Forging Our Path: Formulating Organic Definitions for

Women Heads of Households

An Equal Participatory Research by Viluthu

Research Report

விழுது VILUTHU විළුදු
Centre for Human Resource Development
ஆற்றல் மேம்பாட்டு மையம் | හැකියා ප්‍රවර්ධන මධ්‍යස්ථානය

ISBN 978-624-6206-07-9

Forging Our Path: Formulating Organic Definitions for
Women Heads of Households©
2022

Viluthu
#191, Bauddaloka Mawatha, Colombo 04, Sri Lanka.
E-mail: research@viluthu.org
Tel: +94 11 2506272 | +94 11 2556773
Fax: +94 11 2555529

Foreword

After the end of the armed conflict in 2009, Women Heads of Households (WHHs) has become a commonly used term in Sri Lanka. Yet, the definition of the term has rarely been subjected to scrutiny or discussion but has been assumed to be understood and agreed upon by everyone. As a result, to date, there has been no effort to ascertain whether the definition includes the varied and complex lived realities of women. Viluthu's study on *Forging Our Path: Formulating Organic Definitions for Women Heads of Households* aims to address this gap.

Over the years it has become evident to civil society organisations and activists working with conflict affected women in the North and East, that the manner in which state institutions define/view Women Heads of Households has led to the exclusion of many women who self-labelled as such but were not accepted by state institutions as WHHs. Or, women who did not consider themselves WHH, but would constitute WHHs and should be entitled to support mechanisms, including benefits and entitlements. Yet, they did not gain access to such mechanisms due to the employment of restrictive definitions. Definitions hence became the gateway to accessing entitlements and benefits.

The lack of a clearly delineated and official definition has meant that decision making regarding entitlements and benefits which WHHs can access has at times been arbitrary, and failed to take the lived realities of women into account. For instance, a woman with no family, caring for her sister's grandchildren might not be considered a WHH because her dependents may not be legally within her care. Instead, she may be viewed as a one person household.

The generally used definition focuses only on one aspect of the role of women in their families and communities, i.e. their economic role. This restrictive definition hence ignores women's social and emotional labour and the leadership roles they play in their families. Ignoring these aspects leads to the erasure and absence of women's complex experiences and contributions to family and community while struggling to survive in a war-affected community. It also ignores the multiple aspects that constitute being responsible for a household.

This study, which aimed to understand the realities and lived experiences of women that are relevant to constructing a definition of WHHs, was conducted during the pandemic and economic crisis in Sri Lanka. It therefore also evolved into a mapping of the current situation of WHHs and provides an insight into the dire economic circumstances of these women. Moreover, it highlights social obstacles faced by women that have been compounded by COVID-19 because during times of crisis, such as a pandemic, existing inequalities

within a society are exacerbated, which can lead to increased violations of human rights of those already marginalized. For instance, the gendered nature of work and gendered obstacles faced by women in the informal sector in a deeply patriarchal society is starkly presented in the report.

The results of the study are sobering. They demand that we acknowledge the failure, not only of the state, but also of civil society and broader society to different extents, to address the needs and concerns of women who, due to the impact of the armed conflict, have assumed sole responsibility for the care and well-being of others. Yet, the resources available to these women to fulfil their responsibilities are minimal. For instance, 31% of the women who were part of the study own no assets. Women reported that their most pressing need is livelihood opportunities. Due to food insecurity, increasing inflation and lack of livelihood opportunities, Women Heads of Households are pushed further into debt, thereby increasing their vulnerability to exploitation.

The other issues documented are young marriage, lack of access to education and vocational training and lack of employment opportunities. Further, women are forced to engage in self-employment initiatives that enable them only to meet basic needs and do not facilitate social mobility. It is the familial circumstances of these women, such as the lack of carers for their children that prevent them from seeking other forms of employment. These factors lead to their economic marginalisation and disempowerment and place women at risk of exploitation. Many also continue to suffer unaddressed physical and psychological impacts of the war.

While state initiatives to assist the war-affected rebuild their lives has been minimal, even within the minimal initiatives, women have been absent in decision making processes related to interventions that impact their lives. Eleven years ago, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in its concluding observations on Sri Lanka issued in 2011 recognised this. In response the Committee called upon the government to make ‘provision for economic and social rights in post-conflict reconstruction including through the adoption of temporary special measures’; and ‘include women in the country’s post conflict, reconstruction and peace building process.’ However, in 2022, there has been little progress in this regard.

A critical part of addressing the needs and concerns of war affected women is ensuring women are not excluded from the most basic forms of involvement, such as being able to access entitlements and support to rebuild their lives. The Viluthu study’s finding of 11 distinct categories, and 58 sub and overlapping categories of WHHs illustrates the evolving nature of the lived realities of women that require the state as well as civil society to keep apace if they are to be responsive to their needs.

The findings of this study, which provide a nuanced view of the realities of Women Heads of Households and highlight gaps in state and civil society action, are invaluable as they demonstrate how definitions can function as gateways that restrict women's access to resources and opportunities, and thereby hamper their social mobility and prevent them from achieving economic independence and socio-economic security.

Lives are not static. They evolve and change. So should definitions.

Ambika Satkunanathan
Fellow, Open Society Foundation
Former Commissioner,
Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka.

Preface

Forging Our Path…

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
-Still I rise, Maya Angelou

Women Heads of Households (WHH) remain one of the most complex groups, identified in recent times (post-war) as one of the most vulnerable social groups in present day Sri Lanka that is dominated by a patriarchal values system. The island's post-independence history of war, violence and conflict, its present continuing challenges due to altered forms of transgressions and violence, and new challenges in facing a pandemic and sustaining a battered economy along with future social, political and economic phenomena brings to notice the ever-present challenges Sri Lankan women face. This acts as a precursor for the impact such issues will have on women such as WHHs who lay in the fringes of the power-dynamic structure of society. Along with such are other contributing factors in the form of physical and mental disabilities, sexual bribery and violence, drugs proliferation, predatory microfinance schemes, lack of representation at policymaking level and the lack of legal and wellbeing support networks. Priorities for WHH wellbeing include the security, safety, dignity in treatment, financial and social security, socio cultural economic and political rights of these women and the guarantee of a better future for their children. This WHH group significantly includes minority women, women affected by war and women living under extreme poverty.

Acknowledging the diversity of WHH groups, the circumstances of their being, the diversified nature of the households they head, Viluthu has sought to capture the individual stories of such women. The research relates to the exercise of articulating varied definitions of the women and Girl Child Heads of Households in Sri Lanka with special emphasis on formulating such definitions through initiating discourse and seeking inputs from the targeted demography. This search for definitions could not be done in the exclusion of the women themselves and at the same time would have to recognise the experiences of women whose 'headship' role has been not recognised by society due to patriarchal norms and systems. This demonstrates that their task of headship in this context is ridden with more and nuanced challenges than other persons with the role of the headship. The search also has a personal significance in the journey of Amara (WHH Forum) and Samasam (Women's Federation) formed and continued to be strengthened by Viluthu, as it supported in a process to reflect on its membership and future work. In our journey in support of WHH that started back in 2011 with the initial formation of an unnamed network that would later become Amara, we

have ourselves witnessed shifts in attitudes and transformation of women, issues and context. For example, even though the 'Memorandum of Concerns' released by northern WHH spoke of many issues of WHH, the Widows' Charter from Amara in consultation with other WHH networks together totalling fifteen districts did not make specific demands for women living with disabilities or ex-combatant women. In contrast to the 2019 submission of Amara based on their experiences of mobilisation, advocacy and representation, were able to galvanise support and develop further understanding on issues of some of the women groups extremely marginalised and to put forth further and connected demands to the state relating to these groups. This is coupled with the shift seen in the year 2021 in ways of inclusion within the group taking into account transgender women. This experience of these women demonstrates how from time-to-time measures regardless of who they are, need to be made for inclusion. Inclusion that is not tokenistic, that is representative and yet not taking away the actual representation of the women (in their multiple categories) themselves.

For Viluthu, this journey would not have been possible, nor the principles of this frame, without the guidance and leadership of our late founder Shanthi Sachithanandam, who we do sorely miss at this juncture, as we release this research publication that brings these values as the fundamental principles for its frame, another milestone of women's direct participation in informing and transforming their landscape. Shanthi along with her husband, late Mano Rajasingam dedicated their lives to fearlessly campaign for the rights of the oppressed and the minorities. As a strong orator, a campaigner, a human rights defender and even as a parent, Shanthi's exceedingly impressive values, beliefs and achievements nurtured and encouraged countless women from members of her family to community women and activists to continue with the struggle for reclaiming human rights, dignity and equal treatment of all, even beyond her untimely demise. Throughout this research work, Shanthi's advice, courage and the foresight for women empowerment has resonated with Viluthu and the research team. The upholding of Shanthi's values and the continuous commitment to better the lives of Sri Lankan women including WHHs is not only a tribute to her but is also a testament to the impact she has made in fighting for the causes she believed in. It is with gratitude to her and other women like her who have in the history of our time been acknowledged and at most times (wrongfully) not that we continue on this journey, inspired.

We are really excited to bring forward this living frame that can be continued to be built on by us and many others with the space and consciousness to acknowledge the heterogeneity, dynamic nature and inclusive participatory form of the definition for WHHs, recognising that categories within are unique and distinct, given origin/recognition process, issues affecting them and the contributions made by them in the face of all these challenges. From the very beginning of this research, we never set forth to bring a fixed definition for this section of the demography whose very nature and the root causes or recognition of their existence are ever evolving. It is not the intention of this research to confer identities or definitions but to give ownership of such definitions to the target group itself. However, that is not to say we didn't have surprises of our own.

Given that we exist together with the women in a space where, whether it be our existence or our work, we have been forced at times (that we were conscious of or unconscious of) to confine ourselves to that paradigm. The research process helped us reflect on ourselves and how we have understood Women Heads of Households throughout our collaboration and support. In addition, there were hurdles in the form of actual access, enabling informed consultations and deliberations all of which had to be maneuvered in this COVID-19 pandemic period where Sri Lanka saw the third and one of its largest COVID-19 waves thus far, with increase in infections and measures for lockdown or restrictions. Even though during its course, we found it difficult, it also helped in strengthening our belief that inclusion and participation can be done in many ways regardless of the existing or new barriers. Within this research period we may not have had the option to have the in-person consultations with the women and stakeholders, but that is open for future developments as this frame itself evolves which we expect and welcome. These restrictions did not deter us from exploring participatory research frames in a time of pandemic, as we felt the reverse, that even in times of pandemic we need to stay connected, accountable and representation must be done in a way that it does not remove anyone from representing their own.

This research has focused on three key components relating to WHHs and associated categories:

i. The nature of self-definitions and self-identity with shared categories of girl child heads of households and joint heads of households, along with definitions that mark a departure from existing societal norms to view the WHH concept through prevalent gender discourse. This incited conversations on definitions relating to WHH or expanding identity from Female Heads of Households that acknowledges the presence of transgender women and possibly others of varied gender identities identifying as women whilst seeking insights to the prominence given to their headship status/role played in different localities and local languages.

ii. The growing nature of social, political and economic issues enables to project the potential for categories of WHH to grow and evolve with time. The dynamic nature in categories growing and causes for Women Heads of Households to form correlates to shifting, evolving definitions that this research seeks to identify.

iii. Viluthu's commitment to its organic women networks of Amara Forum and Samasam enhanced the findings of the report to highlight the contributions both delegates from the networks and targeted women make to their respective households, families, the greater society and to policy making. While the identification of such contributions give better recognition to the role women play, it also legitimises the need to provide such women with greater visibility and political and policy representation.

It is hoped that findings presented will acknowledge existing flaws in policy and advocacy structures in addressing issues faced by WHHs, contributing to the current policy changes, reconciliation and development models. The lack of representation at policy level and the continuous inability of stakeholders to acknowledge the evolving nature of WHH definitions, their categories and process of formation have been barriers and led to marginalisation of these women or the issues affecting them. While this rapidly outdates existing policy and welfare decisions, newer categories of WHH are also in danger of being left out from decision making processes. The shrinkage of advocacy spaces and curtailment of democratic discourse that has become a characteristic of the Sri Lankan political system further exacerbates the lack of political and policy representation. The severity of such challenges opens up the findings of this research to WHHs, policymakers, legislators, civil society organisations and activists, academics, women politicians, youth, the media and international organisations to understand the complexity of definitions, social, political and economic conditions to assess the challenges ahead, to better adjust their efforts.

Viluthu and the research team founded the project based on the equal participatory principle. The following research and its detailed findings would begin with the introduction of the Equal Participatory Framework (EPF) formulated to complement the dynamic nature of WHHs along with definitions that will evolve beyond this publication. The EPF was born out of this core concept to allow stakeholders of this project to contribute equally to the research work and act as peers to the research team in formulating definitions. The EPF primarily serves two core objectives of the research project:

i. Firstly, to give the targeted demography, grassroots level movements and regional youth the ownership of the project, thus giving the targeted demography the opportunity to contribute to the project design, formulate their self-definitions and utilize a platform which would otherwise be substituted by research teams and organisations.

ii. Secondly, to embed capacity building measures to enhance the research and advocacy capabilities of all equal participants (Viluthu staff, research consultants, youth lead researchers, youth volunteers, Amara Forum and Samasam women delegates, WHH women) by providing skills, information, networking abilities and stimulating intellectual growth, to sustain the findings of the project and improve necessary skills for future research work.

The dynamic nature of the definitions sought is complimented by the dynamic formulation of the EPF that is open to stakeholder inputs to sustain related advocacy and research work beyond the timeline of this research project. Meaningful participation of all stakeholders was achieved through ensuring inclusivity, representativeness, transparency and knowledge and power sharing amongst all. In application, such goals were achieved via extensive consultations, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and the completion of contextual analysis questionnaires which saw the inputs from over one thousand women, over fifty Amara and Samasam delegates, nearly sixty youth researchers and a range of key informants, whose

inputs have been reflected in this research and its findings. Owing to Viluthu's extensive record on working with youth and women in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka, the research work focused on the districts of Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Batticaloa and Trincomalee. The selected geographic regions are also home to a higher percentage of WHHs in the country stemming from the conflict and associated economic impediments.

Viluthu is grateful to all the stakeholders of the project, in particular the regional Amara Samasam delegates and the youth researchers for their contributions in drafting the potential WHH categories list with over one hundred different variations of WHHs, girl child heads of households, joint heads of households and women of minority genders to illustrate the diversity and the evolutionary nature of the subject matter. The compiled list also served as a foundation for the research and associated fieldwork. The stakeholders of the EPF hope that such outcomes of the research will aid the purposes of all project beneficiaries to serve the empowerment of WHHs and the attainment of their rights.

Much of the praise goes to the research team comprising of the research consultants, research assistants, Amara Forum delegates, Samasam delegates, district youth research leads, youth volunteers, research coordinators and Viluthu staff members who took all the effort and measures for enabling this. Without their tiring efforts, commitment and vision this would have remained only a dream. We cannot remain without thanking all individuals and organisations who helped Viluthu achieve its objectives through this research. It is the contributions and assistance of these officials, stakeholders (both state and non-state) and participants that carried and participated in this research project to meet its objectives. It was extremely beneficial and a privilege to have Ambika Satkunanathan (Former Human Rights Commissioner, Activist) as an external advisor to the research project providing reflection and an objective review of our work as we progressed. In addition, we also know that such participatory or inclusive measures, in the COVID context would have further stretched the need for financial resources to complete this task and we are thankful to our donor/partners Global Fund for Women, DIAKONIA and Strengthening Reconciliation Process in Sri Lanka (SRP) which is jointly funded by the European Union and the German Federal Foreign Office and implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft Für Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and the British Council, in partnership with the Government of Sri Lanka who have also extended their support for the publication and launch of this research.

It is Viluthu's sincere hope that the findings in the following chapters would be a turning point for the facilitation of policy, welfare and the reaffirming of rights of all WHHs and associated groups in Sri Lanka and the greater South Asian region as a whole.

'Hope' is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all –
And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard –
And sore must be the storm –
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm –
I've heard it in the chillest land –
And on the strangest Sea –
Yet, never, in Extremity,
It asked a crumb – of Me.

-Emily Dickinson

Maithreyi Rajasingam
Executive Director
Viluthu

Shakti Sri Devapura
Research Coordinator – Consultant



Research Team

This research project was conducted with the participation and assistance of the following EPF stakeholders, advisors, consultants, resources persons and service providers.

Research Consultants: Prof. Fazeeha Azmi (University of Peradeniya)[1] and Dr. Subramanium Jeevasuthan (University of Jaffna).[2]

Research Assistants: Arathiya Pushpalingam (University of Peradeniya)[3] and Pakeerthika Rajaradnam (University of Jaffna).[4]

Youth Lead Researchers: Inparaja Nirojan, Thushany Sundaralingam, Anuwarna Waranakulasingam, Kanthasamy Velraj, Mathyshangar Vijayabalasingam, Meenu Vicneshawaran.

District Youth Volunteers: Saheer Ahemedhan, Selvarajah Kalistan, Mohamed Mufazzal, RFM.Nafeer, Saththiyanathan Thanushan, J.Santhru, Mirnalini Vadivel, Niroja Navaraththinam, Murugathas Kalojini, AMS.Ahamed, D.Dilmy Tharusika, M.S Thilzath Banu, K.A.Ruwani, Niyumi Nimesha, MJM Waseem, Vadivel Thanuja, Ariyarethnam Aneja, Piruththica Ravindrakumar, Krishnakuma, Thevalaxshana, Sivam Vithurshan, Rammiya Sheldon Vijitha, Aloysius Rupekka, Vasanthakumar Sajanthan, Sanmuarasa Sharmini, Nagenthiran Nayanan, Kunanayakam Kobiraj, Thanabalasingam Thulasiram, Sriarulanantharasa Kugathasan, Sureshkumar Sajeevan, Suntharalingam Rameskanth, Suganya parameswaran, Marlin Venuja Joseph Enosan, Singarasa Kiriththiya, Priya Yogeswaran, Rukshika Sivasunthararasa, Balanathan Anojan, Pathmanathan Sharanraj, Jeseelan Sangith, Muththukkumar Vijayakala, Sounthiraraja Thipana, Navaradnam Piriya, Mahendran Laxshana, Thanikasalam Thaventhiny, Suntharalinkam Tharsiny, Yokarasa Yokatharsiny.

Amara Samasam Delegates: Sivaraja Mariyarosani, Ithayaraaj Sailaa, Kumaravel Thayaliny, Pushpananthan Immaculata, M.R.G. Ilmunisha, R.Vijayaledsumi, Safeeka, A.Ajantha.

Viluthu Head Office and District Staff: Maithreyi Rajasingam (Executive Director), Inthumathy Hariharathamotharan (Head of Programmes), Thuvaraka Thavathurai (Senior Community Mobiliser), Sivajothi Kirshnamoorthy (Senior Community Mobiliser), Sarmiya Navaradnarasa (Senior community Mobilizer) Sithamparappillai Suhirthavily (Senior Community Mobiliser), Kanthan Nirmala (Documentation Officer).

