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STUDY ON WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS AVIATION CAREERS IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

The aviation sector is very important to Sri Lanka both in terms of contribution to employment as well as for the growth in Gross Domestic Product. The aviation sector is dominated by men rather than women. As according to the literature, one of the major issues that women have to face is lonesomeness while other factors including public opinions and political pressure. Besides, the women who were seek to enter for aviation related jobs have under gone challengers related to educational and occupational stereotypes in physical, cognitive and psychological abilities. It is imperative to understand the underrepresentation of women in other sectors in aviation other than in flight crew which induce professionalism to women in aviation. The purpose of this study was to identify the women's perspective towards aviation sector jobs in Sri Lanka. 10 in- depth semi structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with females who were selected as embedded - single case design method as per in statistics to order to represent different divisions in aviation. Prior to conduct in-depth semi structured face-to-face interviews, the questions were predetermined. 10 females from different divisions in a same organization was considered for the interview. The responders (10 women) were selected based on embedded - single case design and all the face-to-face interviews were conducted at the same day. Individual interviews were carried

out to collect unbiased information from the responders. The research objectives were briefed to each interviewee prior to the interview. The snowball sampling method was enabled the interviewees to introduce the research for other responders who were in the target population. The results reveals that there are several issues that women should overcome if they select aviation sector as their long term career path. In-flexible work schedules, lack of training opportunities, and also male work culture were identified as the major factors that influence of their work capacity. The gender imbalance can be rectified by implementing employer level and national policies which nurture more women in aviation. Majority of the women who are in the aviation sector jobs like to see more female representation in aviation sector jobs. Hence, as per this study reveals, it is mandatory to address the difficulties pertaining with in-flexible working hours for women in order to retain more women in aviation sector jobs.

Keywords: Aviation, Sri Lanka, Careers, Women

INTRODUCTION

The aviation sector is very important to Sri Lanka both in terms of contribution to employment as well as for the growth in Gross Domestic Product. The aviation sector is dominated by men rather than women [1]. Hence, there have been very

low number of empirical studies carried out about women in aviation [2,6]. However, it is obvious that the majority of cabin crew and ticketing staff are women, while the behind the locked door of the cockpit, the situation is quite different [4]. By the change of social environmental situation occurred in 1970s, more feminine movement could be seen in aviation sector which were traditionally dominated by male [5]. As according to literature [3], one of the major issue a woman has to face is lonesomeness while other factors including public opinion and political pressure. Besides, the women who were seek to enter for aviation related jobs have under gone challengers namely educational and occupational stereotypes related to physical, cognitive and psychological abilities [6]. It is imperative to understand the underrepresentation of women in other sectors in aviation other than in flight crew which induce professionalism to women in aviation. The purpose of this study is to identify incentives and barriers which attract or limit women in general aviation sector in Sri Lanka.

METHODOLOGY

Prior to conduct in-depth semi structured face-to-face interviews, the questions were predetermined. 10 females from different divisions in a same commercial airline based in Sri Lanka was considered for the interview. The responders (10 women) were selected based on embedded - single case design and all the face-to-face interviews were conducted at the same day. This approach produces healthy empirical qualitative data and it was allowed the respondents to discuss their opinions in explicit manner [7]. Individual interviews were carried out to gather unbiased information from the responders. The research objectives were briefed to each interviewee prior to the interview. The snowball sampling method

was enabled the interviewees to introduce the research for other responders who were in the target population. The emails were sent for few members in the target population and these individuals were told to provide contact details of the other members in the same airline. Ultimately, it was ended up with 10 interviewees for the interview.

All the semi – structured interviews were carried out by a single interviewer in a day. A part from age, job profile and experience, 12 questions (Table I) were piloted with two aircraft technicians.

