.0	46.1	39.9	3.5	-
GCE A/L Passed	-	42.9	49.0	6.1	2.0

Source: STWT (2003)

Expectations of self-employed youth

The overall preferences of self-employed youth did not differ significantly from employed youth. Similar gender differences continued with more women on the whole expecting a lower minimum than men. 57.1 per cent of self-employed women expected a minimum income of less than Rs 5,000 per month compared to 32.2 per cent of men. 50.4 per cent of self-employed men expected a minimum income of less than Rs 10,000 per month compared to 27.7 per cent of women. With regard to district variations, there was a notable increase in the expectations of minimum income in the self-employed category for youth in Matara. 64 per cent expected a minimum income between Rs 5,000 and Rs 10,000 per month compared to 51.3 per cent of employed youth. 20 per cent of self-employed Matara youth expected less than Rs 5,000 per month compared to 40 per cent of employed youth.

Table 4.18: Expectations of self-employed youth of minimum income (%)

Self-employed youth	Less than Rs. 1,500 /month	Less than Rs. 5,000 /month	Less than Rs. 10,000 /month	Less than Rs. 15,000 /month	Less than Rs. 20,000 /month	Cannot explain
Men	3.1	32.2	50.4	10.9	2.7	0.8
Women	12.6	57.1	27.7	2.1	-	0.5
Sinhala	-	27.1	55.8	14.1	3.0	-
Tamil	12.8	55.9	27.4	2.2	0.6	1.1
Muslim	12.7	53.5	32.4	-	-	1.4
Colombo	5.4	45.0	41.9	6.2	0.8	0.8
Kurunegala	5.0	41.3	40.0	11.3	2.5	-
Matara	-	20.0	64.0	14.0	2.0	-
Monaragala	-	26.0	60.0	10.0	4.0	-
Hatton	13.3	73.3	13.3	-	-	-
Batigoda	16.7	50.0	25.0	5.0	-	3.3
Jaffna	14.0	52.0	32.0	-	2.0	-

Source: STWT (2003)

Life goals of youth

Personal life goals have a significant influence on whether work is a source of satisfaction or frustration for many people. Therefore, it is important to be able to understand the life goals of people in order to understand how these may be influenced by or how these influence the aspirations, expectations and satisfaction/frustration of youth. The following is a discussion of the different life goals presented to young men and women in the survey. Although some of the items suffer from subjective interpretation and may overlap with other items (e.g. being successful in work may mean financial success or social recognition or social contribution), it is assumed that each item is fairly clear in terms of what aspects they refer to.

Being successful at work was most popular amongst schooling youth with 42.9 per cent of men and 49.8 per cent of women stating that this to be their life goal. This was followed by making a contribution to society, which was stated by 18.6 per cent of men and 22.8 per cent of women. There were no significant gender differences amongst schooling youth with the exception that a slightly higher percentage of men stated that having a lot of money was their personal life goal compared to women (9.5 per cent to 0.5 per cent).

With regard to ethnic differences amongst schooling youth, the most stated life goal was being successful at work with 41.2 per cent of Sinhala youth, 56.1 per cent of Tamil youth, and 41.4 per cent of Muslim youth stating this to be their life goal. The next most stated life goals was making a contribution to society with 25.1 per cent of Sinhala youth, 17.6 per cent of Tamil youth. For young Muslims, finding a purpose and meaning in life (16.2 per cent), making a contribution to society (16.2 per cent) and having a good family life (16.2 per cent) were the life goals of equal proportions of youth.

For job-seeking men and women, being successful at work was also the most important life goal (41.9 and 40.5 per cent, respectively), although having a lot of money was stated by slightly more job-seeking men (16.7 per cent) than schooling men (9.5 per cent). For job-seeking Sinhala youth, being successful at work (31.2 per cent) and making a contribution to society (26.1 per cent) were the most common life goals. For job-seeking Tamil youth, being successful at work (59.3 per cent) was the most common life goal. For job-seeking Muslim youth, being successful at work (34 per cent) and having a good family life (20 per cent) were the most common life goals. As can be seen below, these patterns did not change very much for employed and self-employed youth.