Research Coordinator - Consultant: Shakti Sri Devapura

---

[1] **Fazeeha Azmi** is a Professor in the Department of Geography, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. Her research interests include youth, poverty and livelihood changes, women and migration, internal displacement, tourism, small scale fisheries and post war development in Sri Lanka. She has published journal articles and book chapters on the above subject areas and has presented her works in international and national conferences.

[2] **Subramanium Jeevasuthan** is the head of department and a senior academic in the Department of Sociology, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka. His research interests include social policy, women-headed households in post-war scenario, Tamil diasporic involvement in different domains in Sri Lanka, internal displacement, water security and NGO culture in Sri Lanka. He has extensively published with reputed international and local publishers on the above areas and presented his work in national and international conferences.

[3] Arathiya Pushpalingam is a postgraduate student at the Postgraduate Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, where she is pursuing her Master of Philosophy in Geography. She enjoys examining concepts and has produced a book review and a book chapter in local publications. Her field of specialization is Human Geography.

[4] Pakeerthika Rajaratnam has completed her bachelor's degree in sociology at the University of Jaffna. Currently following Masters of Arts in Sociology at the University of Colombo. Apart from her employment, she also acts as freelance researcher working as a research assistant in a number of research projects.

Project External Advisor: Ambika Satkunanathan (Fellow, Open Society Foundation. Commissioner, Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka 2015-2020).

KOBO Consultant: Rismey Mohamed

Translators: Janith Rukmal, DocuWiz Pvt. Ltd.

Sinhala Language Resource Person: Vibusha Madanayake

Graphics Designers: Yaseen Khan, Altaf Ahmed, Magnet Studios

Data Presentation Advisor: Protégé Media

Printed by : E&S Print Solutions - +94 771 921 460

Organizational Background

Viluthu is a not-for-profit organization operating in Sri Lanka since 2003 with the prime focus on working with war affected communities and vulnerable women from former war areas. Operating under the principles of creating an inclusive and socially cohesive society that practices participatory democracy and adheres to gender equality, economic, social justice and equitable development, Viluthu seeks to enhance women and youth participation in policy discourse and provide a platform to the marginalised groups for such purposes. The Organisation's core strengths are the grassroots women's networks and the Amara Forum and Samasam that it has fostered over the years to engage with and seek solutions to the problems of war affected women and communities.

The Amara Forum grew as a surrogate of the Women's Federation of Viluthu which nurtured the creation and the growth of the forum. Since its inception, the Amara Forum has grown to a widespread network to enhance political participation, advocacy and capacity building of Women Heads of Households (WHH). The Forum also draws in resources from the state, civil society organisations to perform relief work. At present, the Amara Forum has an established presence in seven districts of the island and an outreach for policy discourse in another eight districts with other WHH groups. In 2015, the Amara Forum and Viluthu published the Widows Charter, the first of its kind in the region, which prompted the need for a broader definition[5]. The Widows Charter drew inspiration and inputs from the Amara Forum's twenty thousand strong member base to call on the state to ensure the advancement of women in all aspects of life including human rights and fundamental freedoms whilst safeguarding the rights of the vulnerable WHH through the provision of security, equal opportunities in policy development and economic engagement. The Widows Charter inspired the research in many ways. The Widows Charter emphasises the importance of recognizing widows and other WHHs and mainstreaming their perspectives in all policy development and decisions. It calls for understanding the situations of the WHHs, assess their numbers, eliminate discrimination and poverty and acknowledge them as valuable social capital. This research, with the participation of Amara Forum and Samasam, aims to contribute towards these objectives, by involving the Amara Forum and Samasam delegates in all important stages of the research. As envisioned by the Widows Charter, the research mainly aimed at recognizing the diversity of WHHs and the issues they have prioritised as their concerns.

The works of both Viluthu and the Amara Forum are complimented by **Samasam**, which is an organic women's grassroots network (Women's Federation) to engage and address issues arising in conflict affected

[5] Released in 2015 by Amara Forum for Women Heads of Households, drawing on concerns and needs of WHHs and placing their recommendations to the State on safety and security, livelihood and social security, access to entitlements and benefits, education, nutrition and health, socio-cultural issues and missing persons and family members in detention to both the central and provincial governments (2015-2016). This initiated the response of the Government of Sri Lanka drawing a National Action Plan centred policy for WHH.

areas. The functioning of Samasam demonstrated the need for a forum such as Amara Forum to enhance the networking capabilities of WHHs and unite them to attain common goals.

Viluthu, Amara Forum and Samasam have consistently strived for the betterment of the vulnerable communities, women and youth including Women Heads of Households with works such as the Widows Charter making an impact on relevant national policy. Owing to this, Viluthu seeks to continue enhancing the lives of the vulnerable such as WHHs through promoting engagement and capacity building facilitation that is informed by its research work.

Contents

Foreword..... iii
Preface..... vi
Research Team..... xii
Organisational Background……..... xiv
Contents. xvi
List of Figures, Maps and Tables ……..……. xx
Acronyms and Abbreviations ……..…… xxii
Executive Summary …….…….…. 1

Section 1

1 Introduction 6
2 Contextual background 11
2.1 Women in Sri Lanka 11
2.2 Women Heads of Households in Sri Lanka 12
2.3 Project Context 14
2.4 General Objectives 15
2.5 Beneficiaries and Target Groups 16
2.6 Desired Outcomes 16
2.7 Sustainability 16
2.8 Initial Risks and Limitations 17
3 Project Methodology and Approach 18
3.1 Equal Participation Framework 18
3.2 Data Collection Methods 21
3.3 Geographical Areas of Focus 23

Section 2

4 Heterogeneity of WHHs 24
4.1 Main and Sub Categories 24
4.1.1 Widows 26
4.1.2 Women Whose Husbands are Missing/ Enforced Disappearances 26
4.1.3 Women Whose Husbands are Imprisoned 28
4.1.4 Separated 28
4.1.5 Legally Divorced 28
4.1.6 Husband Has Left (the Woman /Family) 29
4.1.7 Married (According to Civil and Customary Laws) 29
4.1.8 Remarried (Legally, Not Legally, Married According to Customary Law) 30

4.1.9 Not Married 30
4.1.10 Women in Open Relationships 31
4.1.11 Girl Child Heads of Households 31
4.1.12 WHHs with Disabilities 33
4.1.13 Women Directly/ Indirectly Related to Armed Groups/ Government Forces 33
4.1.14 Transgender Women 34
5 Socio-Economic Background of the Respondents 35
5.1 Age 35
5.2 Ethnicity 35
5.3 Religion 36
5.4 Native Place 36
5.5 Education 38
5.6 Vocational Training 39
5.7 Employment Status 41
5.7.1 Previous Employment of the Currently Unemployed 41
5.7.2 Reasons for Previous Unemployment 42
5.7.3 Unemployment and Income Source 43
5.7.4 Types of Jobs 45
5.7.5 Multiple Income Sources 46
5.7.6 Current Employment 48
5.7.7 Barriers to Current Employment 50
5.7.8 Types of Barriers Experienced by WHHs in their Current Employment 51
5.7.9 Barriers in Getting Employment 55
5.8 Monthly Income 57
5.8.1 Adequacy of Monthly Income 58
5.9 Asset Ownership 60
5.9.1 Right to Use Land 62
5.9.2 House Ownership 65
6 Headship and Household Responsibilities 67
6.1 Perspectives of the Participants on the Responsibilities of a Household Head 67
6.2 Contribution of Male Members to Household Income 68
6.3 Community Acceptance of Household Headship 70

7 Vulnerabilities and Precarities 72
7.1 Early Marriages and Under Aged Marriages 72
7.1.1 Reasons for Under Aged Marriage 73
7.2 Poverty: Loan & Debt 76
7.2.1 Financial Assistance Received 77
7.2.2 Loans: Current Situation 78
7.2.3 Intention to take Loans in the Future 80
7.3 COVID-19 Pandemic 80
7.4 Sexual Harassment 82
7.5 Impacts of War on WHHs 83
7.5.1 Victims of War 83
7.5.2 Disabilities due to the War 83
7.5.3 Challenges Faced by Ex-Combatants 87
7.5.4 Government Sponsored Rehabilitation 88
7.5.5 Psychological Impacts of War 89
7.5.6 Feelings of Recovery 91
8 Accessibility to Services 93
8.1 Types of services and Access 93
8.2 Barriers in Accessing Services 95
8.2.1 Types of Barriers in Accessing Services 96
8.3 Bribes and Exploitation 98
8.3.1 Seeking Remedies for Bribery and Corruption 100
8.3.2 Complaints Lodged 101
8.3.3 Action taken Regarding Complaints 102
9 Social Networks in Supporting WHHs 103
9.1 Membership in Social Organizations 103
9.2 Amara Forum & Samasam 105
10 Health and Well-being 108
11 Contribution of WHHs 112
12 Discussion and Reflection 119
12.1 A Note on Our Methodology 120
12.2 Establishing the Definition of WHHs 121
12.3 WHHs: What does it mean to us? 121
12.4 Heterogeneity of WHHs 122
12.5 Socio-Economic Background and Recognition 123
12.6 Access to Services 123
12.7 Vulnerabilities and Precarities 123

12.8 Social Networks and Support Systems 125
13 Policy Recommendations 126
13.1 General Recommendations 126
13.2 Recommendations to Government, International organisations and Civil Society 126
13.3 Recommendations to Viluthu 132
13.4 Recommendations to WHHs 132
13.5 Recommendations to the Media 133
13.6 Post Publication Recommendations *(Addendum)* 133
14 Conclusion 136
15 References 139

Appendix A: Equal Participatory Framework xxiii
Appendix B: Potential WHH Categories and Subcategories drawn from EPF Stakeholders xxvii
Appendix C: District Profile xxxii
Appendix D: Tables xxxvi
Appendix E: Questionnaire xli

List of Figures, Maps and Tables

Figure 4.1: Civil status of the respondents 25
Figure 5.1: Age structure of the respondents 35
Figure 5.2: Ethnic composition of the total sample 35
Figure 5.3: Religious composition of the total sample 36
Figure 5.4: Percentage of native population and migrant population 36
Figure 5.5: Reasons for internal migration 37
Figure 5.6: Educational qualifications of the respondents 38
Figure 5.7: Receipt of vocational training of the respondents 39
Figure 5.8: Types of vocational training received by the respondents 40
Figure 5.9: Employment status of the respondents 41
Figure 5.10: Previous employment status of the currently unemployed respondents 41
Figure 5.11: Reasons for previous unemployment 42
Figure 5.12: Income source of the unemployed respondents 44
Figure 5.13: Types of jobs of the employed respondents 45
Figure 5.14: Income from multiple sources 46
Figure 5.15: Number of income sources 47
Figure 5.16: Current employment or livelihood of the respondent 49
Figure 5.17: Barriers in current work / employment of the respondents 50
Figure 5.18: Types of barriers to continue current employment 51
Figure 5.19: Barriers to get employment 56
Figure 5.20: Monthly income of the respondents 57
Figure 5.21: Monthly household income of the respondents 58
Figure 5.22: Adequacy of monthly income from employment of the respondents 58
Figure 5.23: Assets owned by respondents 61
Figure 5.24: Source of land owned 62
Figure 5.25: Nature of right to use the land 64
Figure 5.26: Source of house provision 66
Figure 6.1: Opinion on the responsibilities of the household head 68
Figure 6.2: Contribution of male members to household income 68
Figure 6.3: Acceptance of women's headship by the community 70
Figure 7.1: Age at marriage 73
Figure 7.2: Reasons for early marriage of the respondents 74
Figure 7.3: Financial assistance received by the respondents 77
Figure 7.4: Respondents who have loans to pay back 78
Figure 7.5: Purpose of loans taken 79
Figure 7.6: Intention to take loans in the future 80

Figure 7.7: Victims of war 83
Figure 7.8: Physical disabilities related to war 84
Figure 7.9: Status of challenges: ex-combatants in the community 87
Figure 7.10: Receipt of rehabilitation from Government 88
Figure 7.11: Thoughts of participants on rehabilitation programme 89
Figure 7.12: Feeling of recovery from the war impacts 91
Figure 8.1: Accessible services 94
Figure 8.2: Barriers in accessing services 95
Figure 8.3: Types of barriers in accessing services 97
Figure 8.4: Type of bribes 98
Figure 8.5: Aware of institutions to complain on bribery 100
Figure 8.6: Complaints made by respondents 101
Figure 8.7: Reasons for not making complaints 101
Figure 8.8: Actions taken on complaints made by respondents 102
Figure 9.1: Membership in social organizations 103
Figure 9.2: Types of the organizations 103
Figure 9.3: Roles taken in organizations 104
Figure 9.4: Reasons for holding membership in social organizations 105
Figure 9.5: Knowledge on Amara Forum and Samasam 105
Figure 9.6: Membership in Amara Forum and Samasam 106
Figure 9.7: Social support to overcome the issues faced in day-to-day life 107
Figure 10.1: Health and wellbeing 108
Figure 10.2: Health issues 109
Figure 10.3: Women who consulted a doctor during the last twelve months 109
Figure 10.4: Reason for not consulting a doctor 110

Map 3.1: Geographical focus of the study 23
Table 2.1: Distribution of FHHs according to Districts 13
Table 3.1: Distribution of informants included in the contextual analysis questionnaire 21
Table 7.1: Types of impacts 86

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CBO	Community Based Organizations
CEJ	Centre for Equality and Justice
CPA	Centre for Policy Alternatives
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSD	Civil Service Division
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CTB	Ceylon Transport Board
DCS	Department of Census and Statistics
DSD	Divisional Secretariats of Sri Lanka
EPF	Equal Participation Framework
EMI	Equated Monthly Instalment
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FHH	Female Headed Households
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GCE A/L	Certificate of Education Advanced Level
GCE O/L	Certificate of Education Ordinary Level
GHHs	Girl Child Heads of Household
GNs	Grama Niladhari
GS	Grama Sevakar
HIES	Household Income & Expenditure Survey
ILO	International Labour Organizations
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna
KI -s	Key Informant Interviews
KIs	Key Informants
LKR	Sri Lankan Rupee
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MMDA	Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
PAMA	Public Assistance of Monthly Allowance
PNM	Prefer Not to Mention
PTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
RAs	Research Assistants
RCs	Research Consultants
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SMS	Short Message Services
TNA	Tamil National Alliance
TID	Terrorist Investigation Division
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WDO	Women Development Officer
WHH	Women Heads of Households

Executive Summary

The three decades of war in Sri Lanka and its post war context have made disproportionate effects on different categories of women. As a consequence of war and violence, women have been left as widows, half widows,[6] disabled and victims/survivors of sexual violence. Most of them are placed in the peripheries of social, cultural, economic and political structures. This is particularly true in the case of Women Heads of Households (WHHs) who lack the necessary social, economic and cultural support systems they require. Most Intersections such as age, marital status, ethnicity, caste, religion, language, education, displacement status, educational achievements, household structures and various other constraints embedded in the patriarchal communities in which they live continue to limit the opportunities for them to enjoy their freedom and ensure their advancements. The inherited vulnerabilities and evolving precarities have helped very few of them to navigate difficult terrain while leaving many of them out.

The main objective of this study is to map and establish organic definitions of WHHs through a broader consultative process and to identify and examine the issues faced by them which influence their self-identity. It also aimed at contributing to the capacity building processes for WHHs, women and youth on research and documentation that would result in participatory dialogue leading to inclusive policy development. Another observation the research makes is identifying WHHs contribution to their families, society and to their country. Our study conducted in the districts of Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Batticaloa and Trincomalee, provides a perfect context for formulating organic definitions of WHHs, due to the districts' experience of war and different ethnic compositions. The study used the Equal Participatory Framework (EPF) as the research approach. Identified as an evolving framework this provided for various stakeholders within its development and implementation enabling an inclusive platform to engage in the several exercises in formulating the organic definitions of WHHs. The research methods included extensive stakeholder consultations, a detailed questionnaire survey, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, follow up interviews and reflection meetings.

The analysis of the data brought to light 11 distinct categories, and 58 subcategories and overlapping categories of WHHs. It also revealed that the WHHs play the roles of caregivers, breadwinners, decision makers, community leaders, employment providers, politicians and peace agents. It is important to note that the participants' identification of WHHs is not restricted to their economic roles. In performing these roles, they face multiple challenges and disadvantages. The current socio economic and political challenges they face have exacerbated their hardships. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the traditional civic space and community networks that civil society organisations maintained have started to erode. All of the

[6] WHHs who do not know the whereabouts of their husbands. This category could include WHHs whose husbands were made disappeared after surrendering to the Sri Lankan Armed forces.

aforesaid process has resulted in the reduction of support and guidance that WHHs received and hence, has curtailed their ability to seek help relating to issues they face.

In establishing organic definitions of WHHs, the study identified, their socio-economic backgrounds, heterogeneity, changing understanding of headship and household responsibilities, accessibility to services, vulnerabilities and precarities, social networks, their health, impacts of war and finally their contributions to their own families and the community. In the patriarchal societies they are living in, the social stigma related to widowhood, half widows, unmarried women appear in various forms to marginalize the WHHs.

The socio-economic background of the informants reflected diversity in terms of age, ethnicity, education, employment, vocational training, resettlement status, income and expenditure. Majority of the respondents belong to middle and old age groups. When considering their level of education, within the context of Sri Lanka, the majority of them are in a disadvantaged position. Very few WHHs were able to achieve a higher level of education. When they were schooling their education was severely impacted by the war. Some WHHs had to marry at an early age to avoid forceful recruitment by the LTTE, which also interrupted their opportunities to study. Due to low educational qualification and lack of vocational training experiences, WHHs are facing disadvantages and discrimination. Among the WHHs majority of them have undergone vocational training, which are very much gender stereotypical. The employment status of the WHHs showed nearly half of them are unemployed. They depend on charities, government assistance and diaspora support for their daily survival. Some of them depend on home gardening, remittances, pensions and interests from their savings, while some WHHs did not prefer to mention their income sources. Their unemployment is also connected to health issues, dependents at home, lack of proper guidance and non-availability of employment opportunities that they can engage in.

Among those who are employed, the majority of them are in the temporary employment category. A reasonable majority is engaged in daily wages and seasonal employment such as fishing, prawn farming, preparing snacks and meals for ceremonies and engaging in producing palmyrah palm products. The employment types of the WHHs show their vulnerability and precarity. The COVID-19 pandemic, natural hazards, economic crises at the national level and many other factors have also severely affected the livelihoods of WHHs who already engaged in unstable economic activities. The research found that among the WHHs who are employed, the majority of them are engaged in gender stereotypical employment such as sewing, food making, handicraft making, livestock and poultry. Only 4% of the WHHs are employed in the government sector. Among the employed, 81% are receiving their income from multiple sources. This shows that they are exploring different opportunities to support their family income using their networks and agency. This also highlights the inadequacy of their one source of income and the circumstances that compel them to search for multiple sources of income. However, this also demonstrates that the WHHs have strived to explore and access different opportunities to support their family income using their networks and demonstrate their agency.

