



Disintegrating female-headed households:

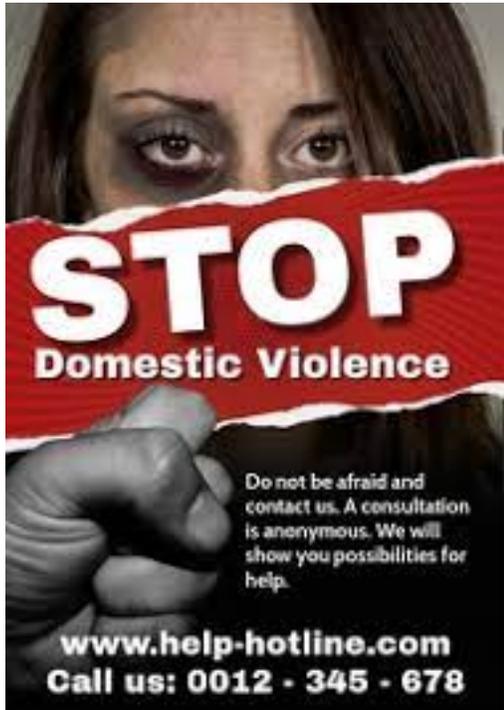
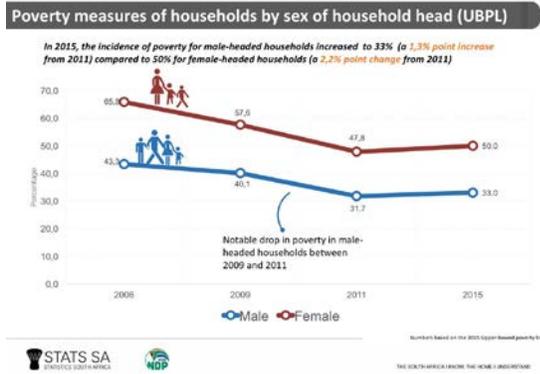
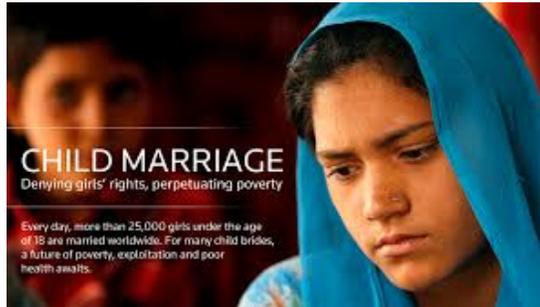
Neglected diversities in formation, existence and vulnerabilities of de-facto female-headed households in Sri Lanka