Table 4.19: Life goals of youth (%)

Group	Being successful in work	Finding purpose and meaning in life	Making a contribution to society	Having lot of money	Having good family life	Having lot of different experiences	Upholding religious faith	Other
In-school								
Men	42.9	10.8	18.6	9.5	8.7	4.8	2.6	2.2
Women	49.8	5.1	22.8	0.5	12.6	3.7	1.9	3.7
Sinhala	41.2	8.0	25.1	3.5	7.0	8.0	3.0	4.0
Tamil	56.1	2.7	17.6	7.4	11.5	1.4	1.4	2.0
Muslim	41.4	16.2	16.2	5.1	16.2	1.0	2.0	2.0
Job-seekers								
Men	41.9	5.4	14.0	16.7	14.0	2.3	0.5	0.5
Women	40.5	6.6	16.7	8.4	20.3	2.6	0.9	-
Sinhala	31.2	4.5	26.1	11.6	17.1	2.0	1.0	-
Tamil	59.3	4.0	6.0	12.0	15.3	1.3	0.7	-
Muslim	34.0	12.0	8.0	15.8	20.0	5.0	-	-
Employed								
Men	45.1	6.2	10.6	19.0	11.1	3.1	0.4	-
Women	41.2	5.0	11.8	10.9	23.1	3.2	0.5	0.5
Sinhala	39.7	4.0	15.1	11.1	19.6	5.5	-	-
Tamil	53.6	5.3	6.6	17.9	12.6	0.7	-	0.7
Muslim	34.0	9.3	10.3	18.6	18.6	2.1	2.1	-
Self-employed								
Men	40.9	10.0	12.4	9.7	13.9	1.5	0.4	-
Women	32.8	14.8	9.5	7.4	15.9	0.5	2.6	0.5
Sinhala	46.5	5.1	18.7	7.1	12.1	2.0	0.5	-
Tamil	33.0	15.0	5.6	10.6	15.6	0.6	1.1	-
Muslim	23.9	23.9	4.2	8.5	19.7	-	4.2	-

Source: STWT (2003)

5. University-to-work transition in Sri Lanka: Selected insights on the perceptions and experiences of social science graduates⁹

5.1 Background of the research

Graduate unemployment has been the subject of a long-standing public debate in Sri Lanka. This is not surprising as graduate unemployment has been a major social issue over the last several decades. This issue has become more contentious and critical in recent years. On the one hand, the rapid expansion of university education has resulted in a substantial increase in the output of local universities¹⁰. On the other hand, the contraction of the public sector and the weight of economic reforms have virtually closed down many conventional avenues of graduate employment. The worst affected category is that of Arts graduates who have been virtually shut out of the expanding corporate private sector, which is referred to as the engine of growth and the creator of employment in the new liberal economy. The result is growing unemployment among Arts graduates contributing to widespread social unrest and political tensions.

The persisting and increasing unemployment among Arts graduates is often perceived as the result of the shortcomings of the graduates themselves. The private sector employers often allege that the graduates do not have the skills and the temperament required to fit into a private sector firm. The critics also argue that the courses the graduates have followed have not equipped them with the desired attributes. These points of view appear to have had a major impact on the thinking of policy makers and international donors. The increasing emphasis placed on the need for university reforms advocated by donors and policy makers is indicative of the above impact. The main point that is usually highlighted is the need to introduce and implement reforms that would enhance the employability of university graduates, in particular Arts graduates.

The issue of graduate unemployment has been discussed and often remedial measures suggested by various people without paying much attention to perceptions, experiences and grievances of graduates themselves. This is not desirable in the context of a modern democratic polity. Those who are targeted by a package of reforms should be given an opportunity to express their views, based on their own lived experience, both within and outside the university.

It is against the above background that the present qualitative study of university undergraduates and passed-out graduates in the Arts stream at the University of Colombo has been carried out in November/December 2003 as part of the ILO “School-to-Work-Transition” project in Sri Lanka. Interviews were conducted using a set of clearly laid out guidelines to ensure uniformity and comparability of the data collected. What is discussed in the remaining pages of the present chapter is the main output of the study, following the same structure as the overall report by dividing the analysis into aspects related to education and employability, job search and equal opportunity as well as employment and expectation of “decent work”.

It is necessary to note at the outset that the sample of respondents interviewed during the course of the present study came from the University of Colombo. Given the fact that this university is situated in the capital city where the undergraduates have access to various resources outside the university; they may not be fully comparable to a sample of students and graduates drawn from a provincial university in another part of the country. However, as the University of Colombo has launched far reaching reform efforts to improve undergraduate education in the social sciences over the last 4-5 years, empirical insights into the experiences of students at the Colombo University should be of high interest for other Sri Lankan Universities, which are increasingly trying to implement similar reform efforts.

⁹ This chapter has been mainly written by S.T. Hettige, Dinusha Pathiraja and V. Vathsaladevi.