Nearly 33% of the WHHs face barriers in their current work. These barriers included, household work, looking after dependents, disability, health issues, lack of transport facilities, distance to work site, poor working conditions, strict administration and the family's and society's perception and expectation on their work outside home. In addition the WHHs also face problems related to non-flexible working hours, gender blind work administration, insufficient protection from Sexual and Gender based violence (SGBV) and lack of or no channels to report violence or abuse in their workplace. The WHHs also face barriers in getting employment, which varied from dependents at home, non-availability of jobs, their personal decision not to go for work, non-availability of matching employment for their experience, qualification and skills and non-availability of proper guidance. Although some WHHs face barriers in their employment, they choose to continue to work as they have to feed several mouths, showing their marginalized and powerless situation. The monthly income level of the employed WHHs showed that more than one third of the respondents are only receiving an income above LKR. 10,000/-.

Ownership of assets is very important for WHHs, not only for their economic survival, but also for their social identity and security. According to our research findings, 68% of WHHs mentioned that they own assets, while 31% said they do not own any assets. Among the assets, WHHs highlighted the importance of land and house. The WHHs access to asset ownership within a patriarchal society is influenced by several factors along with the influence of post tsunami and post war reconstruction. Land occupation, land grabs, resettlement programmes and displacement have all eroded their ownership and access to assets.

The WHHs are diversely represented and are differently positioned in the communities where they live. They are in different vulnerable and precarious situations. The research found that their vulnerabilities and precarities are connected with early/underage marriages, poverty, loans, debts, COVID-19 pandemic, sexual harassment and the continuing impacts of the war in their everyday lives. The primary issue identified by the majority of respondents connected to the above situations was lack of income. Respondents foresee that they would face additional challenges as a result of their lack of income, either directly or indirectly. Their earnings were insufficient to meet their basic needs. Respondents were afraid of becoming indebted to people and banks. Nearly 30% of the WHHs have taken loans for various purposes. We noticed that these loans are taken to cover daily household expenditures, education of children, repay loans that are already taken, constructing houses, pay dowry, weddings, funerals, birthday parties, puberty celebration, to get electricity and water supply connections, to buy vehicles, migration and buy several other goods and services that they identified as important. When WHHs depend on unregulated micro finance institutions to obtain loans most of them are exploited and become more vulnerable. We found most of the WHHs who have obtained loans are trapped in debt.

Most WHHs have direct experience of war and experience the continuing legacy of war. During the war, while some of these women were civilian women another group of women served as combatants. The combatant role provided them a different identity and social purpose in a patriarchal society. The community

respect elicited through their participation did not negate the application of patriarchal principles in their control and conduct. In the post war context, the ex-combatant women could not gain the same acceptance. They face marginalization and exclusion within their community which saw them as heroines once. Some of them have undergone rehabilitation as required by the government, in the hope that they will be free from any charges. However, the procedures adopted for rehabilitation process by the government has been highly criticized for the lack of transparency, lack of clarification on who should be rehabilitated, militarization of the process, undefined rehabilitation period, misuse of the law, lack of coherent policy, lack of verifiable statistics, procedures adopted to transfer from rehabilitation centres to detention centres and post monitoring services (Satkunanathan 2018). Even after their release from the so-called rehabilitation process, the continuing surveillance make the ex-combatants' lives miserable and leads to isolation in the society.

In our research, among the rehabilitated ex-combatants we found women with disabilities. They are the sole breadwinners of their families. The social stigma they face is silently experienced and in some cases confronted with their agency, challenging the social expectations on how they should behave. In the post war context, the ex-combatants are experiencing many complicated issues in their everyday lives, which are connected to their daily survival, community participation, marriage and the community's views on them (Satkunanathan 2012). The agency and empowerment the ex-combatants experienced during the time of the LTTE has also been questioned by researchers and also the former political strategist of the LTTE, Anton Balasingham (ibid). The actual meaning of agency and empowerment is not clearly understood or conceptualized within the patriarchal society in which the ex-combatants live. Within this context, the ex-combatants continue to face many problems to make their ends meet. Low levels of education, irregular employment opportunities, lack of relevant job training, lower income and higher expenditures, challenges in accessing services are some of the issues faced by many WHHs. While the majority of the WHHs are caught up in this dilemma, a few WHHs were able to overcome the vulnerabilities they face, although they too faced similar challenges. Amidst this varying and vast range of challenges, there still have been WHHs who have striven to be caregivers, entrepreneurs, community activists and politicians. The new challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic since its onset have put extra burden on already vulnerable WHHs. The situation has also created many WHHs connected to economic reasons, when the previous head of the household lost their employment and income sources.

Access to services is very important in the everyday life of WHHs. As WHH face critical and nuanced challenges and barriers in comparison to other women, proper access to services becomes crucial in fulfilling their responsibilities, needs and increasing family and public participation. However, the research shows that WHHs face many challenges in accessing services. Health, banking (financial services), police service, legal service, safe houses, education, skills/vocational training, counselling and protection are some of the services available in the study areas. WHHs also mentioned the importance of electricity and water supply. The research found WHHs have varying access to these services. It is pertinent to note that the

access to counselling services, skills training and safe houses showed a low level of accessibility. These services, especially counselling and safe houses are important for WHHs who continue to bear the wounds of the war. Some of the WHHs are facing the issue of various forms of bribes in accessing services. However, due to the stigma, fear of powerful perpetrators and lack of proper channels to address or report the issues and lack of awareness, these issues are experienced silently.

The research also found that except in Mullaitivu in all the other study districts, WHH's participation in social networks is limited. As the district was severely affected by the war and Tsunami, it has several social networks serving different needs of the community. We understood that most of the WHHs are interested in joining social networks and organizations that are providing them with material benefits, awareness or advocacy related networking while also valuing social networks and organising, particularly for social benefits and other reasons. The activities which are implemented by Amara Forum and Samasam received appreciation and it should be expanded widely among the needy women with a rapid action plan, understanding the issues and vulnerabilities of WHHs with wider geographical scope.

WHHs in the study mentioned various health issues. Increased physical and mental health challenges were also linked to WHHs' social and economic inequalities. During and after the armed conflict, women from marginalized/minority groups were also subjected to various forms of violence, inequalities, and related psychological challenges. The WHHs' most common challenges were grief, psychosomatic complaints, anxiety, and aggressive behaviour apart from the war related physical disabilities.

The WHHs included in the study are not always passive victims of various socioeconomic, cultural, political and natural processes. They have contributed successfully to their families, communities and their country. However, such contributions sometimes remain unnoticed and unacknowledged. In our research, we showcase their contributions in various areas at various levels.

Based on our research we make some recommendations for different entities. These recommendations are put forward by various partners involved in the research. The core message of the recommendations spins around the importance of acknowledging the evolving categories and the heterogeneity of WHHs in relevant areas of interventions, policy and the need for inclusion in such processes. The recommendations are addressed to different entities that are directly and indirectly working with the WHHs. The recommendations highlight the necessity to recognize and include GHHs and transgender women in the WHHs policy and programmes. Amara and Samasam can play a key role as an important stakeholder with key entities in this journey.

SECTION 1

1 Introduction

Conceptualizing Female Headed Households (FHHs) or Women Headed Households (WHHs) has created a broad discussion at academic, research and policy levels. The robust body of literature on the concept shows that there is no uniform agreement on who constitutes FHHs or WHHs. The literature on FHHs/WHHs has mainly centred on the concept of household headship and on whether FHHs/WHHs are poor and worth targeting in development projects. According to the literature, household headship is defined and understood in several ways. The literature documents that, headship of the household is associated with economic contributor role, decision making role or a person in the family accepted by the other family members as the head (Buvinić & Gupta 1997, Posel 2001, Chant 2003(a), Ruwanpura & Humphries 2003, Rogan 2013, 2016).[7]

Different definitions are used in different countries and by different agencies in their activities, projects, policies and programmes. In most of the National Census it is defined in three different ways: 1) Self-reported or accepted by others in the households, 2) defined by the authorities and 3) being the main contributor to the household economy. UNFPA and the ILO have their own definition of WHHs. While the former concentrates more on persons considered breadwinners, the latter focuses on 'male absent households. Generally, national and international research have identified FHHs/WHHs as household units of adult women, with children living without a male partner. These different understandings suggest that the definitions can vary according to the purpose and the context highlighting the headship or households and what defines headship.

The category of FHHs/WHHs in the development literature pertaining to the global South has centred on the conceptual confusion regarding 'household' and 'headship' (Ruwanpura 2004, Chakrabarti 2019, Jayasinghe 2019, Joshi Rajkarnikar and Ramnarain 2020). The conceptual meaning attached to the term 'households' has undergone changes throughout time. Within the complex socio-cultural contexts in South Asia, the definition of households is different from the Western understanding of household, which is generally defined by a nuclear family (Varley 1996). In the South Asian context, a household comprises members living under the same roof and who share cooking arrangements (Ruwanpura 2004). However, such a narrow understanding of the concept, leaves many unanswered questions: Who lives under the same roof, what other activities are shared, who is responsible for care needs, who has access to resources, who controls resources, who makes decisions, how and why one becomes responsible for a household, are some hitherto unexplored issues. In addition, such a narrow definition can minimize the role of women in the households.

[7] In the South Asian context, generally the definition of the head of the household is associated with the man in the family. The man is responsible for providing economic support for the dependent family members, and has the authority to make decisions

Similar to the concept 'household', the concept of 'headship' is also surrounded by several conceptual problems. Identifying a male as the head of the household has been adopted for administrative purposes by the Western countries and later transferred to their colonial states (Ruwanpura 2004). The patriarchal structures in most of the colonial countries favoured the household headship's link with males. Within the context of South Asia, where patriarchal norms are very influential in everyday life, the association of household headships with males, seriously undermined and masked the role of women. Such claims were reflected in the national statistics, including census reports and many development programmes. Since women were treated as the heads of the households mainly in the absence of men, feminist scholars have made immense contributions to reveal the hidden roles played by women and the need to recognize their roles formally (Chant 1997). Feminist literature has documented that women have been the main economic provider of households even if an adult male is staying at home (Buvinic & Gupta 1997). They challenged the notion of associating household headship with men and their provider role in the literature and in official discourses.

Development literature and practice has continuously raised questions on the use of the term 'female headship' and who constitutes female heads of the households (Buvinic & Gupta 1997, Varely 1996, Chant, 2001, 2003b, 2004, 2006a). The term made its entry into the gender and development discourse as early as the 1970s. The research and the academic interest on female heads of the households grew as this category has been identified as one of the most poor and vulnerable categories in many parts of the world (Buvinić & Gupta 1997, Chant 2004). They have been identified as a poor, socially excluded, marginalized, vulnerable group who lack agency (Chant 2003, Kabeer 2003).

In the literature, while one line of argument holds the view that the focus on women heads of household is worthy of special attention (Dwyer & Bruce 1988), the contrary perspective highlights that female heads of the household should not be the main targets (Fuwa 2000). Some academics have also argued that targeting female heads of the households in poverty and socially disadvantaged settings is worthwhile, but the strategies should acknowledge the heterogeneity of female heads of the households as they are not always poor and vulnerable (Buvinić & Gupta 1997, Chant 1997). The literature further endorses that although WHHs are more vulnerable to poverty, it could not be generalized, and it is not uniform across countries (Chant 1999, Datta & MacIlwaine 2000). While one set of literature has portrayed FHHs/WHHs as poor, vulnerable, marginalized and victims of socio economic and development processes the other set argue and questions the link between the above conditions and FHHs/WHHs (Varley 1996, Buvinić & Gupta 1997, Chant 2003 (a), (b), 2004, 2006 (a) (b), Whitehead 2003, Joshi Rajkarnikar & Ramnarain 2020; Yoosefi et al 2020).

One of the main reasons behind such seemingly contradicting conclusions appears to be the fact that WHHs constitute a heterogeneous group of households with different types of FHHs/WHHs with different reasons for becoming a female/women heads of household. The literature acknowledges the heterogeneity. Apart

from the problematization of the concept, criticisms have unanimously acknowledged the heterogeneity and diversity of heads of the households regardless of their biological identities as males, females or transgender. A plethora of literature calls for an understanding that the FHHs/WHHs are diverse and the related definitional ambiguity. Women heads of households vary greatly in terms of socio, economic, cultural and demographic contexts. Chant (2003b) highlights that the heterogeneity of the women headships vary in the lines of routes into headship (choice/voluntary), marital status, residence (rural/urban), stage in the life course, access to resources. Chant (2003a) further emphasizes that the female headship cannot simply be associated with poverty. The heterogeneity and complex nature of the concept itself calls for deeper understanding of the concept. It is also possible to note that the dynamic nature of the socio, economic, cultural and natural contexts can create new types of FHHs/ WHHs (Habib 2020).

For example, wars, natural disasters, pandemic, migration, divorce, separation, desertions and eroding family support systems could also contribute to the routes into headship. Although widowhood is considered the prime reason for women's headship in South Asian countries, with the increasing precarity and dynamic nature of the above discussed contexts, new types of FHHs/ WHHs are emerging in the society. In the context of Sri Lanka, identifying WHHs related to conflict has received much of the due attention among researchers and donors. Although the same attention is continuing, there are new categories of FHHs/WHHs entering the list. However, due to the officially defined (if any) or traditionally contextualized concept of FHHs/WHHs, the heterogeneity of FHHs/WHHs is unacknowledged or goes unnoticed. They can no longer be limited to a narrow definition or category. This situation has serious consequences for such women who are not classified officially or identified as FHHs/WHHs. They might be left out from main development projects and programmes targeting FHHs/WHHs, either as beneficiaries or participants. Although there is no universally agreed concept on who FHHs/WHHs are, it is important to acknowledge the heterogeneity and the evolving nature of the concept. Our work will attempt to uncover diverse evolving categories of FHHs/WHHs in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country. It is hoped that such research focussing on the organic definitions would give greater scope to explore gender dimensions of the associated terms, taking into consideration the marginalization and rights of transgender people and people of different sexualities along with other vulnerable groups. This exercise would allow for the identification of FHHs/WHH contributions to their household, family, society and policy making as well.

Household structures in many countries have been undergoing drastic changes during the last two decades. Feminization of household headship is said to be growing across the world during the last half century. The dynamic socio, economic, political and environmental conditions too have contributed in different ways to the growing Women Headed Households. Since the breakthrough of COVID-19, there is a sudden increase in the number of WHHs, as women were forced to take up new roles as breadwinners and their roles as unpaid caregivers increased (Withers, Henderson & Shivakoti 2021). This could be related to deaths, illness, income loss and migration. In the census reports and in many other government documents, although this

phenomenon is highly captured through the socio-economic factors, adequate attention has not been paid to the broader contextual factors leading to women headship. According to Ruwanpura and Humpries (2003) globalization of economic production activities, neoliberal economic strategies, population growth and awareness of gender equality are few contributing factors. Divorce, separation, widowhood, male migration, non-marital fertility and marital instability have also been identified as root causes for the formation of WHHs (Bruce & Lloyd 1992, Habib 2020). Nwosu, and Ndinda (2018) discusses that male labour migration, female labour migration, war and conflict and erosion of the extended family structure are the factors responsible for the increase in WHHs in Sub Saharan Africa. Further, increasing alcohol use, drug addiction and increasing life expectancy of women have also paved ways to hike the number of WHHs.

Further, the dynamic phenomenon of women's headship is becoming a common feature in most of the countries, especially the global South. It has recorded an increasing trend. However, the different contextual facets of women household headships are rarely discussed in the development, gender and feminist literature. Women headships are likely to be diverse in different countries and even different within various communities within the same country. In the context of the South Asian region, which is deeply patriarchal and a region which is experiencing rapid socio-economic changes due to various dimensions and processes of globalization, the composition of households and their hierarchies within them are caught at the nexus of traditional and modern values. Considering the increasing number of FHHs/WHHs, due to the aforementioned factors, these narrow definitions have to be revisited, in order to ensure the inclusivity of growing heterogeneous types of FHHs/WHHs.

The foregoing discussion makes it evident that continuous efforts have been made to capture the diversity of heads of the households and their evolving nature. It should also be admitted that capturing the diversity of FHHs/WHHs is challenging due to the dynamic socio economic political and environmental conditions and context that create different types of FHHs/WHHs in a rapidly changing world. Agreeing on a common definition might be difficult as any restrictive definition will leave many WHHs/FHHs out. The agreed definition requires it to be broad and dynamic so that it can take into account the complexities of the everyday realities of women. Therefore, it is imperative to map a broad definition of FHHs/WHHs, Girl Child Heads of Households (GHHs), shared households and different other forms of households, which have not been adequately focused in research and policy. In such an exercise, it is essential to involve different stakeholders and most importantly women.

This research seeks to map an organic definition for what Women Heads of Households entails. The acronym FHHs has been used to define Female Heads of the Households (FHHs) as well as Female Headed Households (FHHs) and Female Household Heads in the literature. Similarly the acronym WHHs has been used to define Women Heads of the Households (WHHs) and Women Headed Households and Women Household Heads. This research uses the concept of Women Heads of Households (WHHs) as we acknowledge the term ‘Female’ is biologically defined. It cautions that by simply using the term women, we

should not exclude transgender women. At the same time, through this exploration in search of organic definitions we seek to showcase the need to include all women including transgender women in such processes to better understand how they identify themselves, as even within the group there may be variations and sub strata of identities. As a process to elicit the organic definition, this research acknowledges the term Women Heads of Household apart from the other terminologies used in literature as described above, as this was what the women stakeholders of the EPF closely related to and identified with at this given time. The participants in this research revealed that household headship is connected to power, decision making, household responsibilities, and includes financial management of other resources, social acceptance and economic provider role. The participants also acknowledged that present social contexts relied on social acceptance and the role as the economic provider as influencing household headship. However, these influences have usually supported in alienating women from being recognised as heads of the households, contrary to how women wished to be identified.

2 Contextual Background

2.1 Women in Sri Lanka

Since independence, Sri Lanka has undergone profound changes in the socio, economic, political, cultural and historical spheres, which have impacts on men and women. According to the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) 2020, Sri Lanka had a population of 21.8 million in 2019. In the total population, the composition of the female population shows 51.6%. This pattern is reflected in the study districts of Batticaloa (52.3%), Trincomalee (50.7%), Jaffna (53%) and Mullaitivu (50.5%). The female population according to age distribution in the country shows that women who are 75 years old and over account for 59.6% while girls below the age of 15 years is around 49%. Growth of elderly female population has been identified as an increasing trend in the country since 1971 (45.1%), which accounted for 55.7% in 2012. The welfare-oriented state policies have contributed to the health and longevity of Sri Lankan women. The educational attainment of women too is remarkable. According to the 2012, DCS records, the literacy rate for females was 94.6%, which excludes the Northern and Eastern provinces, due to the war situation, the census was not conducted in these regions.

The mean age of marriage for Sri Lankan women, which was 20.7 years in 1946, has increased up to 23.4 in 2012. According to the 2012 DCS data, those who are married between the ages of 15-19 show 2.4% in 2019, compared to 3.5% in 1981. The reasons for the increase in age at marriage are related to socio economic changes taking place in Sri Lankan society, which are also influenced by global forces. It is claimed that Sri Lanka has a higher rate of marriage in the South Asian Region (Caldwell 2005).