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SDGs:
Leave no one
behind

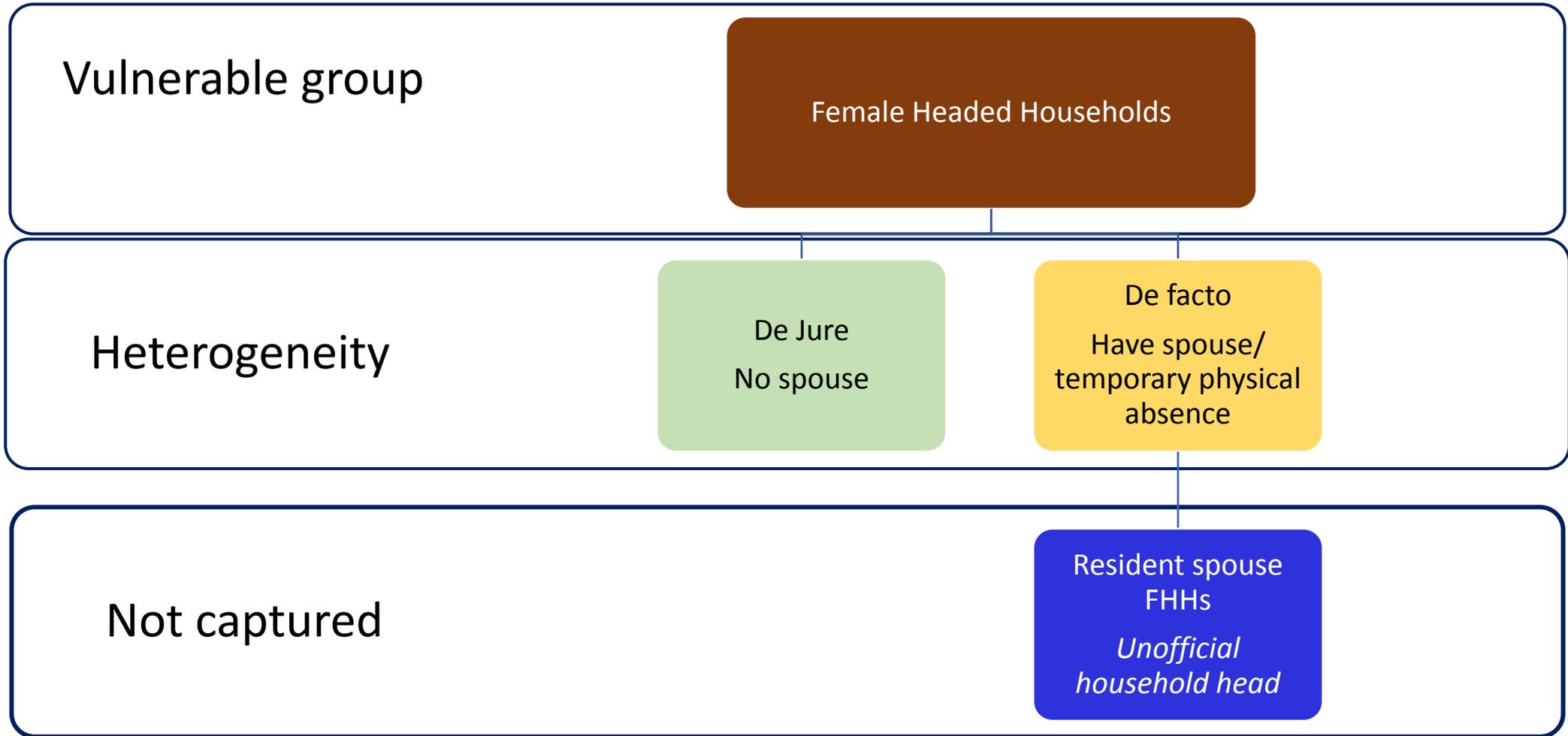


Introduction

- Main aim of SDGs is to leave no one behind
- It is established that where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are disadvantaged and excluded
- Women as a group are considered as vulnerable
 - Domestic violence
 - Elderly women abuse
 - Child marriages
 - Women more impacted in environmental disasters
 - Refugee women and girls more at risk
 - Exploitation of migrant labour
 - Poverty and vulnerability of FHHs
 - **Female Headed households** – recognized and targeted in development programs
- **Yet when some sub-groups are emphasized, it can undermine other needy groups**
 - “Un-official (de facto)” female heads are one such group



Identifying the un-recognized



Why identify de facto resident spouse FHHs ?

- Currently married and lives with spouse
- Carries primary or full economic and social responsibility of households
 - In developing countries, there is a general trend of more and more women being the primary source of economic support for their families
 - Male unemployment
 - Lack of responsibility
 - Unavoidable health issues of males
- No official recognition due to male bias in identifying heads of households – hence not captured in policy and programs
- Does not match the traditional criteria of vulnerability of FHHs (i.e. no male spouse)
- Faces many challenges as “unofficially heading “ households
- Yet no official recognition similar to official female heads



Objective



- Highlight “un-official (*de facto*)” female heads of household and their characteristics
 - Reasons for formation
 - Time of formation
 - Economic situation
 - Social/domestic conditions

Methodology

Study area: Selected districts in Sri Lanka

Study: A comparative study of *de facto* female headed households

With migrant spouse

With resident spouse



Sample: 154 *de facto* female heads

identified as having a migrant spouse

OR

self identified by women or household members as taking main responsibility of the household