TABLE I. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

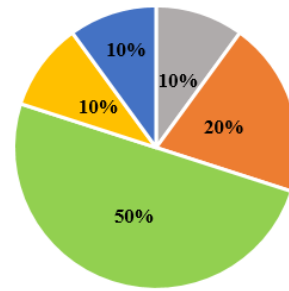
TABLE I. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Question No	Question
1	What are the factors which will improve the current working conditions?
2	What are the prominence issues which have to be deal with in the career?
3	What are the most important issues which affect for the working capacity, while working in the job?
4	How many training oppertunities did you complete before qualifying for your job?
5	Do you have opportunities to get promotions?
6	Do you have opportunities for novel developments?
7	Have you benefited from employer level policies which promotes gender equality in aviation sector?
8	Have you benefited from national level policies which promotes gender equality in aviation sector?
9	What are the causes for limited number of entries from women for jobs in aviation sector?
10	Do you motivate other women to work in aviation sector jobs?
11	Do you prefer to continue your current job as a long term career?
	Open ended question
12	What are any additional information on positive or negative work experiences which may be useful for this study?

The interview process was started by inquiring the age, job profile and experience at the current job profile (Table II) from each responder.

TABLE II. LIST OF RESPONDENTS

Respondent	From Introductory questions		
	Age	Job profile	Experience (years)
1	26-35	Aircraft Technician	6-10
2	26-35	Ticketing	0-5
3	15-25	Management	0-5
4	15-25	Ground Handling	0-5
5	26-35	Information System Analysis	0-5
6	15-25	Aircraft Technician	0-5
7	15-25	Aircraft Technician	0-5
8	15-25	Management	0-5
9	15-25	Aircraft Technician	0-5
10	26-35	Ground Handling	11-15



- Occupational Safety and Health improvements
- Childcare provisions
- Training opportunities
- Gender sensitivity training for all workers
- Better physical working conditions

The rest other questions were related to identify the issues and challengers pertaining to limit women in aviation as given in Table I. Each interview was carried out 30 - 40 minutes. The responses were recorded separately. Prior to conduct this pilot study all participants noted that the questions did not make them to feel discomfort, hence they answered honestly. The interview was concluded with an open ended question which allowed the responders to give any additional information on positive or negative work experiences for women in aviation sector.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 10 interviewees had an average age range of 15-25 and all of them have average range of experience from 0-5 years at the current designation. All the responders were females and out of that there were 2 females who are working as Aircraft Technicians, 2 as Ground Handling staff, 2 as Management staff and also 2 from Ticketing and 2 from Information System Analysis staff.

A. Responses related for factors which affect to improve the current working conditions

Fig. 1. Factors affect to improve the current working conditions

As shown in Fig. 1, half from the responders believe that providing the training oppertunities will improve the working conditions of the employees, while 10% from the responders believe that gender sensitivity training for all workers, better physicl working conditions and also improvements in occupational safety and health improvements will affect to enhance the present working conditions among female employees in aviation. Further, the rest 20% responded that Childcare provisions also influence to improve the current working condiitons.