Women's contribution in the economy of the country has to be highlighted. The statistics on economically active population by sex shows that women account for only 35.4%. Their contribution is higher in unpaid family labour, which accounts for 79.8%. The district wise variation of economically active women reflects that in the district of Jaffna 26.5%, Mullaitivu 22.5%, Batticaloa 25.9% and Trincomalee 21.7% are active in the labour force. Historically Sri Lankan women have contributed to the household economy and economy of the country differently. Their contribution in agriculture has catered to the needs of the local economy and export-oriented economy. Women are playing important roles as migrant workers outside the country. Their remittances contribute to sustaining many families. They also work in the export-oriented garment factories and in the health care sector. Their involvement in the local and global economies show 'they have to navigate a complex web of political, cultural and socio-economic forces' (Lynch 2016). Not all women benefit from the opportunities given by the global economies. Employment opportunities available for women in rural Sri Lanka are characterized by temporary, poorly paid and labour-intensive work.

It is important to note, although Sri Lanka is a small island, the experience and exposure of women in the spaces of Sri Lankan economy, culture, politics, war and peace are different. Perera-Mubarak (2013, 664–6) argues that "there is a need to systematically consider the category of 'woman' alongside other social dynamics." Hence, understanding and locating them in specific contexts is necessary for exploring the problems affecting them. The experiences of women and their exposure are marked by the intersections of history, geography, gender, ethnicity, religion and language, shaping everyday lives of women. The heterogeneity of women, with their multiple identities and social positioning which are embedded in the complex and dynamic systems of economy, politics and socio-cultural lives force them to navigate a difficult terrain. In such a context, we found women from the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka have undergone and are currently undergoing a unique experience of life as women affected by war and living in the post-war context. Their experiences are different as civilian women and ex-combatants. They

experience a different post war context compared to women in other parts of the country. Some of their socio-cultural norms have been altered and strengthened perpetuating and exacerbating social inequality and marginalization. All these changes have placed them in different levels of vulnerabilities and capacities. While few women were able to navigate these challenges, the majority could not.

2.2 Women Heads of Households in Sri Lanka

Before looking into the increasing feminization of household headship in Sri Lanka, it is pertinent to point out the linguistic vagueness of the terms Female Heads of the Households and Women Heads of the Households. Though these terms are linguistically different in English, in terms of Tamil and Sinhala languages, there is no distinction between FHHs or WHHs practically.[8] The literature pertaining to the gendered nature of household headship in Sri Lanka has mainly used the term Female Headed Households (Ruwanpura & Humphries 2004, Kandanearachchi, & Ratnayake 2017) in the studies though the concept of Women Headed Households have also been used. Fonseka (2015)[9] calls for definitions that capture the different categories of WHHs and emphasises that finding a single definition that captures different categories would be impossible. She also criticizes using pre-existing definitions and labelling the WHHs accordingly in studies, or other works will mask different other categories. She emphasises the practical difficulties encountered by the researchers, development practitioners and policy makers in identifying the WHHs. In addition, she points out the conceptual issues related to the concept of 'household,' which might cover some categories of WHHs such as widows. In the Sri Lankan context, young widows with young children live with their parents or other family members due to the social stigma. Such women might not be included in popular surveys such as Household Income and Expenditures Survey (HIES). Fonseka (2015) highlights the contribution of a study done by Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) in 2005 in the North and East, in which WHHs are identified as women maintained households which gives a recognition to her different roles, including the decision making role. However, she questions the recognition for such a term in a patriarchal society. In terms of policy documents related to WHHs, there exists a huge vacuum in Sri Lanka. The Ministry of Women's Affairs submitted a cabinet paper (No. 16/1991/740/010) titled "National Plan for Women Headed Households," which was approved by the Cabinet in 2016. A closer look at this document reveals it focuses on both Women Heads of the Households and Women Headed Households without providing for any definition or definitions for who WHHs mentioned in the said document are.[10]

[8] However, the use of the terms such as 'Kudumbath Thalayvi' (Woman leader of the family) is used in the language of Tamil to denote WHHs. During the reflection meetings with women, youth lead researchers and volunteers, it was pointed out 'Penthalamai Kudumbangal' female heads/women heads of the households are the common words in use. These terms have become popular during the war and post war context, though WHHs are not a new phenomenon. It was also noted that 'Thai Thalamai Kudumbangal' has also been used. However, the usage is very limited. It denotes mothers heading families. It was accepted that not all the WHHs are mothers and hence it is used in selected contexts and for selected purposes.

[9] R. Fonseka, 'Women-headed Households: Searching for a Common Definition,' CEPA Blog, 2015,http://www.cepa.lk/blog/details/women-headed-households-searching-for-a-common-definition-314ca10cd108ab6e8fba55ce0b5e86bd.html Accessed 14.12.2021

[10] http://www.childwomenmin.gov.lk/storage/app/media/WHF.pdf (Accessed on 14.12.2021). This draft plan focuses on six strategic areas: 1) Health and psychosocial support; 2) Livelihoods and food security development; 3) Support services systems; 4) Personal) Security; 5) Social protection and 6) National level policy formulation and awareness raising at the Community level.

In Sri Lanka the feminization of household headship has been identified as a growing phenomenon. The increasing number of WHHs was mainly associated with the JVP insurgencies and three decades of war between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). There was a perception that the number of WHHs increased in peaceful parts of the country due to divorce, separation, widowhood, male migration, non-marital fertility and marital instability (Boyagoda 2014, Jayasinghe 2019).

According to the DCS (1981) the female headed household accounted for 17.4% of the total households and it has grown up to 25.8% as found in 2016 (DCS, 2018). The table 1.1 below indicates the distribution of FHHs in study districts of Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Batticaloa and Trincomalee. The Batticaloa district has the highest percentage of WHHs among all. Among the four districts, according to the severity of the impacts of war, Batticaloa comparatively had a larger population affected by war, leaving many women as WHHs. In general, Census reports use the self-reported method to identify the head of the households, where males are identified as the heads of the households, based on the claim that they are the main economic provider of the households. However, this criteria has been widely criticized.

Table 2.1: Distribution of FHHs[11] according to Districts

District	Percentage of FHHs	
	2012	2016
Jaffna	23.8	22.6
Mullaitivu	23.8	28.0
Trincomalee	23.0	23.4
Batticaloa	26.7	32.3

Source: Household income and expenditure survey 2016: Census of Population, 2012[2]

Due to a near three-decade-old armed conflict and periodic episodes of unrests in both post-independence and post-war Sri Lanka, women have been disproportionately affected by the adverse effects of violence, including death of family members, loss of property and sexual violence. Conflict has resulted in an increasing number of persons with disabilities, including women who have also experienced exclusion from economic and social structures. This is particularly true for WHHs, who in most instances lack the social, economic standing and support systems they require.

Apart from the ethnic conflict and discrimination of minorities, women from marginalized communities and other social groups are discriminated on the grounds of caste, political affiliations, economic status and a plethora of factors reinforced by the existence of a patriarchal system that denies recognition to affected women and prevents the advancement of their rights and freedoms. Despite interventions by the civil society and other actors, the challenges faced by women from vulnerable communities seem to evolve with new dynamics replacing older ones. Current trends in concerns, such as drug use, rising crime rates particularly in former war areas have exacerbated the hardships faced by women who play the role of both caregivers and breadwinners in most households. This has added complications to ongoing issues faced by WHHs due to the presence of incapacitated males, males abandoning households, the creation of temporary WHHs with the incarceration of males along with other reasons. The study districts of this project had to bear the brunt of the war, and the impacts are still continuing. People live their lives with the feelings of loss, trauma and uncertainties about their future. They are also experiencing various forms of poverty and inequality. In order to escape their worries they rely on drugs and alcohol.

[11] In the census report and labour force survey the term FHHs is used and no definitions were provided.

[12] http://www.statistics.gov.lk/GenderStatistics/StaticalInformation/Education (Accessed 20.11.2021)

The government of Sri Lanka has been actively engaged in taking measures and actions to curtail the use of drugs in the country. Meanwhile, Satkunanathan (2021) notes that the war on drugs has also been used to justify the militarization in the post war period, which has increased since November 2019 after the presidential election.[13] The report interestingly notes the fact that though the drug related cases should be handled by the ministry of health, it is currently handled by the ministry of defence. The trend reflects one step in the strategic militarization. It also highlights the issues of domestic policy on drug control, treatment and its implementation that have a direct impact on women's lives.

In addition to the above discussed problems, the WHHs encounter sexual harassment when accessing services while fears of sexual harassment also keep WHHs from accessing services as they do not want to confront the perpetrators. This also leaves WHHs unable to access services owing to the risk of being victims of SGBV perpetrated by public servants and private individuals. The lack of government support in recognizing and addressing challenges particularly in relation to unethical microfinance schemes that prey on the vulnerability of WHHs is also a cause for concern. Current trends in expedited development work, private sector activities complimented by government policies have resulted in unchecked land grabs leading to the destruction of traditional communal habitats and livelihoods. WHHs have become particularly vulnerable to such new challenges owing to the reasons mentioned above in seeking recognition and rights for themselves. Since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the gradual erosion of traditional civic space and community networks that civil society organizations maintained has been noted. This has contributed to the reduction in support and guidance that WHHs receive and has curtailed their ability to seek help relating to issues they face. In addition to this, the pandemic has resulted in added economic challenges contributing to the worsening of the vulnerability of WHHs and affected women.

Security, safety, dignity in treatment, financial security and the guarantee of a better future for the children are some of the key concerns that WHHs face. The ownership of the discourse to voice concerns and ideas of WHHs should be given to the section of the demography itself. Seeking organic definitions for what Women Heads of Households entails would allow the exploration of holistic definitions that includes the views of numerous sub strata of WHHs and give due regard to the changing nature of concerns and shrinkage of rights and freedoms. The plurality of the categories of WHHs involved, ranging from Girl Child Heads of Households, to Joint Heads of Households and subcategories that exist should be acknowledged in making an informed analysis. This would also look into the distribution of household headship along with contributing factors. Such holistic, organic definitions are hoped to better reflect the diverse nature of challenges WHHs face in policy representation, academic and relief work, making them a part of the future resolve to bring equality in treatment and attainment of rights.

2.3 Project Context

For the purposes of this project, the research work has largely focused on Women Heads of Households, as commonly associated with the target group of the project (as they identify themselves). While giving due regard to greater inclusion, the project seeks to put ownership of the formulation of the definitions primarily on WHHs and hence sought inspiration in the classification of Women Heads of Households, Female Heads of Households (FHHs) and associated categories from the targeted demography. Apart from such definitions, the research aimed to ascertain the necessity for a distinction between WHHs and FHHs as the concept is closely connected with societal, language and cultural factors.

[13] https://www.hri.global/files/2021/08/03/HRI_Report_-_Sri_Lanka_Drug_Control.pdf Accessed 01.01.2022

2.4 General Objectives

The general objectives of the project are:

- To map and establish organic definitions of Women Heads of Households with Viluthu, Amara Forum and Samasam, both their evolving nature/possibility and understand in their own words the issues of concern for WHHs through extensive consultations with the concerned demography. Reflect on the evolving nature of challenges that WHHs face and how new social dynamics transform established definitions for greater inclusion, including of FHHs, Girl Child Heads of Households, Joint Heads of Households and other related categories.
- To contribute to capacity building processes for WHHs, women and youth on research and documentation, enhancing deeper understanding of participatory dialogue and research that contributes for policy development.
- To identify and document WHHs contributions to their family, society and at national levels.

In doing so, the research attempts to achieve the following sub objectives:

- Identify the issues and challenges of WHHs with extensive consultations with the concerned demography.
- Identify the specific need of an alternative platform of communication and participation for the greater involvement of WHHs in highlighting their issues.
- Initiate a capacity building programme to enhance the research and advocacy capabilities of WHHs and youth research groups by providing information, networking abilities, technical tools and stimulating intellectual growth that could sustain the future development of the project and improve necessary skills.
- Act as a guide point to establish an inclusive platform as a two-way communication link between WHHs and activists, academics and practitioners who seek inputs for future contributions to policy development, research, literature and the designing of welfare projects.
- Encourage the participation of WHHs that would inspire beneficiaries to make organised demands for rights and needs through grassroots organisations such as Amara Forum and Samasam.
- Identify the contributions made by the Amara Forum, Samasam and WHHs to the society in order to adjust current approaches to operations and sustaining ongoing work.
- Contribute to the current policy changes, reconciliation and development models including Sustainable Development Goals and research through inputs from actual victims and sub strata of victims that are present within vulnerable groups and to better educate the public and the concerned in challenges faced by WHHs and ways to address such challenges.

2.5 Beneficiaries and Target Groups

- Women Heads of Households
- Grassroots level activists and organisations
- Civil Society Organizations, researchers and academics
- Policymakers and the government of Sri Lanka
- Local and women politicians
- Regional leaders and organisations
- Donor groups and agencies
- Youth – for capacity building and advocacy purposes
- Private sector – for capacity building, employment opportunities and partnerships

2.6 Desired Outcomes

- The establishment of definitions of what the term Women Heads of Households entail, with the consultation of the concerned demography while seeking avenues to broaden/evolve definitions to include terms such as FHH.
- Develop an organic definition of the Amara Forum, Samasam network and its line of work.
- Comprehensive data and findings on issues and challenges faced by WHHs and their contributions to their household, family, society and policy making.
- A networking platform (online/offline) as a two-way communication link between WHHs and activists, academics and practitioners.
- Act as a foundation for proposed future stages of the project and identify target groups and resources needed.
- Capacity building of WHH and youth through data collection and assistance to research.
- Clearly identify gaps in policy and legal frameworks in relation to WHHs.
- Establishment of well-organised advocacy groups and WHHs led research teams in the selected regions.

2.7 Sustainability

The EPF will support the sustainability of this process, by enabling periodical review and amendment based on the reflections bringing out the live and dynamic nature of the definitions as they evolve through continued participation of the various stakeholders of the EPF which will include the women themselves. Strong linkages have been initiated and/or strengthened among the EPF stakeholders and women, and there is a need to continue to build on this, use this to advance women's participation and representation in supporting policy development that will strengthen women's groups, the said processes and the related policy. The specific recommendations within the research to be raised with the different stakeholders identified so that related actors such as women's rights activists, community women's groups such as Amara and Samasam can utilise this as a tool to further the discourse or influence reform.

2.8 Initial Risks and Limitations

Owing to the lack of recognition at the policymaking level and the stagnation of both government and civil society projects due to political and financial reasons, certain targeted groups have felt disenchanted with project work of this nature. A community driven approach, Viluthu's extensive grassroots level networks and reputation greatly aided in alleviating this drawback. It should also be noted that given the political climate and surveillance of communities, certain groups hesitated to provide honest, appropriate answers to the interview questions. This is applicable to youth, women delegates and female participants of the project.

The COVID-19 pandemic prevented researchers and project staff from conducting face to face interviews and interactions and might discourage WHH participation or alter the sincerity of communications. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we faced limitations in conducting physical meetings and therefore all meetings were required to be held virtually. The same could be said regarding language barriers. Such drawbacks were minimized by the use of communal data collection models.

Surveillance and threats to women directly influenced some women being barred from participating in the research. The stakeholders of the EPF had to connect via online and phone communication. Relationships of trust conducive for sharing were established through this medium which required multiple discussions and a need to accommodate the timings conducive for all partners, particularly the women. The partners of the EPF came from different locations and from different levels of education and context. This required multiple discourse sessions which even though required additional sessions, enriched the learning and sharing experience for all stakeholders of the EPF. Weather conditions, poor transport and road access to remote locations, poor internet connectivity in some areas posed challenges in connecting to respondents of the research and the EPF stakeholders.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no space for women to collectively come together and deliberate on some of the issues and sub strata of identities that were emerging from the data and findings of the research. Future review building on this EPF could enable such discourses for collective understanding deepening group engagement. However, given the efforts made within this EPF to stay connected, to increase discourse sessions with all stakeholders even amidst this COVID-19 pandemic also showed the necessity to find alternative forms of communication and connection to enable meaningful participation and the value of the same.

3 Project Methodology and Approach

3.1 Equal Participation Framework

The core aim of this research is to formulate organic definitions of WHHs through extensive consultation with the concerned demography. The research attempts to reflect on the evolving nature of challenges that WHHs face and how the new social dynamics transform established definitions for greater inclusion. The narrow and fixed definitions of who constitutes WHHs have led to a situation, where the most marginalized have not been "identified" in programmes and projects targeting them. An example of this is the Women Headed Household National Policy document draft dated in or around 2019, wherein women living with disabilities were not specifically recognized as a major sub group within Women Heads of Households. This holds huge consequences for women as their recognition of specific categories such as Women Headed Households or Women Heads of Households enables them and their families to benefit from services and resources from both State and non-State actors, local and international, including the UN and other agencies.

The objectives of the research clearly highlight the need for an inclusive platform to find organic definitions of WHHs. Under the participatory research paradigm, equal participation (admitting diversity) in the whole process of research is important. Hence, the research participants were involved in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating project outcomes that affect them. Therefore, the research approach called for equal participation in all the identified steps by different stakeholders. The stakeholders of this EPF included the research team, youth lead researchers, youth volunteers, Samasam, Amara Forum and Viluthu staff members. We identified the following categories of people as Key Informants: Women's group leaders, Grama Niladhari/Grama Sevaka (GNs/GSs), school teachers, researchers, NGO/CSO workers, activists, local politicians, parliamentarians, representatives of aid and donor agencies and others identified by Viluthu's youth researchers.

Additional consultations were held with representatives of the Amara Forum and Samasam to explore existing work done on the subject matter and seek inputs to enhance the delivery of the project. A contextual analysis questionnaire was prepared in consultation with all EPF stakeholders during the pre-fieldwork workshops that were conducted.

Based on such inputs, questions were formulated and reformulated to interview potential WHHs and grasp their ideas on what the real issues of WHHs entail. During the process of EPF, at various points (during workshops and fieldwork), the youth lead researchers, youth volunteers who also took the role of field researchers, Amara Forum and Samasam delegates raised the issues of asking sensitive questions, language issues, travelling related issues, and technical issues. They were handled on a case by case basis depending on the situation. For example, in places where field access was difficult for field researchers, after informing WHHs and the relevant authorities, informants were provided with transport facilities to come to a convenient meeting place for both the informants and Viluthu's youth researchers.

Apart from the involvement of research consultants, advisors and researchers, data collection was collectively done by youth volunteer researchers, youth lead researchers and research assistants. The collection of data and the subsequent analysis ran concurrently with further inputs received from participating WHHs, and delegates from Amara Forum and Samasam to fully immerse their ideas and give priority to the presentation of WHHs work. Consultations in this regard were conducted in two stages with the first stage dealing with the research team debriefing the other stakeholders within the EPF on the objective of this project and the methodology for equal participation while seeking their inputs on the very same objective, scope and methodology so that all stakeholders had an equal-power sharing role from the

very beginning. The second stage of the data collection involved re-engaging selected (stand out) WHHs to seek ideas developed on self-definitions, contributions made by WHHs and further inputs, based on their experience.

The EPF was introduced as a mechanism to ensure equal and holistic participation. The EPF opened more spaces for identifying WHHs, by the WHHs themselves, other women, community, youth lead researchers, politicians, activists, NGO/CSO workers, and government officers. The research team envisaged the participants to be active stakeholders and not simply act as researchers without an ability to influence any decisions affecting them. Here, the overarching holistic approach aspired to actively engage with the youth and women has aided in shaping this framework and research methodology. The EPF works as an evolving framework that embeds all stakeholder inputs while being open to new submissions from the target groups to conceptualize the project's approach to meet its objectives.