¹⁰ See Sri Lanka University Statistics 2002. Colombo: University Grants Commission

5.2 Sample profile of the respondents

The sample selected for the survey was purposive rather than random owing to various constraints that were perceived in the planning of the survey within the given time frame. However, the selection process ensured the appropriate recognition of important features such as gender, language proficiency and subject background of the students interviewed. The graduate category sample was divided into 4 groups, namely undergraduates, job-seeking graduates, self-employed and employed graduates.

Table 5.1: Sample specification by gender and categories

Medium of study	Female under-graduates	Male under-graduates	Female jobseekers	Male jobseekers	Female self employed	Male self-employed	Female employed	Male employed
Sinhala	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Tamil	6	6	6	6	4	8	6	6
English	3	3	2	2	3	1	3	3

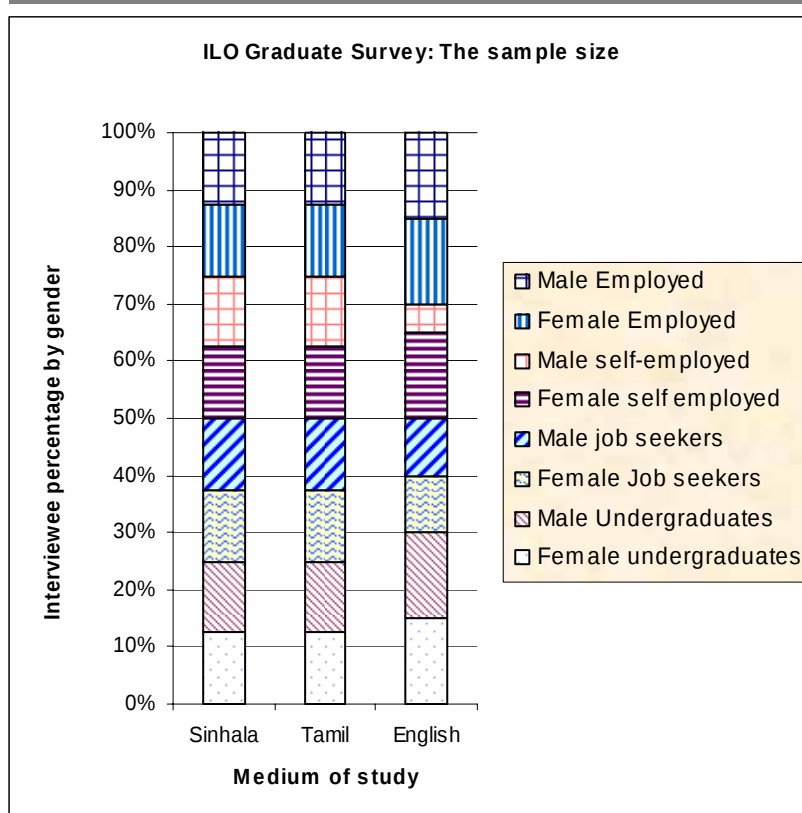


Table 5.2: The total sample

Medium of study	Total Number of Interviewees
Sinhala	48
Tamil	48
English	20

Source: STWT Survey (2003)

The basis of this categorization was to identify the obstacles faced by graduates in the process of transition from university to work. These four categories are representative of the obvious stages that each graduate has to pass through in the said process. The sample was further divided among three language categories to represent all graduates who pass out of the Arts Faculty having completed degrees in the Sinhala, Tamil or the English language. Finally, an equal gender balance was ensured in the selection process as well.

The sample of graduates was purposively selected from those who had completed their degree programme within the period of 1997-2003. The reason for this purposive selection was to get a thorough understanding of successes and shortcomings of the new reforms that were introduced to the Arts Faculty curriculum in the year 1998. These reforms were introduced with the main aim of increasing the employability of the Arts graduates and it has revolutionized the hitherto existent

curriculum. The opinions of students on this new system can provide a starting point to better understand the skills and training most useful for Arts Graduates to compete in the job market later on. Given below is a comparison of the old and the new syllabuses:

Table 5.3: Comparison of the old and the new systems of study at the faculty of arts, University of Colombo

The old system	The new system
Limited choice in the selection of courses	Emphasis on choice and diversity of courses
Limited flexibility in planning the academic programmes	Students can control their course load, duration of their courses, etc
Inadequacy of common foundation (or core) in the education across disciplines	A strong foundation course structure for all undergraduates
Strong disciplinary boundaries	The possibility of multi-disciplinary courses, even inter-faculty courses
The emphasis on depth of specialization over breath across disciplines	Combination of specialization with general distribution of courses
Difficulty of upgrading and changing syllabi	Courses flexible (only a brief outline needs to be approved, lecturer develops details alone)
Large classes	Smaller classes possible through alternate selection, repetition of courses, etc
Inadequate accountability of staff	Detailed course description binds lecturer and makes her/him accountable
Emphasis on rote learning, even absentee learning	Student participation and continuous assessment as significant features

Source: Parakrama, A. (1999). *Some Important Guidelines on the Course Unit System*, In: University of Colombo, Faculty of Arts, Handbook for Undergraduates. Colombo.