B. Responses related for the prominence issues which have to be deal with in the career

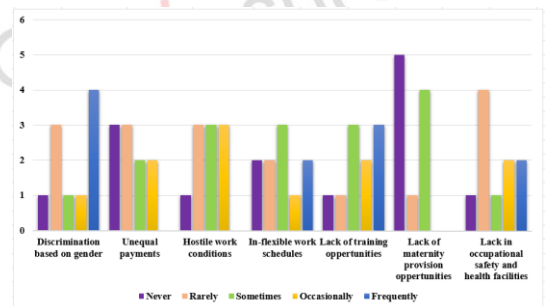


Fig. 2. Factors for the prominence issues which have to deal with in the career

As according to Fig. 2, seven parameters were identified which are directly relevant for the prominent issues that the females under go during their career. As according to the responders only one mentioned that she has not gone through any sort of discrimination based on gender, while there are four females who have under gone discriminations due to femininity during their career. There were three females who experienced gender discrimination rarely during their career while other two females were experienced gender discrimination sometimes and occasionally. Unequal payments were experienced rarely by three female employees, while another three never experienced such. Another two females were experinced unequal payments sometimes and another two by occasionally. But none of them experienced unequal payments frequently. As per the responders view there was one female who never experienced unfriendly working conditions while there were another three females for each who experienced hostile work conditions rarely, sometimes and occasionally. But there were non of the females who experienced unfriendly working conditions frequently. As per the information given by the responders, two of the responders have never under gone in-flexible work schedule while another two have frequently under gone through the in-flexible work schedules. There were three of the females who have experienced in-flexible work schedules sometimes. In addition there was one employee who experienced in-flexible work conditions occasionally while another two experienced in-flexible working conditions rarely. Three of the female responders mentioned that they have experienced lack of tarining oppertunities frequently while another three experienced lack of training oppertinities

sometimes. One employee stated that she never experienced lack of training oppertinites and another one rarely experienced lack of training oppertinities. But two of the responders mentioned that they have experienced lack of training opperunities occasionally. Half of the respondents mentioned that they have never experienced lack in maternity provision oppertunities while another four respondents sometimes experienced lack in maternity provision oppertinities. One has experienced lack in maternity provisions oppertunities rarely but none of them experience lack in maternity provision oppertunities frequently. Four of the respondents have rarely under gone lack in occupational safety and health facilities while another one never experienced lack in occuptonal safety and health facilities. Another two females experienced lack in occuptonal safety and health facilities occasionally and other two experienced it frequently. In addition there was a single respondent who experienced lack in occuptonal safety and health facilities sometimes.

C. Responses related for the most important issues which affect for the working capacity, while doing in the job

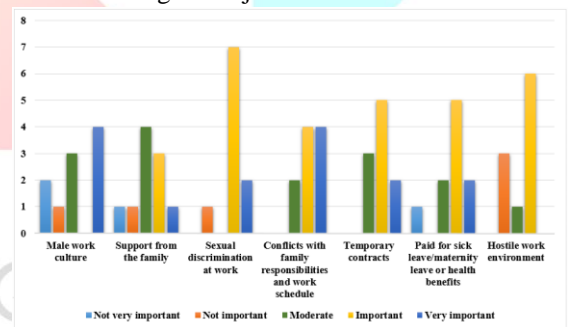


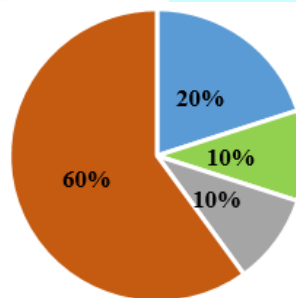
Fig. 3. Factors which affect for the working capacity

As given in Fig. 3, six factors were identified which have the influence on the working capacity of female employees. Four respondents mentioned that the male

work culture is very important and two females mentioned that male working condition is not very important of their working capacity. Three of the employees mentioned that male work culture is moderately influence for females working capacity while none of them mentioned it as important factor of their working capacity. But there was one respondent who mentioned that male work culture is not important for her working capacity. Four of the respondents mentioned that support from the family moderately influences for the working capacity and another three mentioned that support from the family effect for the working capacity importantly. One of the respondents mentioned that family support is not very important for the working capacity for her while each one mentioned that support from the family is not important for the working capacity and the remaining one stated that support from the family is a very important factor for her working capacity. Seven of the responders stated that the sexual discrimination at working place importantly influence for the working capacity and two of the respondents mentioned that sexual discrimination is a very importantly influence for the working capacity. Only one respondent mentioned that sexual discrimination at the working place is not important for the working capacity of her. Four of the responders mentioned that conflicts with family responsibilities and work schedule moderately influence for the working capacity while another four stated that conflicts with family responsibilities and work schedule very importantly influence on their working capacity. The rest of the responders mentioned that conflicts with family responsibilities and work schedule moderately affect for their working capacity. Five from the total respondents mentioned that by being in temporary contract in job importantly influence for the working capacity while three of the