To ensure the continuation of the EPF, the research envisioned that the contributions of women and youth lead researchers are essential. From the beginning of the research process to the end their involvement included: drafting, commenting and administering the questionnaire, organising and participating in FGDs and helping to identify KIs, filling a separate table time to time to include different categories of WHHs (*Refer to Appendix B*), liaise with relevant authorities to get access to field, participating in workshops, training programmes, reflection meetings, commenting on the summary report and participating in the final reflection meeting of the final report. They actively played a significant role in shaping the outputs of the research. These processes aided in replacing the power that the key researchers would otherwise yield as the sole authority and instead distributed ownership of the research project to all stakeholders from grassroots level upwards. By adopting the EPF, we expect that the WHHs and youth researchers can collaborate and engage with Viluthu to influence matters/decisions that directly involve and affect them. By doing this, it was expected that rather than the WHHs and youth researchers fitting into our research, they would strive to find ways to respond to their concerns and needs. Hence, the project assumes that the EPF would lead not simply to the process of inclusion, but will enhance their role in the project and via that, enhance their involvement in and influence over decisions that impact their lives. Such would lead to capacity building as an ongoing process.

By adopting the EPF, we intend to:

- Provide or share information on the research study with all potential stakeholders on all aspects of framing and implementing of the research study so that they are not passive participants but active informed participants.
- Formulate an organic understanding of WHHs and highlight the dynamic nature of the concept.
- Document the viewpoints, experiences, issues, needs and priorities of the stakeholders through extensive consultations and interviews.
- Engage in discussion with stakeholders so that multiple perspectives on WHHs are captured. It would bring out diverse perspectives. The discussions will also require navigating in a patriarchal system where women headship of the household on its own has never before systematically been recognized in Sri Lanka.
- Find collaborative solutions to identified problems faced by the WHHs.
- More importantly as WHHs is an evolving and dynamic category, the EPF will remain as a living process, where stakeholders can continuously submit their inputs with Amara Forum and Samasam playing a crucial role in this process.

- We expected any unforeseen challenges which may prevent stakeholders from fully involving in the process and that the EPF may not function smoothly or to the maximised levels of our expectations due to the pandemic situation and uncertainty of the surrounding circumstances and related regulations at the time of initiating this research. Exploration of a data collection tool that could efficiently support in collecting the data was also an important consideration.

We attempt to achieve meaningful participation through ensuring, inclusivity, representativeness, transparency and knowledge and power sharing. The long-term sustainable impacts of the process would lead to stakeholders' good collaboration with Viluthu and enable WHHs capacity to carry out their own initiatives for problems affecting them and strengthen their capacities in bringing forward discourses to reclaim identities, negotiate their space and priority needs and concerns with the State. The research team strongly believes that the EPF approach will re-ensure the 16th century Polish slogan "Nothing about us without us." We have ensured the participation of stakeholders in all processes. We have benefitted from the final reflection meetings too. It was noticed that stakeholder contributions were overwhelming in the last meetings. The final reflection meetings revealed that most of them are satisfied that they were able to contribute successfully to the research and their capacities increased. Stakeholders were made aware of a new data collection method and had to find ways to navigate through a pandemic era for such an inclusive research process and showed deeper understanding of the complexity of the categories of the women due to the experience of this research and confidence in articulating them. Amara Forum and Samasam delegates acknowledged the importance of the ownership of the project and how the findings are important for their works in the future. They are willing to continue the task of identifying and documenting emerging categories of WHHs. The transfer of ownership of the research process to persons at the community-level encourages the women to play an active role in shaping the process, the output of which is hoped will influence policy. Thus, enabling the target groups to take control of their narrative and of how their identities are portrayed.

The project was supported by the following stakeholder categories: Viluthu staff, project research team, youth lead researchers and youth volunteers, Amara Forum and Samasam delegates and women from the communities in focus. The inconsistencies in research experience between stakeholders were identified and acknowledged with methods drawn up to ensure the high quality of research and standardization of project activity and inputs. Special considerations were given to capacity building and skills development approaches. As envisioned, such special considerations were also applicable to youth researchers who carried out mapping exercises and detailed interviews with informants using technology-based tools. It was hoped that such exercises would improve the quality of inputs made by stakeholders to the project and would encourage them to actively contribute to the formulation of the research and the presentation of research findings.

The inconsistencies in research experience between stakeholders would also come into play during the equal power sharing arrangement in documenting the project findings as per the EPF, where caution needs to be exercised to not exclude any of the stakeholders. Recognition of their contributions were made irrespective of past experiences (or lack of) in contributing to research projects.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

The methodology of the project is guided by the identified objectives and the EPF. Within the identified objectives, ***participation*** runs through as a golden thread connecting all objectives. In order to achieve the objectives, the research requires both quantitative and qualitative data and information. (*Refer to Equal Participatory Framework attached as Appendix A*).

As part of the data collection method, a detailed contextual analysis questionnaire was administered by using the KoBo Tool Box method, which helped to collect data within a short time, under the COVID-19 pandemic. This open-source tool for data collection has been recommended when conducting research in challenging environments. In this research project, the KoBo tool was highly beneficial, as the researchers had to conduct the study within the context of limited mobility due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The introduction of KoBo to the team of Research Consultants (RCs), Research Assistants (RAs) and district youth researchers contributed immensely to the capacity building in conducting research in pandemic situations. The whole research team participated in the KoBo training workshops conducted via Zoom. All workshops were conducted in both Sinhala and Tamil languages and the shared research project literature at these sessions were also in both Tamil and Sinhala languages. A WhatsApp group was created to report any issues encountered when using KoBo. The active social platform provided the opportunity for the youth field researchers to clear their doubts and solve them simultaneously. The KoBo tool box provided the benefit of automatic computerization of all collected data and the analysis and visualization of data and enabled the reading and filling of the form in all three local languages so that the language of preference could be used. The application of the KoBo tool box saved time on manual work.

Using KoBo, 1081 contextual analysis questionnaires were administered in total in all four districts. The table 3.1 shows the distribution of respondents according to gender and the geographical location.

Table 3.1: Distribution of informants included in the contextual analysis questionnaire survey

Gender Profile of Respondents	Districts								Total	
	Jaffna		Mullaitivu		Trincomalee		Batticaloa			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Female	275	100.0%	288	100.0%	256	99.2%	260	100.0%	**1079**	**99.8%**
*PNM	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	0.8%	0	0.0%	**2**	**0.2%**
Total	**275**	**100.0%**	**288**	**100.0%**	**258**	**100.0%**	**260**	**100.0%**	**1081**	**100.0%**

*PNM: Prefer not to mention

Source: Contextual Analysis Questionnaire survey, 2021 October

Table 3.1 explains that among the respondents, more than one fourth (27 %) are from Mullaitivu District, whereas one fourth (25%) are from Jaffna district and Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts recorded less than one fourth of the female respondents. Some of the participants did not want to reveal their gender identity. All 1081 participants were selected through using the purposive and snowball sampling methods to better match the objectives of our research. Our study focused on a particular unit of population - WHHs. The respondents were approached with the help of Amara Forum and Samasam in all four districts.

However, in order to avoid any bias in the sample, we made sure that WHHs outside Amara Forum and Samasam are included. The Map 4.1 shows the distribution of the samples. Considering the pandemic travel restrictions and the limited time for field work, the research did not cover all Divisional Secretariat Divisions (DSDs) of the selected study districts. Samples were selected from eight, three, ten and twelve DSDs from Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Trincomalee, and Batticaloa districts respectively. We had to use the convenience sampling methods too in selecting our participants (Hay 2000). Our research benefited from various advantages of purposive sampling. We attempted to minimize any disadvantages arising from purposive sampling, with the support of the other methods explained below. We also emphasize that, it should be noted the data and information provided are not representing the district totals as such but, based only on the selected samples in selected locations as necessary for the research.

Along with the contextual analysis questionnaire, Key Informant Interviews (KI-s), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and telephone interviews with standout informants who were identified during the contextual analysis questionnaire survey and FGDs were used. The reflection meetings, field researcher diaries of research assistants (RAs), youth lead researchers, youth volunteers and key researchers' observations during Zoom meetings provided further information. Considering the focus of the research, we decided to use various qualitative data collection methods to further ensure that the research study is inclusive and it captures certain elements of the research which could not be captured simply through a questionnaire. Such informal interviews concentrated on open ended questions. In addition, qualitative research ensured equal participation and balanced power distribution amongst each stakeholder by enabling them to speak of their experiences and viewpoints with greater flexibility, while also aiding in addressing the disproportionate research experience amongst stakeholders.

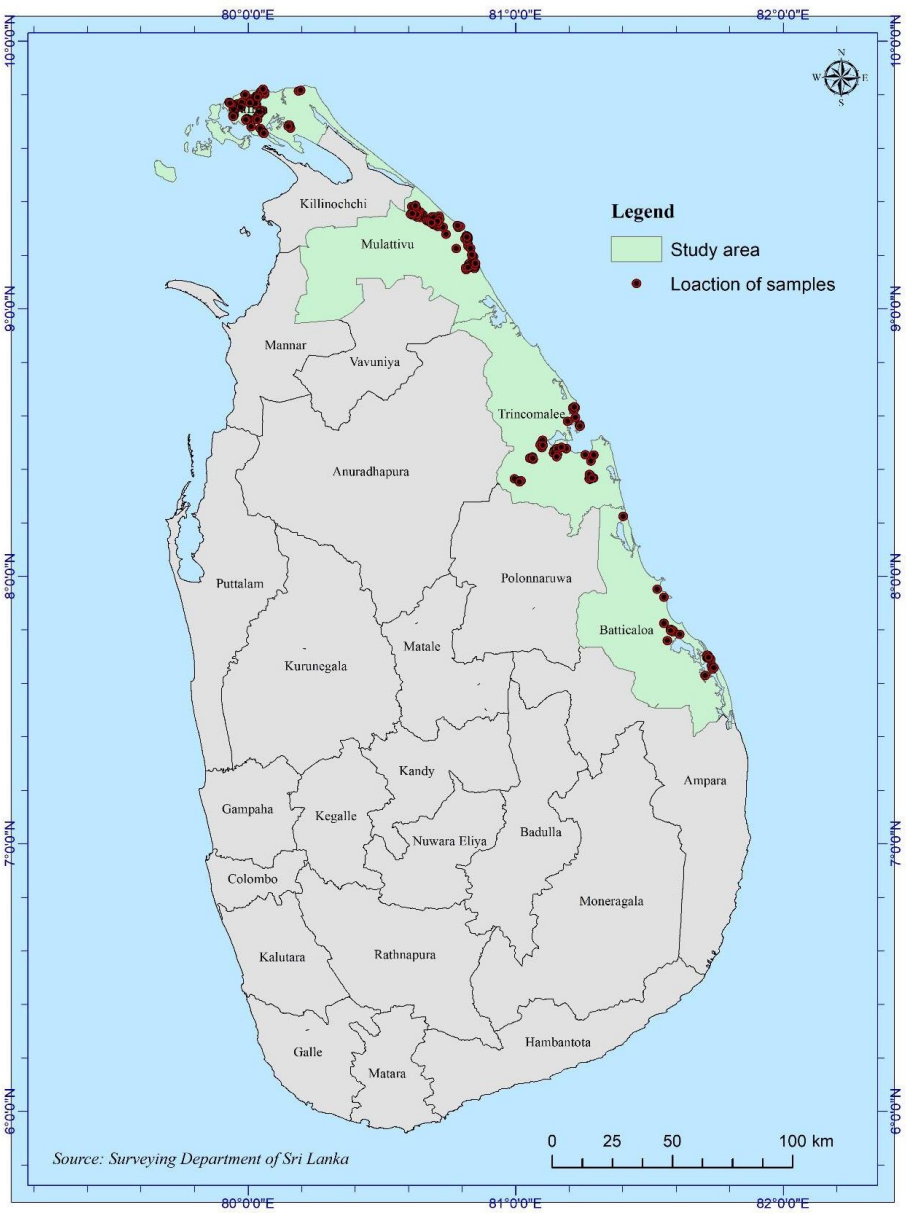
Throughout the process of research, the participatory approach encouraged participants to become key stakeholders and not merely informants. They had spaces to voice their issues, demonstrate their agency and take part and contribute to the discussion, by not only speaking for themselves, but also on others' behalf too. The research team was able to understand this during the FGDs, follow up interviews and reflection meetings. The case studies included in the report provided them the opportunities to talk about not only their difficult past, but also their present successes and achievements. The research provided the participants with a transformative experience to recognize their values, priorities and concerns with the collaborators that may be otherwise hidden. They understood the potential benefits of this work. Such engagement gave them the confidence that the research work would be beneficial for their future as WHHs. It also helped the government officers to know the hidden consequences of using a narrow definition of WHH in works related to WHHs.

The research fully followed the government guidelines on COVID-19 during the whole process. Most of the interviews were conducted via Zoom. Whenever, the government mobility restrictions were lifted, the field researchers conducted one on one interviews. The field researchers were provided with all necessary health protection material and instructions, every time they went to the field. During the workshops held for youth lead researchers and youth volunteers, along with research ethics they need to practice during the fieldwork and zoom meetings, they were also advised on following strict COVID-19 guidelines. KI -s and FGDs were conducted through Zoom. Conducting Zoom meetings were in some cases, disturbed by poor signals and weather conditions.

3.3. Geographical Areas of Focus

The geographical focus of the research includes four districts in two provinces. In the Northern Province, the districts of Jaffna and Mullaitivu are included while in the Eastern province the districts of Batticaloa and Trincomalee are included. These districts had to bear the brunt of the war (in different ways), 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and recently experiencing the impacts of the global pandemic COVID-19. Appendix C describes the socio-economic backgrounds of the selected districts.

Map 3.1: Geographical Focus of the Study



SECTION 2

4 Heterogeneity of WHHs

Several categories and sub categories of WHHs were identified throughout the research process. The main WHHs categories included widows, women whose husbands are missing and disappeared, women whose husbands are imprisoned, women who are separated from their spouses, divorced women, women whose husbands have left, women who are married, re-married women (their civil status is identified as married in the below figure), unmarried women, women in open relationships, girl children, disabled women, and wives of members of armed forces or other groups. The details of sub categories are included in Appendix B. Figure 4.1 shows their distribution at district level.

4.1 Main and Sub Categories

Appendix B shows the heterogeneity of WHHs within each identified category of WHHs. Our research findings document 11 main categories of WHHs and several subcategories of WHHs, which could be included in each main category. The youth lead researchers, youth volunteers, district Viluthu staff members, together with Amara Forum, Samasam delegates and RAs were able to identify 58 sub categories, and overlapping and interconnected sub categories of WHHs who are falling under the main group, which could be further divided based on socio, economic and demographic categories.[14] Understanding and acknowledging this diversity is very important as addressing the issues faced by WHHs needs to be customized and multipronged. The research indicates the different ways the WHHs emerge and suggest state, donors or other interested parties to intervene accordingly, rather than prescribing the same solutions for problems that different categories of WHHs face. Recognition of sub categories are very important in any programme targeting WHHs, as the circumstances that lead to taking the responsibility of the households has a bearing on how these women assume and continue their new roles in the community. It also has implications for their future. This research makes a strong call for customized programmes for different categories and subcategories of WHHs. We continue to emphasize that WHHs are not a static group of people. They continue to evolve, influenced by various local and global processes.

[14] Although several sub categories were identified, not all of them were included as respondents.

Figure 4.1: Civil status of the respondents

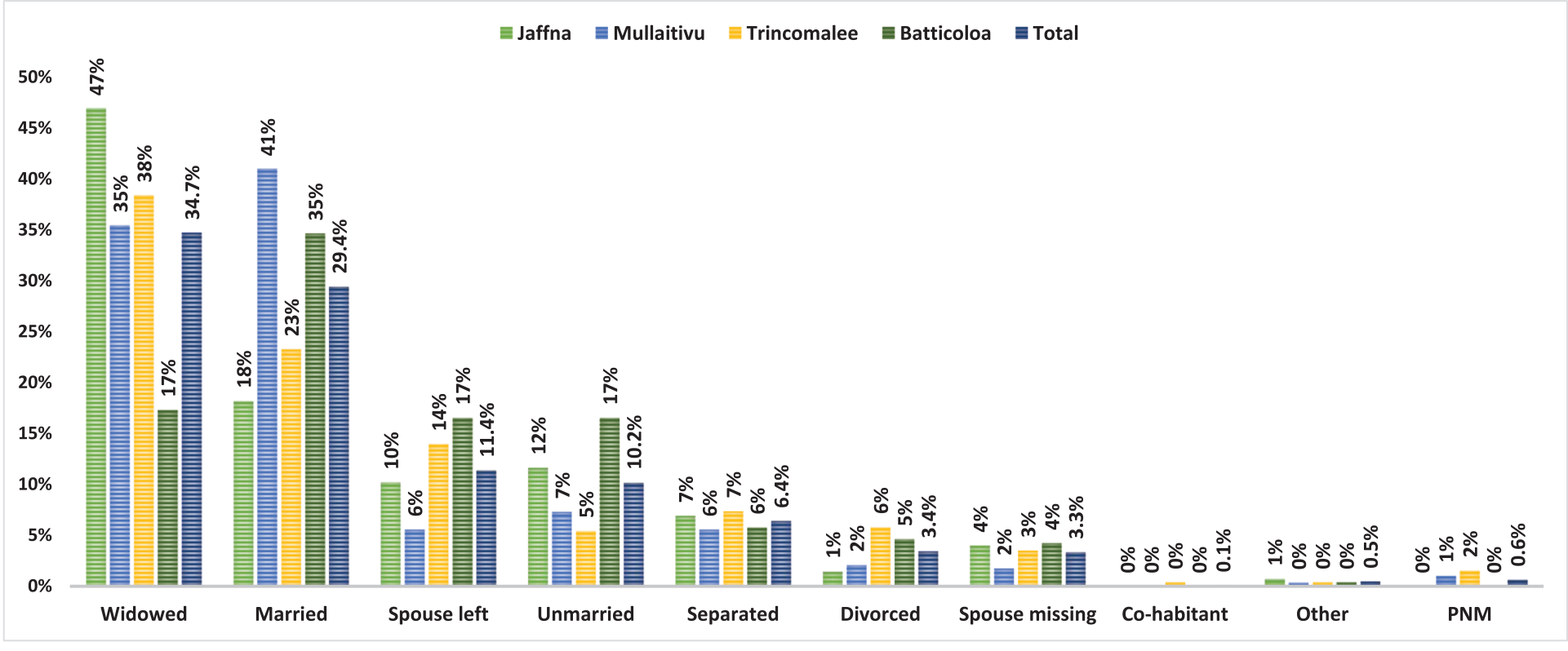


Figure 4.1 demonstrates the civil status of the respondents. More than one third (35%) of the respondents were widowed, whereas 29% are married. There were a significant number of women whose husbands have left them (11%), unmarried women (10%) and separated women (6%) among the respondents. Remarkably, only 3% of the respondents are divorced. Another 3% of WHHs mentioned that their husbands disappeared (forced disappearance, kidnapped, disappeared himself, missing during foreign migration/trafficking, disappeared fishermen). The district level data revealed that among the widowed respondents, 47% are from Jaffna District, 35% are from Mullaitivu District and 38% are from Trincomalee District. There were 4% women whose husbands were missing in each Jaffna and Batticaloa Districts. 0.5% of women identified them in the 'other' category. These respondents include in WHHs whose husbands are not in a continuous relationship with them.