In the perusal of the sample, it becomes obvious that the number of English medium undergraduates and graduates are less in number to that of the other two media. The reasons for this are two fold. The first is the meagre number of undergraduates who brave to follow a degree study programme in the English medium¹¹. The second was the difficulties faced in finding English medium graduates for categories such as job-seeking and self-employed. This is because almost all of the English medium graduates were employed (half-time or full-time) even during their undergraduate years. Finding self-employed graduates was generally extremely difficult, as most of the females (of Sinhala and Tamil medium categories) seemed unwilling to take up self-employment. Contrary to this, only females in the English medium category seemed to opt for self-employment. The reasons for these revelations will be analyzed later in this paper.

5.3 Education and employability

As mentioned above, the majority of Sinhala and Tamil medium interviewees had got into the Arts stream owing to the lack of choices in opting for a stream of study at their Advanced Level Examination (A/L)¹². These interviewees pointed out that they faced ‘regional constraints’ in the selection of a stream of study and were sometimes forced to study Arts subjects to enter into

¹¹ The University of Colombo has a policy that accommodates any undergraduate who wishes to follow any degree program in the national languages or in the English language. However, this theory is put into practice on a superficial level owing to scarcity of lecturers who can hold lectures in the English medium. At most times, English medium undergraduates are those who come from a background where they have had access to the mastery of the English language well before they entered to university.

¹² The Advanced Level examination is the final exam done at the secondary school level to select students into the university. The students can select their streams of study i.e. Science, Mathematics, Accountancy, Arts, Languages etc through which they are selected to enter into university.

university. These regional constraints meant that, on the one hand, the unavailability of subjects in any other stream other than Arts and on the other hand, the scarcity of teachers qualified to teach Science and Mathematics subjects. These undergraduates and graduates also pointed that they had financial constraints within their families, which meant that their parents could not afford the extra tuition that is required to study these subjects. A gender differentiation should also be made at this point, as it seemed that the majority of the females of the Sinhala and Tamil medium categories had selected to do Arts subjects as they felt that 'teaching' was the best career option for a girl. It appears that most of the undergraduates and the graduates in the Sinhala and the Tamil medium categories conforming to the gender roles that were dictated to them by peers and society.

Contrary to these opinions are those of the English medium undergraduates and graduates. Although the vast majority of the English medium interviewees were from leading schools in Colombo and other main cities in various districts such as Kandy and Kurunegala, there was a minority who came from somewhat rural backgrounds and schools. While most of their family backgrounds were not ones that constrained them in supporting in any stream of study that they opted for in their A/L, 100 per cent of the interviewees had opted for Arts subjects as that was where their interests and enthusiasm lay. Their schools have had other A/L streams and both females and males have selected to do Arts subjects to enter into university.

The lack of choice that fashioned the selection of the stream of study of most undergraduates was overcome in the selection of subjects at the university, up to a degree. Many had selected to study subjects that were either of interest (International Relations, Sociology etc) or those subjects that students were already familiar with from their A/L stage (Geography, Islamic Civilization, Economics, English etc). It is at the selection of a special or a general degree programme at the end of the first year that has led to another bottle neck among most of those who study in the Tamil and the English mediums. For Tamil medium undergraduates, subjects like Political Science, Economics and International Relations are the only options available if they want to specialize and for English medium undergraduates the available options are Sociology and English language & literature. If there are students who want to follow any of the other courses either in Tamil or in English for specialization they have to be granted the approval of the specific department for this purpose. Even once the approval has been granted the students have to follow lectures in Sinhala, but can do their assessments in Tamil/English.