responders stated that being in temporary contracts moderately influence for the working capacity. The rest of the responders stated that being in temporary contract plays a very important role in working capacity of them. Five respondents mentioned that paid for sick/ maternity leave or health benefits are important for working capacity while two respondents mentioned that paid for sick/ maternity leave or health benefits are very important for working capacity. Another two respondents stated that paid for sick/ maternity leave or health benefits are moderately important for the working capacity while one respondent mentioned that paid for sick/ maternity leave or health benefits are not important for her working capacity. Six respondents mentioned that hostile work environment is importantly influence for the working capacity and one mentioned that hostile work environment is moderately influence on working capacity for her. The rest of the responders mentioned that hostile work environment is not very important factor to influence their working capacity.

D. Responses related for training opportunities before qualifying for the specific job



- None, less than one week (< 35 hours)
- One to three weeks (35 - 100 hours)
- One to two months (100 - 200 hours)
- More than two months (> 200 hours)

Fig. 4. Training opportunities prior to job

As shown in Fig. 4, 60 % from the respondents have gone through a training for more than two months before they start the specific job and 20 % of the females have gone through none or less than one week training programme. There were 10 % from the respondents for each who have done the training for one to three weeks and one to two months respectively.

E. Responses related for the opportunities for promotions

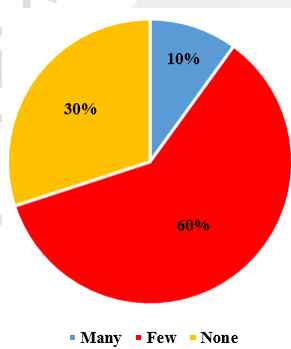


Fig. 5. Opportunities for promotion

As according to Fig. 5, 60 % from the respondents have obtained few opportunities for promotion while another 30 % from the respondents have obtained none of the opportunities for promotion. The rest of the respondents obtained many opportunities for promotion.

F. Responses related for opportunities for new developments

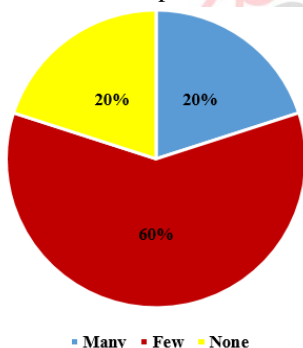


Fig. 6. Opportunities for new developments

As shown in Fig. 6, 60 % from the respondents have got opportunities to do new development while 20 % have received many opportunities for new developments. The rest of the females never got an opportunity to do novel developments during their career so far.

G. Responses related for the impact of employer level policies which nurture women in aviation

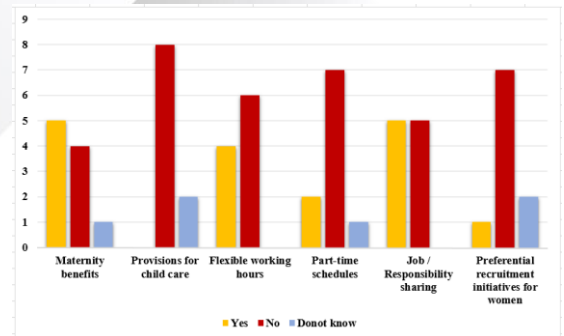


Fig. 7. Impact of employer level policies to promote women in aviation

As Fig. 7 illustrate the identified factors based on employer level policies which affect to nurture gender equality. Half of the respondents mentioned that providing maternity benefits has an influence on promoting female in aviation, while four respondent mentioned that they do not think that providing maternity benefits nurture women in aviation sector. In addition, one respondent stated that she did not have any idea about it. 8 of the respondents mentioned that provisions for child care do not have any influence on promoting women in aviation while the rest stated that they do not know about it. Six of the respondents mentioned that by providing only flexible working hours for ladies may not influence women in this sector and four of the females stated that providing flexible working hours may influence women in aviation sector jobs. Seven of the respondents mentioned that

by providing part-time schedules will not nurture women in aviation and one responded against to it. Two respondents mentioned that by providing part-time schedules will lead to nurture women in aviation. 50 % of the respondents agreed that the feasibility of sharing responsibilities may nurture women in aviation while the rest of the respondents disagreed with it. Seven of the respondents mentioned by providing only preferential recruitment initiatives for women will not influence women in aviation while one was against to it. Two of the respondents mentioned that they did not have any idea about it.