"Due to COVID-19 many women became the heads of their families. However, many of them do not have the opportunity to show that they are heading their households."

FGD Participant, Trincomalee District

Among the participants only one WHH became a widow as her husband passed away as he was infected with COVID-19, when he was working in Kuwait. Her husband was a migrant worker. In this case it is important to note that the reasons for becoming head of the household even before the death of her husband was due to her husband's migration. But now she has become the head of the household as he had passed away. These dynamics should also be captured in identifying the heterogeneity of WHHs. It is also imperative to note that, COVID-19 related job losses of some men in the family has also forced women to take up the economic headship of the households.

In this research, we want to highlight that while the ongoing efforts targeting the WHHs by several local and international agencies have contributed to their upliftment, the arbitrary categorization of WHHs in some cases and the homogenized assumptions may leave many potential WHHs out of beneficiary programmes. The problems related to the WHHs may also go unnoticed and unanswered. We argue that in order to bring tailor made interventions, understanding the diversity and focusing on an organic definition of WHHs are prerequisites. The discussion that follows, brief the WHHs categories identified during the research.

4.1.1 Widows

Majority of the respondents among our informants were widows. As discussed in the context previously, the study districts were seriously affected by the war and the tsunami. Some women lost their husbands due to the tsunami and many WHHs lost their husbands due to the war. Their husbands died in the battlefield as victims, some died in the battlefield as combatants and some were killed for other reasons, which may not be directly connected to the war. Women have also become head of their households in situations where their husbands have died: naturally, due to a disease, accident (either road or work related) and by committing suicide. This research also documented WHHs whose husbands were politicians. We wanted to highlight this category, among the WHHs as these women are placed differently in a society where unequal power relations exist. They have more opportunities to expand their agency and mobilize for change.

4.1.2 Women Whose Husbands are Missing/ Enforced Disappearances

Among the WHHs, some women had to assume household responsibilities as their husbands were missing. It is also pertinent to point out that the 2.9% among the WHHs became the heads of their households as the previous heads of the household were made to disappear. All the four districts included in the study are heavily affected by the war and the scars of the war still remain in different forms. Disappearance of partners has forced many women to take the headship of their households. The types of disappearances include, forced disappearance, kidnapping and missing during and after the war whilst many took place during the last stages of the war. Enforced disappearances which have taken place for decades in the North and East, escalated during the last phase of the war (2006-2009). Hence the study districts had a long history of enforced disappearances. Most men who surrendered to the government during the last stages of the war disappeared. As many women are not sure whether their husbands are alive or not, they face psychological trauma and anxiety every day. Their children too experience the same feeling. Some of them are labelled as

half widows by the society. Some women, although they suspect their husbands might have died after disappearance, are still not ready to accept that truth for a number of reasons.

The community discriminates against women without a husband regardless of the reasons attached to becoming a WHH without an adult male member in the family. Though not openly revealed, deeply entrenched patriarchal values and attitudes continue to unfold in various forms that makes everyday lives of the WHHs more challenging. Young widows are more vulnerable to social exclusion and marginalization as they have become widows at a young age. Even though these women carry the burden of running their families they are looked down upon by the society. In order to avoid the adverse social repercussions, women wish to maintain their cultural identities in their appearance as a married woman as a source of security for themselves and their families too. The Tamil word for widow 'Vithavai' is considered offensive compared to the image of a married woman with children, who is considered auspicious and brings good luck. When a woman loses her husband, she is caught up with different kinds of social, cultural customs and rituals which adds to her vulnerabilities. The women themselves through custom are at times considered bad luck. These attitudes may be more common in rural areas compared to urban areas given the history of such practice and attitudes and the continuation of the same to the present day. However, this does not negate these practises influencing urban populations as well. They are relegated to a lower status. During our reflection sessions, it was pointed out that young widows and old widows have differences in social acceptance.

> *"Although we spoke about social changes and development, widows are not treated equally in our society. I have seen in a wedding, a widowed mother voluntarily hiding herself during the 'thali' (wedding chain). It is the mother who has to play an important role during her daughter's wedding. But I was so worried to see her hiding."*
>
> KI, Activist from Colombo District

As the mother knows the socio-cultural perceptions of the community on widows, she voluntarily withdraws from that space, in order to ensure her daughter's wedding takes place without any prejudices. Many WHHs now have learnt to survive with this socio-cultural environment, not only for their sake, but also for their dependent family. While some WHHs silently experience the discrimination, others have the agency to confront. The women, whose husbands were made to disappear also maintain the married women identity, with the hope that their husbands might return though several years have passed. Subramaniam et.al. (2014) identifies them as 'half widows', whose husbands were subjected to enforced disappearances, but not officially confirmed as dead. These women are also socially stigmatised and discriminated against.

4.1.3 Women Whose Husbands are Imprisoned

The research identified WHHs whose husbands are detained/imprisoned under the PTA, a law that violates international human rights standards, or under other laws and who were jailed for different reasons. There are several men who have been arrested and detained under the PTA, for several months and even years, thereby experiencing violation of their rights.[15] In such families, WHHs face many challenges. They have to look after their families, while they have to seek justice for their husbands. These challenges also include lack of access to legal representation and awareness.

4.1.4 Separated

Some WHHs are separated due to their own willingness, mutual understanding and family pressure.

> *"Married young girls who are below 25 years, are separated in our district. They are not mature enough to run a family life. Many young girls want to find a job for themselves. The situation became worse during the pandemic when their families suffered income loss due to the loss of jobs of their husbands. When these young girls wanted to go for work, both locally and to the Middle East, their husbands did not allow them. This situation has resulted in separations."*
>
> KI, Trincomalee District

During the FGDs and reflection meetings, it was mentioned that unemployment of men, drug dependency and extra marital relationships of either husband or wife has led to separations. In some cases as legal procedures related to divorce take time, women opt for separation. WHHs, who are responsible for such families, may not even be noticed by the official categorization of WHHs.

4.1.5 Legally Divorced

Our research found around 3% of women are divorced among those who were married. The lower rate may be related to the fact that due to social stigma on divorced women, they might not have revealed their actual marital status. These women include: WHHs living alone, living with children and living with parents. When they are living with dependent children and dependent elderly people (parents and in-laws), their economic responsibilities are severe. In some cases WHHs have to look after their children and parents. This responsibility puts extra pressure on them. This is one of the reasons why WHHs opt for self-employment even though such employment may not provide adequate income for a decent living. Official categories identify these WHHs simply as widows, masking several other subcategories, which could fall within the main category identified. More research needs to be done in order to document and explore deeper to ascertain various other sub-categories.

[15] Refer chapters 20 and 26 of the report of the Human Rights Commission's national study of prisons- https://www.hrcsl.lk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Prison-Report-Final-2.pdf

4.1.6 Husband Has Left (The Woman /Family)

The research team was also able to locate WHHs under the category of 'husband has left' (the woman/family) - WHHs, who accounted for 10% of the respondents. Among them we found several sub categories. WHHs abandoned: by willingness of husband's family (husband's family influenced the decision), husband's extra marital affairs, living alone after being left by husband, living with dependent children and living with dependent elders. There could also be WHHs who are living with both the latter categories. The cases related to abandoned, divorced and separated need careful scrutiny as WHHs might not be willing to expose their actual marital status in their communities due to social stigma.

4.1.7 Married (According to Civil and Customary Laws)

The marital status of the respondents shows that there are 25% of married women. According to the sub categories, identified among the married women, the reasons for them to become WHHs are related to their husband's: illness (check subcategories in annex B), disability[16] of their husbands' (check subcategories in annex B), psychological disorders, unemployment, irregular jobs, no contribution to family, even if they earn, unwillingness to do a job, migration, polygamous relationship, dependant on drugs or alcohol.

This research also identified WHH who were heading their households relating to their husband's status or condition. Such women have assumed the headship naturally owing to their skills and competency in controlling the finances, generating an income and making day to day decisions of the household, despite the nature of the contributions and the role played by the husband or other male family members in the household. Joint heads of household where both the husband and the wife share responsibilities equally or take on allocated responsibilities were also identified.

During the KI, FGDs and reflections meetings it was mentioned, in some married WHHs families while husband's physical and mental ill-being have been the root cause for women to take up the household headship, in some families, the husband earn but do not contribute to the family expenditures or do not take any other family related responsibilities. This case questions the income earner definition related to WHHs. Some husbands are dependent on drugs and alcohol. In such families WHHs undergo Gender Based Violence (GBV). However, we do not exclude the fact that women undergo GBV in non-alcohol consuming and non-drug dependent families within the patriarchal system.

Few WHHs have taken the responsibility of their households after their husbands migrated for employment outside Sri Lanka. Such WHHs are managing the remittances sent by their husbands, they educate their children, and play many other roles that were performed by their husbands before the migration. During stakeholder consultation sessions, the research team was also able to identify categories of WHHs where married women who leave their family home at the time of marriage continue to provide economic contribution and play a role in the decision making process of their parents' household.

[16] Disability is a cross cutting theme across multiple categories and subcategories that we have identified.

4.1.8 Remarried (Legally, Not Legally, Married According to Customary Law)

The research team found that few WHHs have remarried. In the statistical analysis, they might have been included in the PNM or other categories. Although remarriage is socially accepted in the Muslim community, it is not the same in the Hindu and Buddhist communities. The customary law *Thesawalamai* permits the re-marriage of widows. Similarly, the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act also permits the re-marriage of widows. The negative connotations associated with remarriage of widows are gradually changing in the Tamil community especially after the war and tsunami. Earlier widows who opted for remarriage were negatively viewed by the community. Unlike in the cases of widows without children, remarriage for women with children remains challenging. The study found the following categories of reasons for remarriage among the WHHs: remarried (with children from previous marriage), remarried to a person with children from his previous marriage, husband is sick, husband is disabled/differently abled, husband is aged, husband has psychological disorders, husband is unemployed, husband is a migrant worker, husband is dependent on drugs/alcohol. It is also pertinent to note here that not all WHHs are legally divorced from the previous husband or are legally married to the current partner. Some of them have married under the customary laws too. Some women also face problems in getting the death certificates of the first husband. In such cases, they can't marry under the civil law.

4.1.9 Not Married

The research team also found that 9% of the respondents stated that they are not married. Among the respondents, unmarried WHHs constitute 15% in the district of Batticaloa. During the reflections meeting with the field research team, it was pointed out that caste identities still contribute to the marriage patterns in some villages such as Kaluwanchikkudi in Batticaloa. If women or their families could not find a suitable partner for marriage within the same caste, they remain unmarried rather than marrying to a partner from a lower caste. It is also important to note that the socio economic changes triggered by modernization have resulted in the rising age of marriage in Sri Lanka despite the religious/ethnic differences.

Among the unmarried WHHs, the following subcategories were found: living alone and financially self-reliant, living with family, but financially self-reliant, living with a single parent but, unable to earn a living, women whose parents/siblings have died and have taken up the responsibility as head of household with dependents (siblings/nephews and/or nieces/grandparents/older relatives), women living with dependents as head of the household who are living with any disability (natural/caused by war), living alone with a disability (natural/caused by war), living alone due to the loss of family members (through death/disappearance/missing), unmarried WHHs with children. In all four districts, in a community, where marriage is valued and motherhood is crucial for social acceptance and respect, unmarried WHHs with children are socially unrecognised. WHHs are generally, socially, economically and sexually vulnerable in all four districts. Within such a context, unmarried WHHs with children are stigmatized and shunned, the children born to them are considered illegitimate.

4.1.10 Women in Open Relationships

Although there were no WHHs among the informants in our research under the above category, the field work and consultation sessions revealed that there are WHHs having open relationships. Due to socio-cultural contexts in which they live, they do not admit that they are in an open relationship. However, this category of WHHs exist and are in need of due attention in programmes and projects targeting WHHs based on the reasons that led them to their present situations. Within this group the partners in the open relationship may temporarily/long term/ periodically co-habit with WHH or remain outside of the household. As these women are hidden in society due to social stigma, they might be in vulnerable situations and are often miscategorised during interventions.

The research also noted WHHs who have dependents who are their siblings/nephews/nieces/ grandchildren/grandparents (wherein dependents may be minors or adults) are also present throughout all main categories. And therefore, it calls for attention at the non-conforming or non-traditional structure of household/family especially in the post war context, when identifying WHHs. Likewise WHHs living (residing) alone or with dependents (minors/adults) in a relative's house also show trends of evolving family/household structures that have increasingly emerged with the impact of war and other crises such COVID-19.

4.1.11 Girl Child Heads of Households

The research team also found Girl Child Headed Households (GHHs). According to the age profiles of the WHHs, there are 2% of girls heading their households. The GHHs were identified as a growing category and some instances hidden. The categories of GHHs included: girls whose parents are present but house responsibility falls on the girl child, orphan girls living alone, girls whose parents are unable to earn or run the household, girls whose parents died and she lives with grandparents, girls whose parents died and lives with her younger siblings, girl child whose parents have separated/remarried, GHHs where one parent is a migrant worker (working abroad), GHHs where the mother separated due to an extra-marital affair, girls with one parent living but under alcohol or drug dependency, girls living with both the parents who have a substance dependency, girls whose parent deserted - with dependents, girls whose parents deserted - without dependents, girls whose parent or both parents have physiological disorders or disability, girls (unmarried) with child/children.

These GHHs are very vulnerable and they are marginalized in their communities. Their opportunities for economic independence and social mobility seem negligible.

> *"During the field work, in the village Sandanavetty, I met a family in which two GHHs (16 and 18 years old) are living with their elder sister who is 21 years old and married. Both their parents died and they moved to their sister's home. Their brother-in-law forced them to be his wives. As they didn't have any place to live, they agreed to marry him. Now he is married to all three sisters and only the first one is legal. The 18 year old girl now has a child. Both the sisters have stopped schooling. They earn an income to look after themselves. There are many similar cases in this village."*
>
> Youth Lead Researcher, Trincomalee District

According to the youth lead researcher, as there are many such cases in the village, the cases like above are not identified as issues of concern. However, the social attitudes towards these types of cases are not always

positive or not accepted. She said she found another GHH from a village, who is 15 years old and responsible for her family.

> *"This girl is looking after two of her younger siblings, when her father goes to work. Her mother passed away, after giving birth to the youngest child in the family. Since that day, she stopped schooling and looked after the baby and the other sibling. She does all the household work."*
>
> Youth Lead Researcher, Trincomalee District

It is important to explore different root causes that lead to under age and child marriages that destroy childhood. As noted in the above narratives, child or underage marriages are most of the time forced on them due to different socio-economic conditions of their families, and they are compelled to pay the price. In very few cases, child marriage have taken place on own willingness. Whichever root causes that lead to child marriages, it is important to explore them very carefully, as they are complexly interconnected with various other processes. It is important to acknowledge the fact that traditionally certain systems or practices existed to deal with the outcome of any deviations from accepted social norms. The previously existing systems that absorbed the orphans (mostly by extended families) no longer work favourable for children. The three decades of war produced many child-headed households and it is widely recognized that child-headed households and especially GHHs are a serious issue which has a huge impact in society. Although the numbers may be small, such households deserve careful attention. The responsible authorities need to have a clear definition of who they are, nature and consequences of such households, root causes leading to the formation of child-headed households and finally a proper system to ensure their rights and their future.

> "*This girl (name anonymous) was sexually exploited by her father after her mother's death. She was 15 years old when her mother died. She had four younger siblings. Her father was addicted to alcohol. Whenever the father comes home, the children go and hide in neighbours' homes. One day the girl discussed her problem with a teacher in her school and the teacher communicated with WDO for help. Now the children are given a separate home and looked after by the neighbours. They are assisted by the villagers. The elder one is going for a garment factory job and others are going to school. But she is heading her household."*
>
> KI, Trincomalee District

GHHs are more vulnerable in these communities. Although child headed households are mainly an outcome of the war, they still exist in the study districts. Showing that apart from the war, other processes at work have also contributed to the creation of GHHs. These processes and situations include, separation/divorce, unemployment, illness, death or migration of parents. It is also important to notice that the legacy of nearly three decades of war continues to have direct and indirect impacts on the lives of many people, including children. Among the child heads of the households, GHHs are more vulnerable in many ways, especially as they could become prey for sexual abusers[17] and continue the sustenance of the creation of GHHs. Migration for jobs outside the village and country has also created a situation where young girls (due to gendered expectations of the society related to household maintenance and responsibilities) are forced to become GHHs temporarily. In the absence of regular income earning opportunities, many young and middle-aged women from the war affected districts have started to migrate to Middle Eastern and East Asian countries as care workers. If they cannot find a guardian to take care of their children, the responsibility falls in the hands

[17] The EPF stakeholders acknowledge that male children may be also subject to sexual violence. However, that is beyond the scope of the present study.

of the girl child. GHHs are also becoming vulnerable due to the divorce, separation or abandonment of their parents.

4.1.12 WHHs with Disabilities

WHHs living with disabilities also formed an important category in our research. Their disabilities were related to visual impairment, hearing impairment, vocal disorders, loss of leg/s, loss of hand/s, dwarfism, locomotor disabilities, locomotor disabilities by birth, long term illness, psychological disorders and women with officially unrecognized and uncategorized disabilities.

> *"During the field work, I met a WHH who was affected by polio. She was 39 years old. Her mother passed away and she is living with her father. She is the only income earner in the family. Although she is affected by polio, she is a tailor."*
>
> Youth Lead Researcher, Trincomalee District

The disabilities they experience have not barred them from taking the headship of their households. WHHs found living with disabilities in the research had different types of disabilities, where some of them are connected to the war. Although we do not have an exact number of war related disabilities in these districts, Mullaitivu has a large number of women with war related disabilities according to our research findings. Depending on the types of disability, they choose to work in a convenient place. During the FGDs and reflection meetings, it was noted that several WHHs are left out from government assistance as they do not fall into the government defined disability category. This leaves many WHHs out from obtaining assistance from government sources. It is important to note that when the NGO/ CSOs working in these districts depend on official definitions to classify disability and WHHs, they too might leave many potential beneficiaries out from their target programmes.

4.1.13 Women Directly/Indirectly Related to Armed Groups/Government Forces

The next group of WHHs identified within the research included WHHs who were formerly directly involved in/presently involved in and/or their spouses were formerly or presently involved in an armed group or government armed force. This included women ex-combatants living alone, ex-combatants living with children, ex-combatants living with disabilities, currently serving members of the armed forces and women whose husbands/spouses are ex-combatants, presently civil defence force members, formerly member of the armed forces and presently serving in the armed forces. The WHHs who are widows of members of the military, have a regular income unlike ones of ex-combatants as they receive their late husband's pension.[18]

[18] Those who have gone missing are considered as deserted becoming the reason for their wives to become WHHs.