The reasons for this difficulty can be explained in terms of the strained monetary situation of the university that prevents the hiring of lecturers who are competent in teaching various subjects in Tamil/English media. There is also the question of the incapacity of the existing junior faculty members who does not have a good command of the English language. It is only the senior faculty cadre who can attempt to teach at least in English as a link language to students of all media but the shouldering of this responsibility is not taken by any of the senior faculty except for those in Sociology and English language and literature. The recognition of these incapacities have in no way reduced the frustration and the anger felt by students of all media who vehemently point that if some attempt is made by the existing faculty cadre, this situation can be overcome at least to a certain degree.

Opinion on the new course unit system

There was a consensus among all the respondents that the old system of syllabi was uninteresting. Those who had followed the old system, in all three language categories pointed out that a year long academic year with only a paper based exam at the end of each academic year, did not kindle a stimulus among students to get really involved in what they studied. They also have said that, since this system provided a lot of free time to Arts students, they became labelled as those doing 'easy' subjects rather than 'difficult' subjects such as law, science or mathematics, which required the intense involvement of the student through out the academic year. This poor opinion among the academia that those who do Arts are doing easy subjects was furthered by the opinion existent in society that those who do Arts are of a lower level of intellect than those who do other subjects especially like mathematics.

The introduction of the new system (or popularly known as the course unit system) therefore has been greatly welcomed by all Arts degree students. The undergraduates have pointed out that the

course unit system produce *creative* Arts graduates meaning that in the process doing continuous assessment in an academic year, comprising of written and oral assignments, researches, presentations, take home papers etc the undergraduates have to use their creative abilities to the maximum.

Also the hitherto existent poor perceptions of Arts graduates too has lifted up to a degree, as the Arts students have now become hard-working, enthusiastic and confident and are also very busy during an academic year. They are no longer viewed as idling about in the university. This perception is gradually seeping into society as well and most people have now become aware that Arts graduates have courses like mathematics, law, or computer studies. These courses fall in line with the introduction of inter-faculty courses under the new system and add diversity and colour to the existing Arts subjects. The Arts subjects too have been diversified in keeping with the changes that are taking place in academic circles currently. These diversifications are further enhanced by interactive teaching methods, discussion classes and applied skills training where applicable (which was mainly lacking in the old system).

Nonetheless, the new system has also received its fair share of critique from the undergraduates and graduates. Most of them point out that they feel over burdened with continuous assessment and even with all the changes introduced, there is far too much attention paid to the learning of theories rather than stressing on applied skills. Many suggested the introduction of an internship component to final year undergraduates doing either a special or a general degree. Since most of the special students have to do a dissertation at the end of their special study programme anyhow, they pointed out that it would be far more interesting to do the dissertation half a year and in the other half of the year, doing an internship at an organization. Also, most of the graduates who have followed the new system pointed out that the knowledge they gain is rather wide, not deep. This they felt was a disadvantage for their knowledge expansion. Taking these factors into consideration, it becomes clear that further reforms are required to the new system of study as well.

Relevance of the degree programmes for employment

The applicability of a Degree programme towards employment is a relative phenomenon. This relativity is dependent on the nature of employment a graduate is engaged in. In the narrow sense of professionalism in Sri Lanka, for those who do an Arts Degree in any medium of study, there is no professional sphere that can readily absorb them. Also, the Arts degree that is received at the university is mainly concerned with the production of academic knowledge, often without consideration of applied skills or learning. There is no component in the Arts Degree towards skills developments, vocational training, etc.

However, the present Arts degree includes the teaching of English to all undergraduates except for those who have been exempted from a placement examination that is compulsory to university entrance. The end result of this is a certificate in English and this certificate though secondary to the Degree transcript, adds value to the undergraduate education.

Also, as graduates are equipped with the knowledge gained at foundation courses such as computer studies, mathematics, philosophy (e.g. Identity, Culture and Politics), poverty analysis and social integration etc., it can be pointed out that these courses have broadened their knowledge base further. Complimenting this knowledge is the exposure the graduates of the new system have got in presentation skills, report writing, proposal writing, dissertation writing, mock researches, etc. that come as methods of assessments in various course units under the new system. It was the view of all employed graduates that, while the subjects learnt at the University would have been useful in engaging in academic study, if a graduate is unable or unwilling to go into the academia, the exposure they received as mentioned above is what equips them to carry out their jobs.

A point stressed by all the employed graduates unanimously is the wealth of experience that the university has brought into their lives and view of society in general. All the interviewees pointed out that doing the degree was an uphill task as the lecturers ensured that the students earned every point they scored. Therefore, graduates had cultivated talents such as perseverance, dedication, initiatives, creativity, etc. that enable them to carry out their work successfully in whatever line they choose to work in.