H. Responses related for the impact of national level policies which nurture women in aviation

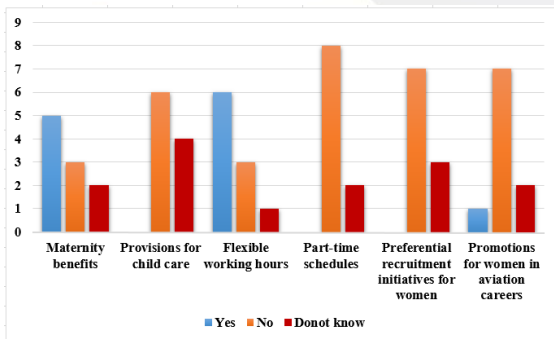


Fig. 8. Impact of national level policies to promote women in aviation

Based on the respondent's comments six factors were identified which have (Fig.8) the impact to nurture women in aviation in national level. Half of the respondents mentioned that national level policies for maternity level benefits may encourage to nurture women in aviation sector and three of them were not agreed with it, while the rest of the respondents mentioned that they did not have any idea about it. Six of the respondents stated that national policies of provisions for child care will not nurture women in aviation while the rest was against to it. Six respondents mentioned that national policies on flexible working hours will

influence to have more females in aviation sector and three were disagree to it. But one of the respondents mentioned that she did not think that national level policies on flexible working hours may effect to enhance the number of women in aviation. Eight of the respondents mentioned that national level policies on part-time schedules will not nurture women in aviation while two respondents did not have any idea about it. Similar responses were obtained for the preferential recruitment initiatives for women as well, where seven respondents were agreeing with it and the rest was against to it. Seven respondents stated that national level policies on promotions will not nurture women in aviation while one was agreeing with the statement. There were two respondents who did not know about it.

I. Responses related for limited number of entries from women for jobs in aviation sector

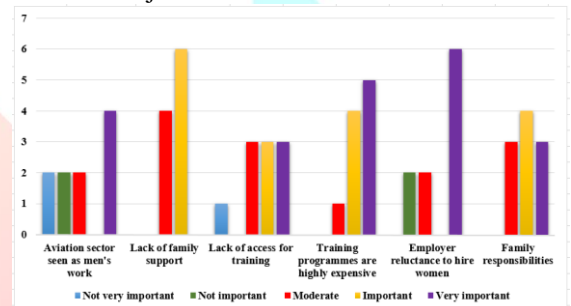


Fig. 9. Factors related for the limited number of women entries in aviation sector

Based on the respondent's comments six factors were identified (Fig 9) which influenced for the limited entries of women in aviation sector. Four respondents mentioned that very importantly they seek aviation as men's work sector while two were totally against to it. In addition, another two females moderately agree with the statement while

another two did not think importantly that the aviation sector is only for men. Six from the respondents seen that lack of family support is one of the important factor for not choosing aviation sector jobs by women. The rest of the women had moderate consent on it. Three of the respondents mentioned that lack of access for training opportunities was very important factor which limit women entries in aviation sector jobs and three respondents were moderately agreed to it. But one respondent stated that lack of access for training was not very important factor for limited women in aviation sector jobs while the three of the respondents considered it as an important factor. Six of the respondents mentioned that employers are reluctance to hire women in aviation sector and as per them it was very important factor which limit women entries in aviation but three of the respondents did not think it as an important factor while the rest of the respondents think it as a moderate factor for women entries in aviation. Three respondents mentioned that family responsibilities play a very important role which lead to limits women entries in aviation and another three females were moderately agree to it, while the rest of the responders were considered it as an important factor which restrict women entries in aviation sector jobs.