4.1.14 Transgender Women

The research team came across WHHs with transgender women identities. They included the following types: living alone, living with parents, living with grandparents, married, not married but in a relationship, living with friends but self-reliant. However, not all expressed their willingness to be included in the research. From the respondents that participated in the research showed:

> *"... do not want to be identified as third gender. The word third gender should be removed from any policy document. ... badly want that word to be abolished legally. ... are now leading our families without any external support and ... expect respect and acceptance as human beings without giving any special consideration to us. People think that people like us are fit only for sexual activities."*
>
> KI, Jaffna District

Household structures and headships have been drastically changing in many parts of the world. We argue that the potential subcategories of WHHs listed in the Appendix B, clearly shows the need to have a broader understanding of WHHs in terms of who they are and their evolving nature. This list would grow over time and needs to be documented and updated. We emphasize that the dynamic nature of WHHs should be acknowledged by relevant institutions that work for them. However, the research study also acknowledges its limitations in reaching out to transgender women to get significant representations and accept that given the multi-faceted form of gender identities and gender expressions it may not necessarily mean that a blanket rule applies that all persons identifying as transgender women would want to be categorised as women. It would be necessary for programmes and policies to be sensitive to the respective individual identities and inclusion process to be enabled by directly involving members of the transgender community.

5. Socio-Economic Background of the Respondents

This section discusses the demographic and socio-economic background of the WHHs in all four districts.

5.1 Age

Figure 5.1: Age structure of the respondents

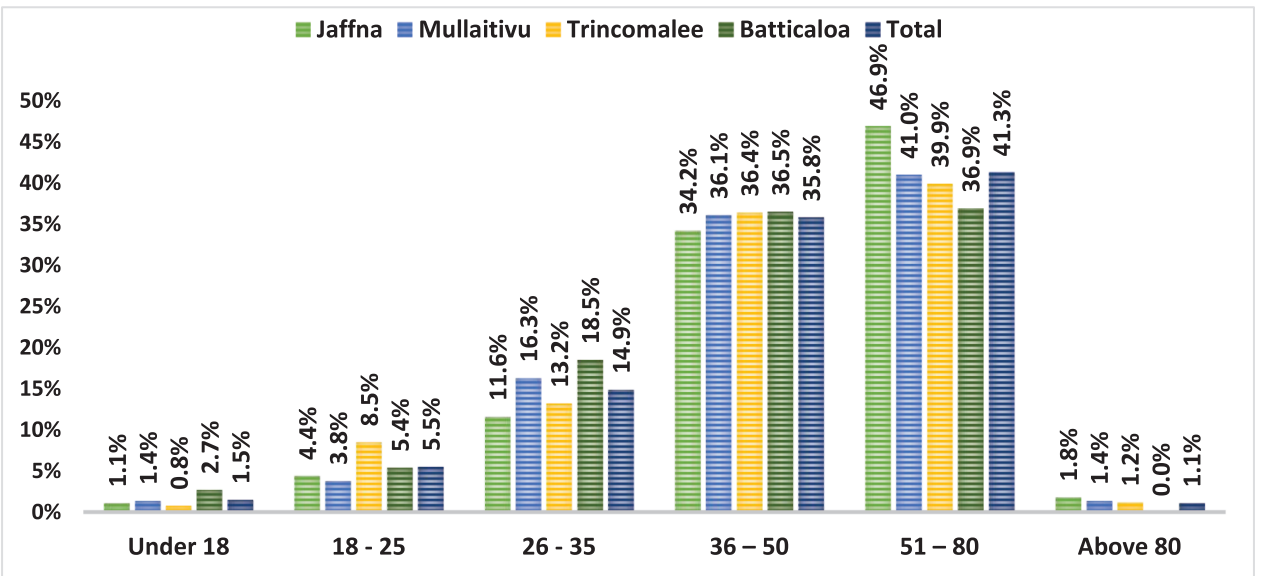


Figure 5.1 indicates the age of the respondents. Overall, 41% of the respondents belong to the age group of 51-80 and 36% belong to the age group of 36-50, whereas the least (15%) belong to the age group of 26-35. It is significant to note that almost equal number of the respondents recorded in the age group of 36-50 in all four districts. Among the respondents 1.5% were under the age of 18. In Jaffna District, less than a half (47%) of the total respondents are of the age group of 51-80 and more than one third (34%) belongs to 36-50, whereas a very small percentage (1%) of the respondents belongs to under 18 categories. In Batticaloa District, 37% each belong to the age group of 36-50 and 51-80 respectively, whereas a significant number (3%) falls under the age group of under 18. In Mullaitivu District, 41% belong to the age group of 51-80 and more than one third (36%) belong to 36-50, a percent each fall under the age group of under 18 and above 80 respectively. In Trincomalee District, 40% belongs to the age group of 51-80 and more than one third (36%) belongs to 36-50, whereas two percent falls under the age group of under 18 and above 80 together.

5.2 Ethnicity

Figure 5.2: Ethnic composition of the total sample

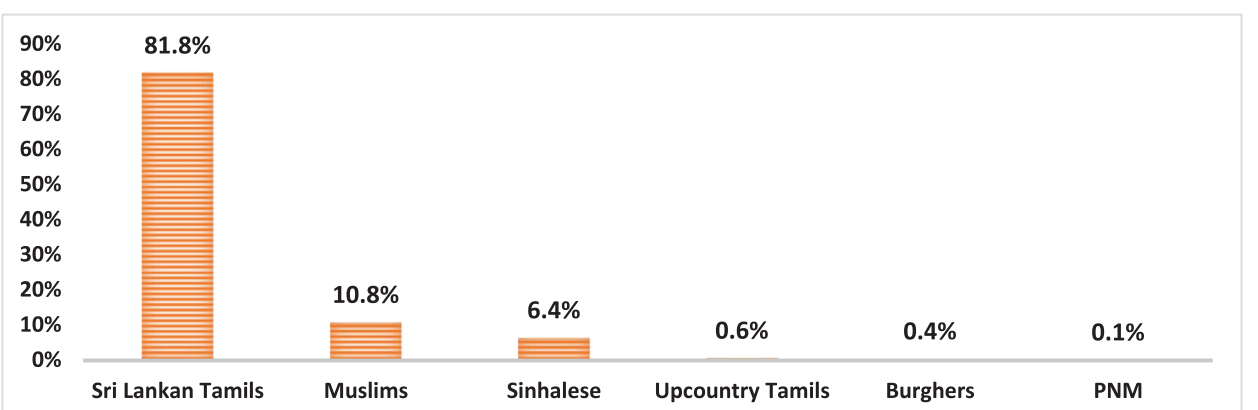


Figure 5.2 presents the ethnic composition of the entire respondents, and the district wise ethnic composition is given in the Appendix D.1. The majority (82%) are Sri Lankan Tamils, whereas 11% are Muslims and 6% are Sinhalese. A least amount (1%)

of respondents are from Upcountry Tamil and Burgher communities. The overwhelming majority of the respondents (100% and 98%) in Jaffna and Mullaitivu Districts are Sri Lankan Tamils, whereas 82% and 45% are Sri Lankan Tamils in Batticaloa and Trincomalee Districts respectively. More than one fourth (27%) of the respondents each in Trincomalee District are Muslims and Sinhalese communities and all the respondents among Muslims are from Trincomalee District. Significantly, the majority (67%) of the upcountry Tamils are from Mullaitivu and the majority (75%) of the Burghers are from Trincomalee District. During the fieldwork planning, measures were taken to ensure that the respondents include a suitable ethnic representation as well.

5.3 Religion

Figure 5.3: Religious composition of the total sample

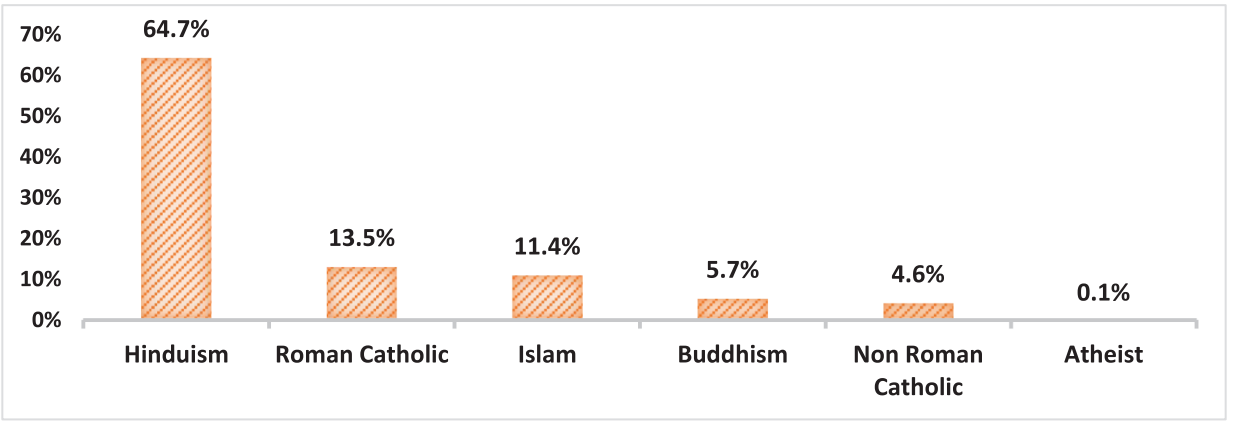


Figure 5.3 describes the religious composition of the entire respondents from all four districts *(See Appendix D.2 for district wise religious composition of the sample).* The majority (65%) belong to Hinduism, whereas the minority, 14% and 11%, belongs to Roman Catholicism and Islam respectively. There were 6% and 5% of the respondents belonging to Buddhism and other Christianity faiths. The district level data revealed that among the respondents of Hinduism, more than one fourth (27%) are from Batticaloa District, whereas the least majority (15%) are from Trincomalee District. Similarly, among the respondents of Roman Catholics, more than a half (56%) are from Mullaitivu and more than one fourth (27%) are from Jaffna District, whereas the least majority (8%) are from Batticaloa District. All the respondents (100%) of Buddhists and the majority (55%) of the respondents of Islam are from Trincomalee District.

5.4 Native Place

Dislocation and displacement following a war and natural disaster could destroy all types of assets necessary for income generation, the formation of skills and human capital due to disrupted schooling, land, vegetation, livestock and equipment. It could also damage social capital and networks. Traditional gender inequalities in terms of access to resources, information or basic services, and income are likely to be connected by the displacement status. Hence, the study participants included both natives and displaced in the study communities where some of the participants are still living in displacement.

Figure 5.4: Percentage of native population and migrant population

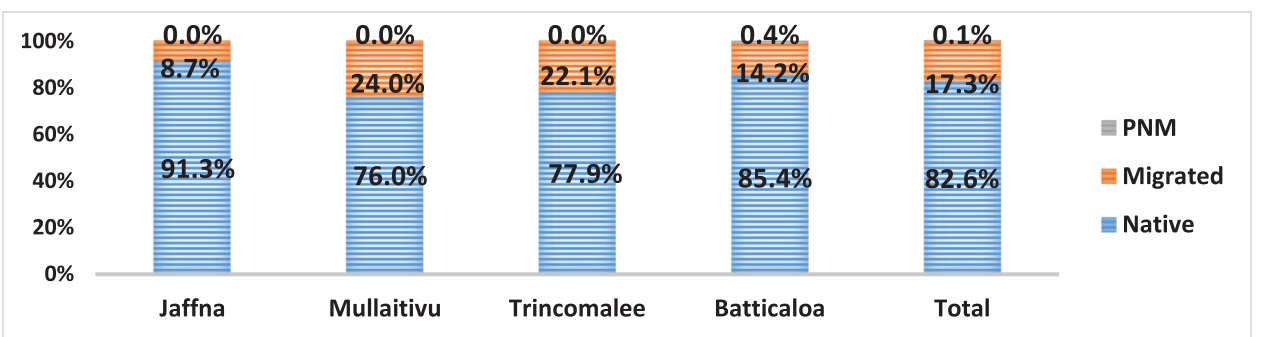


Figure 5.4 presents the residence status of respondents in different Districts. The majority (83%) of the respondents live in their native place, whereas less than one fifth (17%) do not. In Jaffna District, the vast majority (91%) live in their native place, whereas 85%, 78% and 76% live in their native place in Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Mullaitivu Districts respectively. Among those, who don't live in native place, 24% are from Mullaitivu, 22% are from Trincomalee, 14% are from Batticaloa and 8% are from Jaffna Districts. Mullaitivu district comparatively has a higher percentage of non-native WHHs, where Trincomalee district follows.

Figure 5.5: Reasons for internal migration

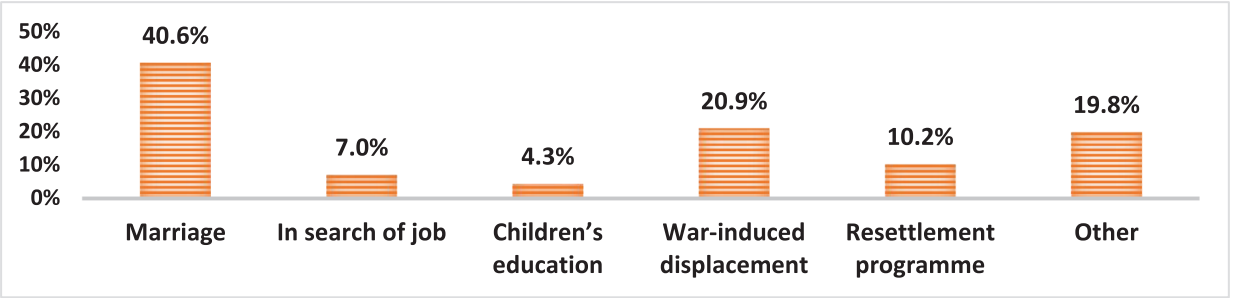


Figure 5.5 indicates the reasons for migration of respondents and, Appendix D.3 gives a more detailed figure of this in all four districts. 41% of the respondents expressed marriage as the reason to settle at the present place of residence, whereas 21% cited war-induced displacement. Significantly, 10% and 7% of the respondents said resettlement programmes and pursuing a job as the reasons to settle in the present place of residence. In Batticaloa District, 38% cited marriage and 24% each cited war-induced displacement and resettlement as the reasons for their current place of residence. In Jaffna District, 46% and 38% expressed marriage and war-induced displacement as the reasons for their settlement in the current place of residence. In Mullaitivu, 44% settled in the present place of residence due to marriage, whereas 22% settled in the present place due to war-induced displacement. In Trincomalee District, 37% settled in the present place due to marriage, whereas 11% each cited war-induced displacement, resettlement and in search of a job as the reasons for their current place of residence.

Most of the WHHs migration is related to marriage, followed by war related displacement and resettlement in a new place. The WHHs have mostly been displaced within the district. Other reasons for displacement could be related to development projects such as in the case of Eastern province, where the Sampur coal power plant development project created a large number of internally displaced people. Displacement and resettlement have been an important process related mainly to the war and the tsunami. The government implemented large-scale post-war development projects in the Northern and Eastern provinces, named respectively 'Northern Spring' and 'Eastern Re-Awakening'. These projects targeted the development of infrastructure, which was destroyed during the war. It was expected that these projects would give opportunities to strengthen the regional economies and connect them with the national economy, which would eventually lead to improved household economic conditions.

During a Key Informant interview with a WDO, it was revealed that such programmes did not consider the actual needs of the war affected areas, leaving many war affected people out from the benefits. She also mentioned that the post war development activities carried out to resettle people, employed vulnerable women, such as WHHs who did not have any members to support their household economies through engaging in demining activities. It is also important to question whether such large-scale development projects implemented in the North and East had a specific focus on WHHs at all or if they were included in the development projects just as women. Among those who mentioned other reasons for internal migration included, tsunami, joining a relative who migrated internally, staying in a relative's place, government/charities provided land in the place currently they are living and dowry were frequently cited.

5.5 Education

When looking closely at the educational achievement of WHHs, among our respondents 7% have not gone to school and 24% of WHHs continued their education up to grade five. GCE (O/L) and GCE (A/L) are important educational achievements in Sri Lanka. Nearly 46% of WHHs have GCE (O/L) qualification. However, diploma and degree holders are very few in numbers. As noted by many researchers, there is a strong correlation between education, employment and labour force participation of women. Due to low educational qualification and lack of vocational training experiences, WHHs may face disadvantages and discrimination. Adding to this their additional responsibilities related to heading a household might reduce the time that they can engage in work, they might have less work experience due to child bearing and caring responsibilities, and other family related care work. Hence, women in general and WHHs more specifically could be trapped in the culturally rooted prejudice, which assigns well-suited jobs for males and females.

Majority of the respondents in this study belong to the age groups of 30-50 and 51-80 years. This group of WHHs are direct victims of war. The experiences of war, multiple displacements and financial difficulties did not enable them to continue their formal education. Being the worst affected provinces, North and East witnessed a massive destruction of educational infrastructure. Due to bombing, shelling and multiple displacement, many WHHs did not have the opportunity to continue their education. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami also contributed to the disruption of education. In a situation of mere survival, families struggled to provide protection and satisfy the basic needs of their children. Socio psychological well-being of children is very important for full involvement in education. Further, due to the war, the support network facilitating education also collapsed. Many schools were lacking teachers and principals. It is also important to consider that many parents sought marriage as a means to protect their children from forced recruitment by the LTTE. Although early marriages were deemed to provide children protection from the war, some such marriages have destroyed the future potential of women with them being abandoned, trapped in abusive relationships due to lack of livelihood which prevents them from leaving, and also have resulted in divorce (Lakshman 2018).