5.4 Job search and equal opportunities

Undergraduates, except for English medium interviewees, do not seem to be involved even in part-time employment. Also, it is not possible to consider even the employed undergraduates as those in 'transition'. The inference here is that those who are in transition are ones who are equipped with their Arts degrees moving into the world of employment. What will be considered, therefore are their experiences in applying for jobs, getting jobs and actually maintaining their jobs with the knowledge and skills acquired at the Arts Faculty.

Applying for jobs

The majority of the job-seekers, self-employed and employed graduates of all three categories had applied for jobs through paper advertisements or notices seen in the university notice boards etc. at some point in time. However, a large share of these graduates pointed out that from most organizations (mainly private sector) they did not even receive a letter of acknowledgement for their application. This factor had brought about a disappointment among many graduates about the value of their Arts degree as opposed to those having other Sri Lankan degrees or foreign degrees. There was a general feeling that employers considered any degree other than an Arts degree in Sri Lanka more favourable. However, employed graduates pointed out that once an Arts graduate is given the opportunity to work, the employers were quick to note that they were often more competent than most other graduates including foreign degree holders.

Avenues through which jobs are found

In finding of employment, Sinhala and Tamil medium graduates had followed different paths to those followed by their English medium counterparts. The former pointed out that they have acquired jobs through formal measures such as newspaper ads, facing competitive exams, formal interviews where their language capabilities, computer literacy and qualifications were scrutinized at length. Only a minority in this category had been able to acquire jobs through political affiliations or through the government sponsored *Tharuna Aruna* or *Sarasavi Saviya* career guidance programmes for graduates.

The English medium employed males and females had landed their jobs mostly through contacts that they had made during their undergraduate years. The majority had faced informal interviews and pointed out that their qualifications were not 'really checked' but their word was taken for being qualified. It was interesting to find out that no one had political affiliations or support from politicians. Also the majority had not even heard of *Tharuna Aruna* or *Sarasavi Saviya*. Therefore, it seems that being competent in English opens more doors for graduates than for those who are not so competent in English. However, the strength of those who have done their degrees in the English medium is their bi-lingual ability, an attribute that monolingual Sinhala and Tamil medium graduates do not possess.

Another important characteristic of graduate employment was the professional qualifications that especially some of the English medium female graduates had acquired (e.g. some of the female graduates are lawyers and the degree for them was a secondary qualification). Though it was a secondary qualification, each one considered it an asset in their line of work giving them an edge over others who had no degree qualification.

5.5 Employment options and expectations of 'Decent Work'

In the analysis of job expectations of undergraduates and graduates, a distinct differentiation can again be made in the opinions of Sinhala and Tamil medium categories as opposed to the English medium category. This differentiation can be analysed on the basis of language aptitude and familiarity with computer usage as well as along gender lines. This however, does not mean that these three categories did not have similar opinions on certain issues, such as self-employment, which most Arts graduates from all backgrounds do not seem to desire.

Sectoral preferences

A majority of Sinhala and Tamil medium interviewees have pointed out that they prefer jobs in the public sector as such jobs guarantee a pension after the service has ended, provides job security and does not have the intense competition that exist in the private sector. This factor, in their opinions, made it possible for them to get into jobs in the public sector easily with their degree qualification rather than attempting to find a job in the private sector, which employed only those who are fluent in English and are computer literate. Also, in general, almost all of Sinhala and Tamil medium undergraduates and graduates were aiming for administrative work, lecturing at the university etc or in other words, jobs that fall in line with their degree programme. They felt that it is advisable to wait as long as it takes to find employment that was worth their degree qualification.

Contrary to these opinions, the English medium undergraduates and graduates preferred private sector employment and envisaged no problems in attaining such employment as they all were fluent both in English and in computer usage. They also seemed to feel that, the private sector suited their temperaments better than the bureaucratic, white collar jobs in the public sector. Also, all the English medium interviewees pointed out that they would readily accept any low position in a private sector firm pointing out that they lacked the work experience to land managerial positions in their first employment. Unlike those in the other two media, those who had studied in the English medium, did not stress that they want to find work that falls in line with what they have studied for the degree, pointing out that the degree only provides an academic qualification and in the private sector there is no place for academic work. However, they too seemed to prefer permanent employment on the whole, pointing out that, though NGOs are an option for part-time or contract based work, it does not provide either the perks or the security that a private sector job offers. They did not seem disheartened by the competition in the private sector, pointing out that, though what they do may not fall in line with what they have learnt, the holding of a degree itself provides enough security and prestige in the private sector for promotions, etc.