J. Responses related for promoting aviation sector jobs among other women

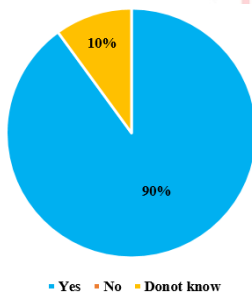


Fig. 10. Promoting aviation jobs among other women

As shown in Fig. 10, 90 % of the respondents have the consent to promote aviation sector jobs among other women while 10 % of them have no idea yet.

J. Responses related for aviation sector jobs as a long term career

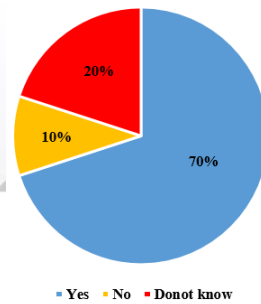


Fig. 11. Selection of aviation as a long term career

As given in Fig. 11, 70 % from the respondents stated that they select their present career as their long term career while 10% mentioned that their current job isnot their long term career. 20 % of the respondents mentioned that they have not decided yet whether their current job will be their long term career or not.

K. Responses related for any additional information on positive or negative work experiences for women in aviation sector

TABLE III. GENERAL COMMENTS BY RESPONDENTS

Respondent	Responses for the additional information related to this study
1	Family support is very important as a lady in working in the aviation industry. In addition, Child care support facilities will definitely add more value to a working mom.
3	Transport is a main issue that will demotivate the women.
8	Transport is an issue. So females have to boarded close by. Hence this leads to arise family conflicts.

Table III consist with the responses which were given by the respondents for the open ended question which was raised by the interviewer. 1st respondent mentioned that family support plays a major role for a woman who occupy in the aviation sector. Besides she mentioned that providing child care support facility is very important for a female who is working in the aviation sector. 3rd and 8th respondent mentioned that transport is one of the issues to demotivate ladies in the aviation sector. Further, 8th respondent stated that when they boarded away from their home, it leads to miss some of the day today responsibilities. It may lead to arise family conflicts as well.

CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that women who are in the aviation sector still believe that they have to overcome several hurdles than their peer males in the aviation sector. Majority of the respondents suggested that the current working conditions can be uplift by providing more training opportunities and also by providing more childcare provisions. The respondents mentioned that they are frequently undergone issues such as discrimination based on gender, in-flexible work schedules, lack of training opportunities and also lack in occupational safety and health facilities. Similar factors were identified by the literature [2, 8], as attributes which women concern when they select aviation sector as their career path. Majority of the respondents agreed that male work culture at the working place and conflicts with family responsibilities are major issues which effect for their working capacity. 60 % of the respondents have gone through training prior to their job. 60 % of the respondents got few opportunities to do new developments in their working place and also 60 % of the respondents got few opportunities to promote. As per the responses employer level and national

level policies are very important to nurture women in the aviation sector. This is agreeing with the literature [6], which mentioned that policies and regulations should be brought to implement gender equality in aviation sector. In this study majority of the respondents seen aviation as men's work which is contradictory with literature [8]. There were several factors were also identified which limit women entries to aviation such as lack of access for training, training programs are highly expensive and also employers are reluctant to recruit women for aviation jobs. In addition, higher family responsibilities in motherhood also limit more women entries in aviation, which is also coincide with the literature given in [1]. Most of the respondents like to promote aviation sector jobs among other women which is also similar with the research findings in literature [8]. Further, this study reveals that 70 % from the respondent would like to continue their present aviation sector job as their long term career, but they noted that they should able to balance their family life as well as career life due to being women, they have more responsibilities towards childcare and family life than men. Further in-depth research needs to be done with more number of respondents in order to generalize these findings through the populations.

Acknowledgment

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