Data collection : A mixed method approach

sample survey

in-depth interviews

Analysis: Descriptive based on SPSS and thematic analysis

Findings

Reasons & time of household formation

Reasons for assuming de facto headship

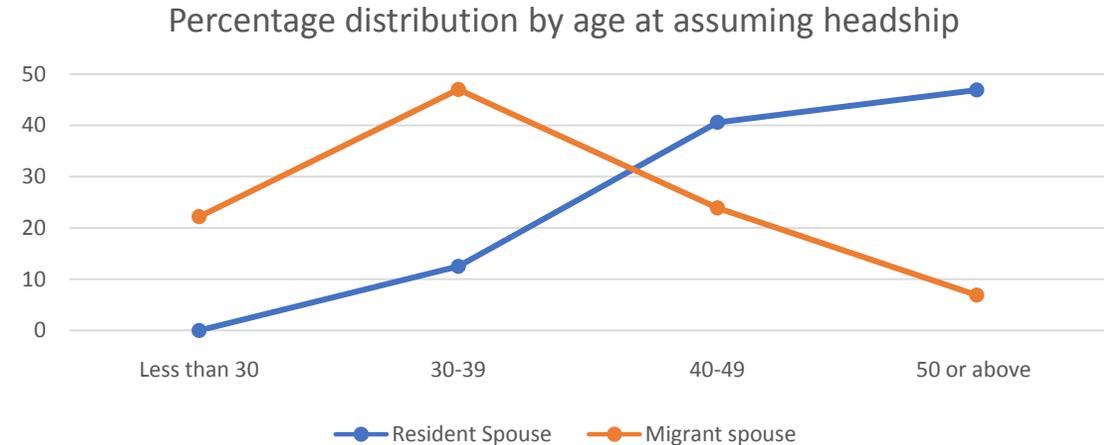
Resident spouse

- 59.45% - sickness or disability of spouse
- 40.54% - irresponsibility of spouse

Migrant spouse

- 100% - Internal or international migration of spouse & official definition

Age at assuming headship



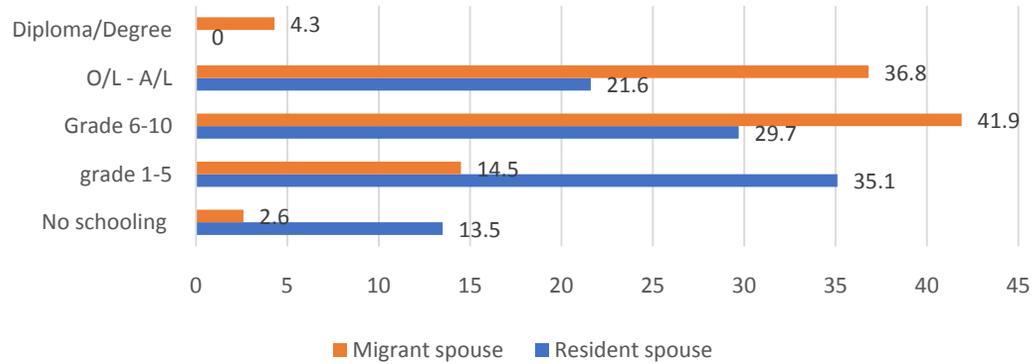
14% with resident spouse cannot remember when/at what age headship was assumed

Cannot say when I decided to take on the tasks that a husband should do. But it is some time now. Now I have to give my name as the head even to the Grama Niladari (government administrator) because my husband doesn't attend to any official tasks.

(Fara, age, 35, Self-employed, urban sector)