A distinct gender-based limitation was felt in the categories of Sinhala and Tamil medium female undergraduates and graduates, who felt that teaching was the best option available for females as it gives them time to look after family and children and also because it does not entail tedious working hours that are a characteristic of the private sector employment. Along these lines of thinking, the most desired position was that of a university lecturer. In the case of some of the English medium female graduates too, teaching was considered as a secondary source of income apart from a permanent position. Some of these females however did not plan to teach academic subjects that they have studied at the university, rather to teach subjects like literature, drama, music etc. that have been their interests for a long time.

However, most of the English medium females had done English language and literature as a subject that has invariably contributed to the professional qualifications that they have acquired in order to teach these subjects. It is interesting to note that the sole English medium self-employed male is also engaged in teaching drama and music. These findings therefore point to the fact that, in the job market of Sri Lanka, there is on the one hand a lot of scope for graduates to take up teaching positions, be it private tuition or teaching in a school. This is because of the flexibility and social merit awarded to those who engage in teaching. This command of respect becomes doubled when a person has a degree to compliment such teaching. Therefore, teaching has become a lucrative as well as appropriate line of employment for females.

Self-employment as an alternative option

A large proportion of interviewees of all three categories did not seem to consider self-employment as an option for 'decent work' unless in a dire circumstance of not finding employment. The reasons for this rejection can be compiled along personal lines and social value lines. On a personal level, Arts graduates did not show an interest towards setting up of any sort of business on their own. This may be because they lack both the knowledge and the experience that is required for such a venture; however, some of the Tamil self-employed males were involved in family run businesses. Vocational training is not a component of the Arts Faculty curricula, therefore, interviewees do not seem to have even considered such an endeavour. When we look at this resistance towards self-employment from a societal values point of view, the low social recognition given to those who are self-employed or for those who have received vocational training can also be pointed out as reasons.

In considering the prominent role that parents play in the life decisions of their children in Sri Lanka; the taking up of self-employment will actually be considered an insult to the degree qualification achieved. It is mainly this narrow opinion that has contributed in graduates refusing to acknowledge self-employment as 'decent work'. In considering the effort that has to be put to build up self-employment with poor financial support, no experience, having to face risks and challenges; did not seem to make the effort to venture into self-employment attractive to graduates in such a social set-up.

5.6 Conclusions

The present study carried out using qualitative techniques has dealt with a number of issues relating to the career of university graduates, commencing with their pre-university educational background and finding employment. What is evident from the data is that Arts graduates, in particular those who have completed a general Arts degree experience serious difficulties in finding employment after graduation. Given the fact that most graduates are already in their late 20s, the lack of prospects for finding desirable employment without further delay is a major source of frustration and disillusionment. It is significant that many male undergraduates opt for a general degree in order to shorten the period of their stay in the university. But this then has negative outcomes as general degree graduates find it harder to find employment, making their situation worse in the employment market.

Another important aspect of undergraduate education is that the general Arts graduates are often the least motivated, partly due to the lack of future prospects for them. These graduates pass out as the most ill-equipped to meet the challenges in the employment market. The higher rates of unemployment among them are at least partly a reflection of this state of affairs.

As discussed earlier, many Arts students have ended up in the stream by default. Their schools did not offer them any option due to the lack of facilities for teaching other subjects. Many such students would have moved into another stream if they had the opportunity. On the other hand, a sizeable proportion of Arts students have deliberately chosen their subjects due to their own interest and commitment. These are the most academically and socially-oriented students, who deserve encouragement and support. These are the students who are likely to make a significant contribution to the development of Liberal Arts disciplines in the university and outside it.

Two other issues relating to undergraduate education have been touched: a) the medium of instruction and b) higher education reforms. As for the first issue, the most widely held view is that the replacement of *swabasha* (national languages) with English is not feasible or acceptable as most students entering the university from rural areas do not have even a basic knowledge of English and also, teaching in English will hamper their learning and progress. On the other hand, all respondents recognize the importance of English, both in education and employment. They are of strong opinion that the students should have the opportunity to learn English during their undergraduate years and that they do not think they have this opportunity today due to the shortcomings of the English teaching programme at present.

As regards the medium of instruction, another issue that is critically important is the position of the Tamil medium. Tamil medium was introduced to the Faculty of Arts in the early 1980s due to the strong demand from displaced students in the North and East. Steps were taken to introduce Tamil medium instruction without adequate resources and this situation has not improved since then though the number of students has increased substantially over the same period. Today, Tamil medium students have many complaints regarding their studies. The lack of qualified teachers, the lack of books, unavailability of certain important and popular courses in the Tamil medium, their inability to specialize in certain fields which Sinhala medium students experience no such restrictions, etc.