Selected Social and Economic characteristics

Percentage distribution by educational level

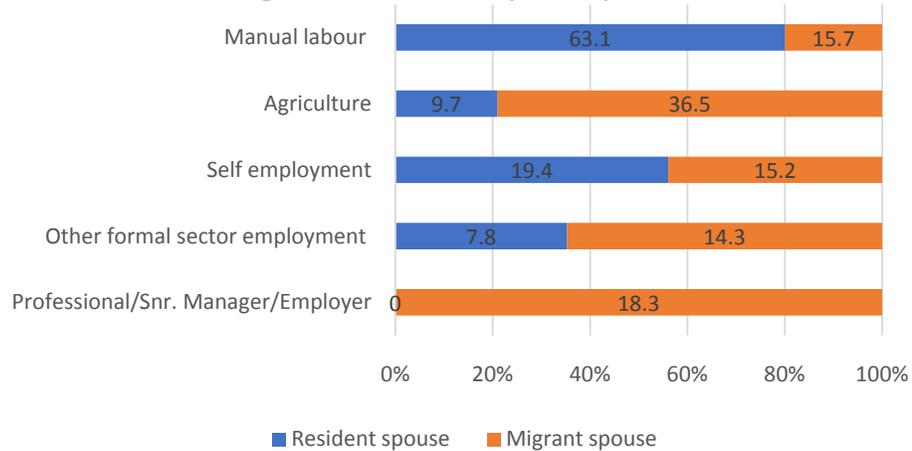


Employment status

	Employed	Unemployed
Resident s.	83.8	16.2
Migrant s.	41.9	58.1



Percentage distribution by occupation



Stability of income

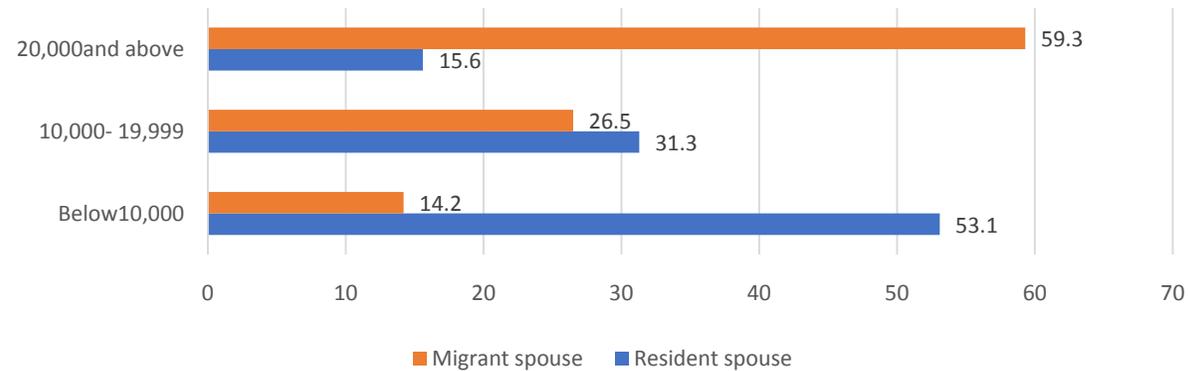
	Stable	Not stable
Resident S	35.5	64.5
Migrant S	50.9	49.1

Economic characteristics *cont.*

Monthly Household income →



Percentage distribution by monthly household income



Persons contributing to HH Income	Resident spouse (%)	Migrant spouse (%)
Solely head/ head+ state	29.7	0
Solely member/ head+ member/ head+ member+ state	31.4	0
Solely husband	0	39.3
Head + husband	0	27.4
Migrant children/migrant children + relatives+ state	9.1	0.0
Different combinations including head, husband, migrant children, relatives, state	29.8	33.3

Social and economic issues



- Male unemployment
 - Male irresponsibility
 - Low income for the household
- Alcoholism and domestic violence
- Heavy dual burden – household tasks + household maintenance
- Lack of responsible father figure leading to deviance in children
- Female physical and psychological health issues
- Social stigma
- Social insecurity (exposed to sexual harassment by community etc.)
- Non-incorporation in state social security mechanism

Conclusion

- FHHs are seen as vulnerable because of lacking a male spousal presence
- Yet household with male presence can also be vulnerable, in economic as well as social terms
 - Non contribution of the male spouse to household economy
 - Abuse of male power through domestic violence
 - Social stigma due to not adhering to the traditional household roles
 - High dual burden

Policy suggestions

- Data collection mechanisms should re-think traditional categorizations and identifications of household headship
- Focusing on **women-maintained** households is as (or more) important as focusing on households without a male spouse, especially in contexts like Sri Lanka where female-maintained households are visible
- Development planning should take into consideration diversities among sub-groups (in this case differ types of FHHS) if no one is to be left behind.

Thank you!