Many Tamil medium students perceive this situation as unfair discrimination and it is certainly not a healthy development in view of the current ethnic crisis in the country. On the other hand, this is an issue that cannot be easily resolved due to resource and practical constraints, but needs to be addressed on a priority basis. Introduction of English medium as a link language of study is the considered popular option at present, although probably more among Tamil medium students, whose options are otherwise much more limited. But the biggest surprise in the views of undergraduates and graduates, including those who are studying in the English medium, was the opposition against providing the degree only in the English medium. The primary arguments forwarded supporting this view were:

1. Considering the university is a national one, the degree should be given in the national languages, thereby giving the opportunity for those who come from the length and breadth of the country to become qualified.
2. The university does not have the human and other resources to make a shift to English medium, because except for some of the senior faculty, the majority of the junior faculty cannot teach in English.

As for University education reforms, once again there is virtual unanimity that reforms are needed. There is however no agreement as to what kind of changes should be introduced. Respondents in general feel that more effective teaching methods should be adopted (e.g. using power point presentations, video showing etc). Most of them expressed strong opposition to conventional teaching methods such as dictating notes by lecturers.

Many respondents wish to have opportunities to establish contact with the world of work while they are still in the university. Short-term internships in outside institutions during vacations would address this issue, if properly planned and implemented. There is also the general view that skill development should be part and parcel of university education, in particular, in the area of computing.

It is significant that employment aspirations of undergraduates and graduates have not changed much over the years in spite of the harsh realities Arts graduates face when they leave university. Most of the graduates wish to have white-collar jobs in the state sector, though they are willing to accept similar jobs in the private sector. They are aware that there are not many jobs to go around in the state sector. They are also aware that they are not readily accepted in the private sector.

They in fact feel that the private sector does not want to recruit Arts graduates. This situation leaves Arts graduates with not much of a choice. Since they cannot wait indefinitely for jobs, many tend to look for at least some form of self-employment. Even here, they tend to engage in activities that are in keeping with their preferences. For instance, most of the self-employed graduates are occupied in private teaching. It is widely held that self-employment is preferred to being unemployed as a transitory phase, until they find regular employment in the public sector which usually ensures job security and offers old age pension, in addition to social prestige to those who occupy state sector jobs.

As mentioned at the outset of the present chapter, the sample of respondents has been drawn from the main metropolitan university in the country. Undergraduates in Colombo, if they wish, could have access to many resources outside the University, to acquire various skills and other qualifications. Yet, not all undergraduates make use of these opportunities due to various reasons, including poverty, but often also indifference. More awareness raising on such opportunities combined with support programmes for students hailing from a more disadvantaged background, could go a long way in improving the exposure of students to additional learning experiences.

Given the fact that even the graduates drawn from the University of Colombo in general are experiencing serious problems in finding employment, one is justified in concluding that the problem of graduate employment in the country is a major structural problem. This problem is partly related to the general education system, and partly related to the educational programme of the university. No serious attempt has been made to address these structural problems, in keeping with the changes that have taken place in the employment market. The present employment market is not ready to accommodate Arts graduates in the way that Arts graduates expect or desire. Rapid expansion of state-funded university education over the last two decades, and in particular, the establishment of provincial universities, has only contributed to an aggregation of the problem.

The above issue adversely affects the lives of thousands of young people, in particular those hailing from underprivileged rural backgrounds. Growing unrest and disillusionment among those educated youth with high social aspirations contributes to social and political unrest at a time when what is most needed is social and political stability. The issue is also relevant from a broader human resource development point of view. In other words, how to make use of the talents and capacities of the youth for their own advantage as well as for the benefit of the country is a question of critical importance.

However, there also appears to be no serious policy debate or policy development aimed at addressing the issue. Policy development leading to systematic programmatic interventions can no longer be postponed if we were to avert serious consequences of a widening gap between a large segment of the educated young population in the country and the fast changing local employment market.

However, it is also important to keep in mind that the identified problems of graduate education are rooted in wider educational structures and processes, and cannot be exclusively addressed within the University system alone. While curricular reforms, skill development programmes, and internships for undergraduates outside the University can be very useful in improving the employability of Arts students, policy interventions at school level are critical. In fact, the development of skills and basic competencies should take place within the general education system so that new entrants to the University come prepared to face the challenges of higher education.

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