Figure 5.6: Educational qualification of the respondents

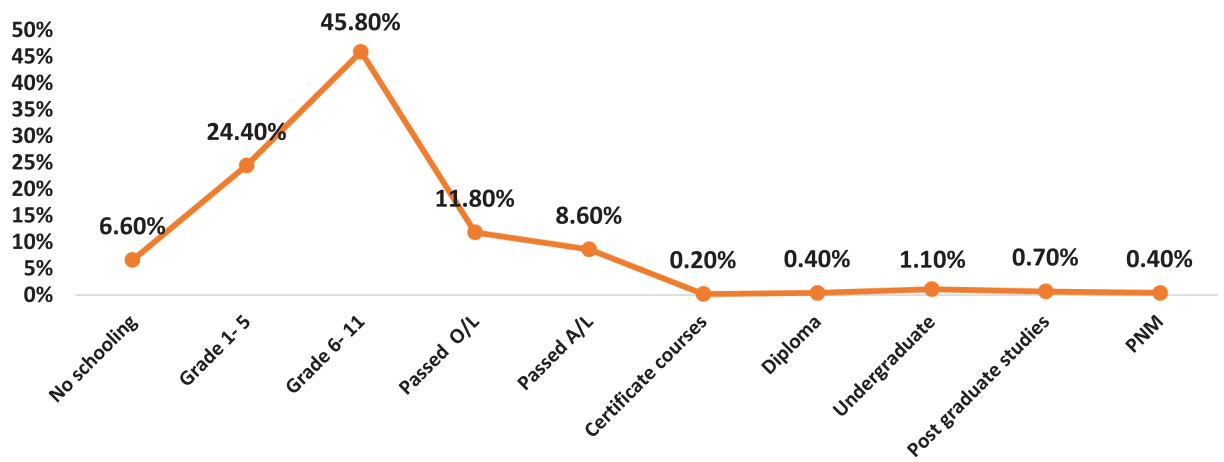


Figure 5.6 indicates the educational qualification of the respondents. Less than a half (46%) of the respondents received schooling up to grades 6-11 and less than one fourth (24%) of the respondents received schooling up to grades 1-5, whereas 12% and 9% have passed O/L and A/L respectively. Significantly, 2% either possess or pursue undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Noticeably, 7% of the respondents didn't attend schooling. In Batticaloa District, 45% and 24% of the respondents received schooling up to grades 6-11 and 1-5 respectively and 46% and 23% in Jaffna District received schooling up to grades 6-11 and 1-5 respectively. The majority (53%) received schooling up to grades 6-11 and more than one fourth (26%) received schooling up to grades 1-5 in Mullaitivu District, whereas 39% and 25% received schooling up to grades 6-11 and 1-5 respectively. Among the graduates including those pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate studies, 40% are from Batticaloa District, 30% are from Jaffna

District and 20% are from Mullaitivu District. Among those who had no schooling, more than one third (34%) are from Trincomalee and less than one third (31%) are from Jaffna District. The level of education among the WHHs remains low in four districts. Those who were able to pass their A/L is merely 9%. The educational achievement of the districts should be looked at within the context of war history too. (*See Appendix D.4*)

5.6 Vocational Training

Figure 5.7: Receipt of vocational training of the respondents

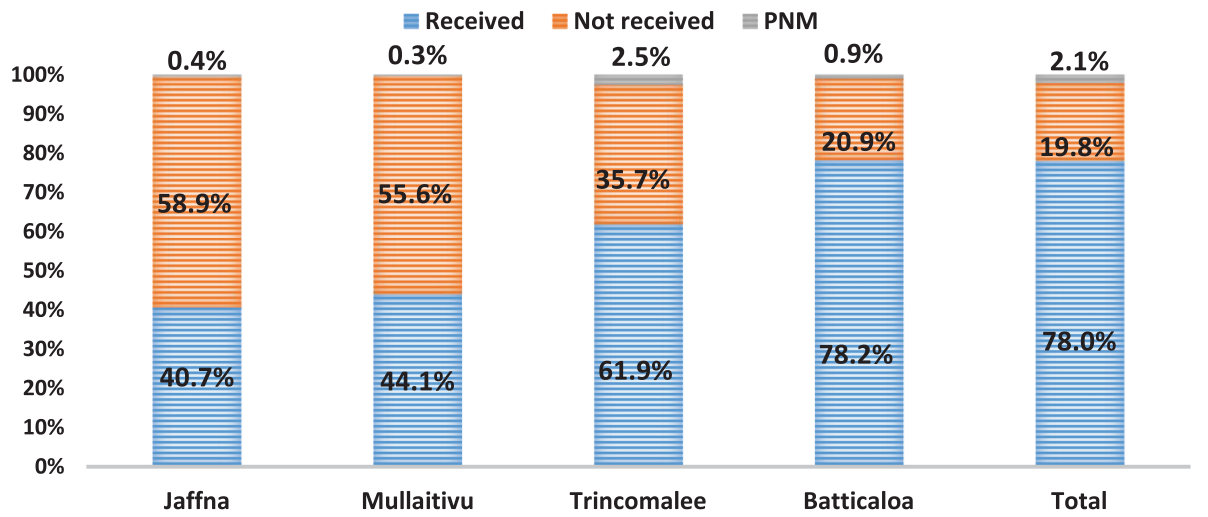


Figure 5.7 indicates receipt of vocational training by the respondents. The majority (78%) have received vocational training, whereas the minority (20%) said they did not. Another 2% preferred not to mention whether they received training or not. The district level data revealed that, among those who received training, less than one third (30%) are from Mullaitivu District and more than one fourth (26%) are from Jaffna District. Of those who didn't receive vocational training, 26% are from Trincomalee District and nearly 24% each are from other three Districts. In almost all districts, the majority of the WHHs have received vocational training. The figure below shows the type of vocational training re-emphasising gender stereotyping.

Figure 5.8 shows that, in all districts the majority of the WHHs have received vocational training mainly in tailoring thus indicating sex stereotyped training. Training in horticulture, cookery, beauty culture and pottery also falls under the same types. The Women Development Officer (WDO) from Trincomalee, who is a project KI, mentioned that the training programmes targeting the WHHs should carefully consider the socio-cultural background of the communities. She mentioned that they received funding for a training programme on pottery making. Other types of training, computer courses, typing courses, compost making, mushroom cultivation, yoghurt production, counselling courses, aluminium fitting, book binding, fibre work and information and communication related training programmes were frequently mentioned. Apart from this it should be noted that types of employment such as cottage industry (traditional types of work) do not always provide long term improvements, such as opportunities for training and future career prospects. Although the State provides training in traditional and modern sectors, WHHs are more interested in following the traditional types of employment training. Young WHHs might opt for new types of training. The choice of training could also be influenced by the generational gap, exposure to technology and marketing opportunities. It is also important to consider whether the State conducts any needs assessment before they plan any training programmes.

Figure 5.8: Types of vocational training received by the respondents

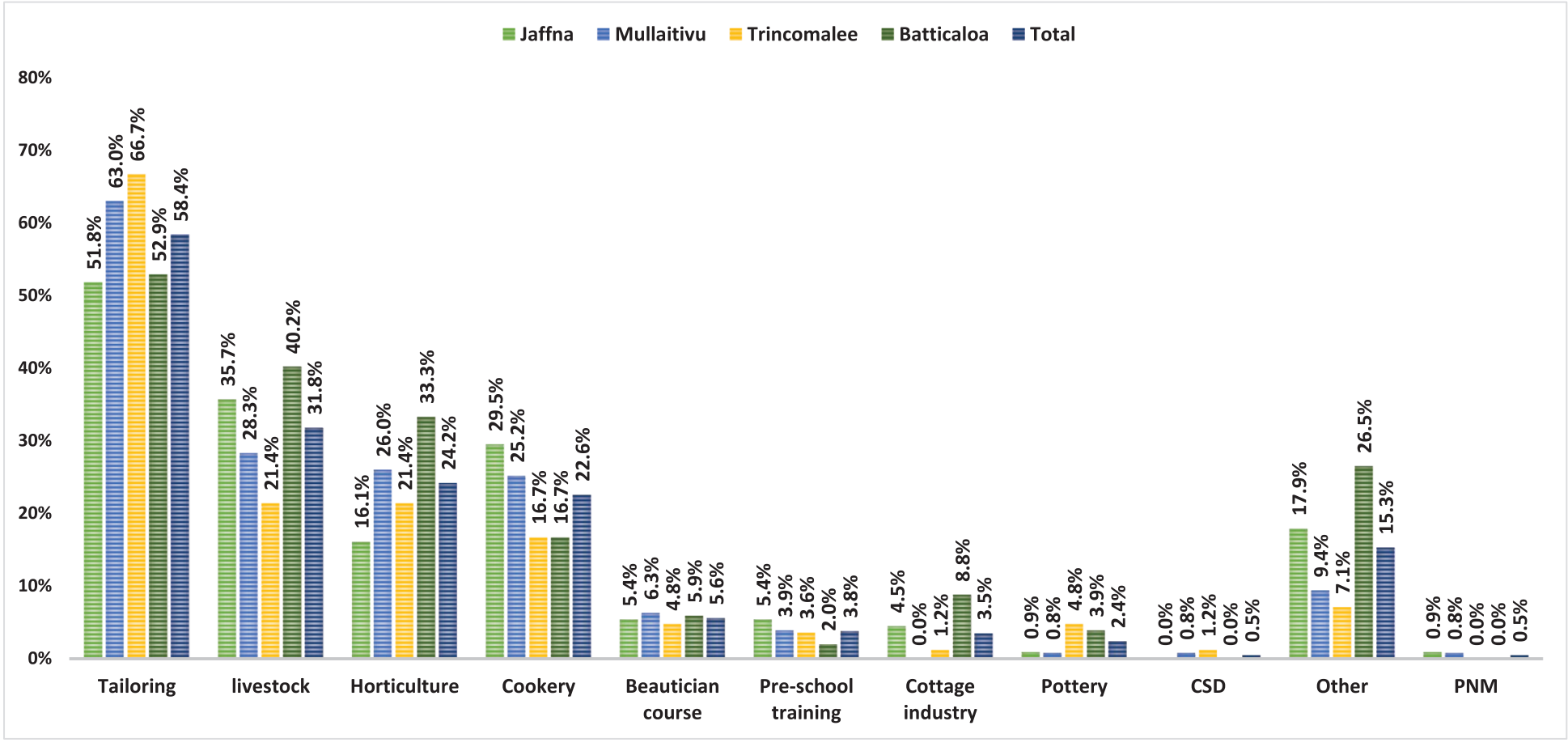


Figure 5.8 describes the types of vocational training received by the respondents. The majority (58%) of the respondents received tailoring as vocational training and nearly one third (32%) received livestock training. Almost one fourth (24%) received horticulture training and less than one fourth (23%) received cookery training. Significantly, 6% and 4% studied beautician courses and preschool training. Among those who received tailoring training, nearly one third (32%) are from Mullaitivu and almost 23% each of the respondents are from other Districts.

5.7 Employment Status

Figure 5.9: Employment status of the respondents

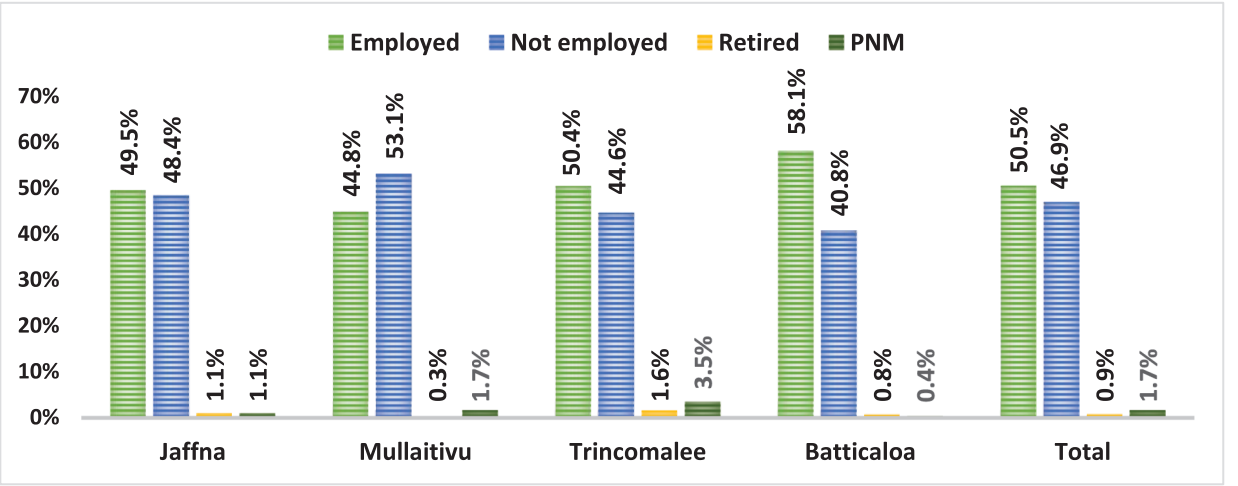


Figure 5.9 describes the employment status of the respondents. A majority (51%) of the respondents are employed, whereas 47% are unemployed. The latter unemployment rate of WHHs shows their economic vulnerability. They have to depend on other sources to feed their families. Among those employed, 28% are from Batticaloa district, whereas 25% are from Jaffna district. Among those unemployed, 30% are from Mullaitivu district and 26% are from Jaffna district.

5.7.1 Previous Employment of the Currently Unemployed

Figure 5.10: Previous employment status of the currently unemployed respondents

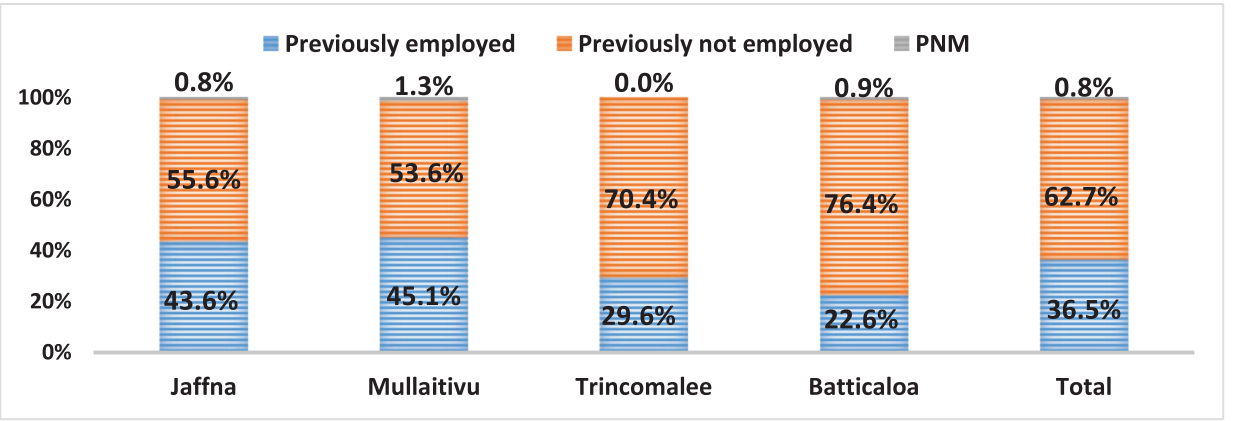


Figure 5.10 presents the previous employment of the unemployed respondents. A majority (63%) of the respondents were not employed previously. Among them 76% are from Batticaloa, 70% are from Trincomalee, 56% are from Jaffna and 54% are from the district of Mullaitivu.

A KI responded from Jaffna District said that most of the WHHs were not familiar with any livelihood activities other than some home based experiences such as poultry or preparing food items. They were depending on their husbands or any of their family members. Therefore, most of they were not involved in any livelihoods prior to taking up the responsibility of their families.

5.7.2 Reasons for Previous Unemployment

Figure 5.11: Reasons for previous unemployment

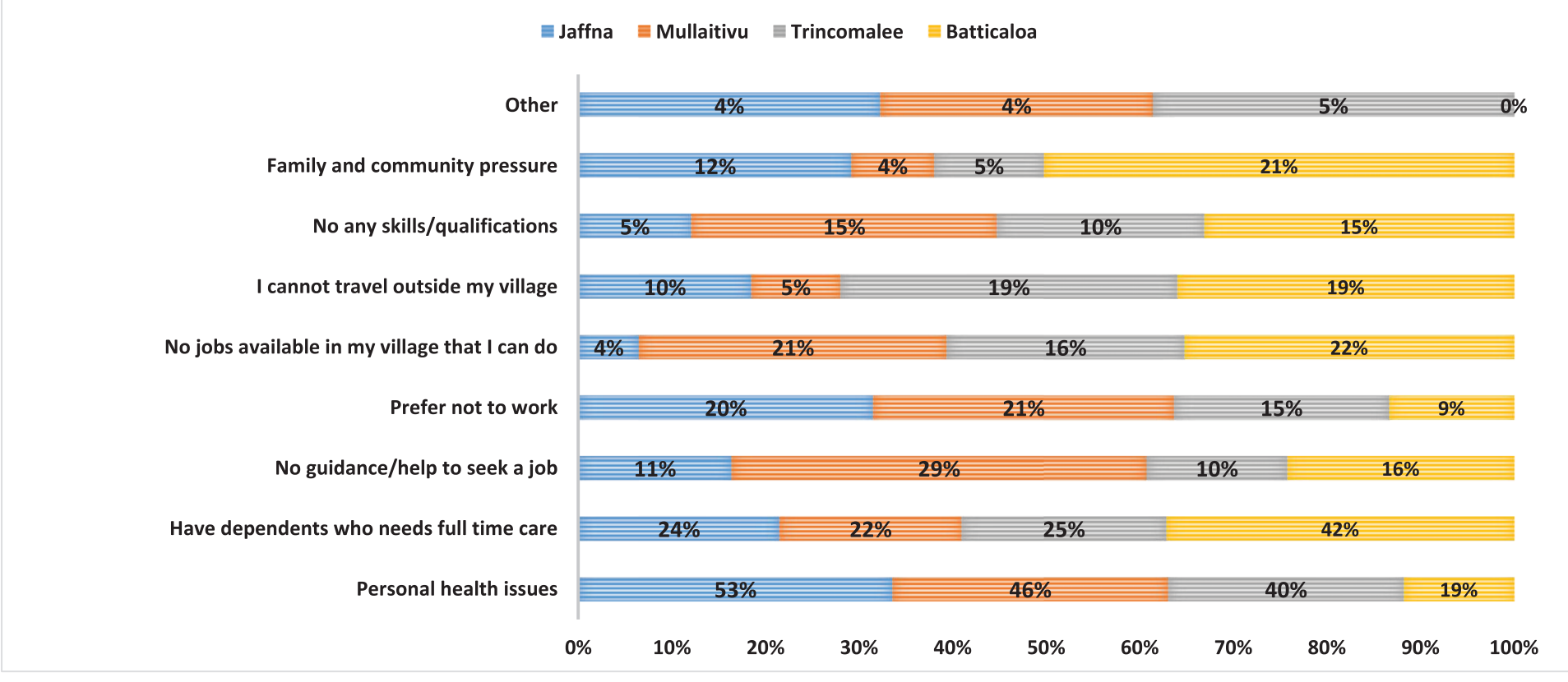


Figure 5.11 presents the reasons for previous unemployment of the 318 respondents. 39% of the respondents including 31% each from Jaffna and Mullaitivu district have cited health issues as the reason for their unemployment, whereas 28% cited dependents at home as the reason for their unemployment. Lack of guidance and non-availability of jobs in their locality are the reasons for the previous unemployment of 33% of the respondents. Significantly, respondents from Jaffna, Mullaitivu and Trincomalee districts cited health issues as a reason for their previous unemployment, it was 53%, 46% and 40%, correspondingly, whereas respondents who mentioned that the dependents at home as the reason for their unemployment was 42%, 24%, 22% and 25% for Batticaloa, Jaffna, Mullaitivu and Trincomalee districts, respectively. Lack of guidance and non-availability of jobs in their locality are the reasons for the previous unemployment of 33% of the respondents for all four districts.

A KI from Jaffna also acknowledged that the affected women are preoccupied with looking after their children and other dependents. Managing household chores would be their sole responsibility, reducing their time for income earning. They are also not educationally qualified to do any jobs in the government sectors or non-governmental sectors. The only option would be to be engaged in some low paid jobs. The KI also emphasised that there is a huge demand for domestic workers in the town areas but the WHHs prefer to work from home or in a place closer to their homes. They have several barriers to work as domestic workers related to harassment, sexual harassment and the difficulty to work away from home.

5.7.3 Unemployment and Income Source

FGD participants from Jaffna district said that they have to find different avenues to generate income. Home gardening, food preparation and engaging in manual labour for daily wage are some among them. If they have grown up children, they also contribute to their household income generation and financial management in many ways.[19] However, they said that due to price hikes their savings have drastically deteriorated. They pool income from different sources to cover the family expenditures. Other income sources of the unemployed included charities, and donations with such donations sometimes coming from NGO/CSOs and the diaspora communities. In addition to the contribution of diaspora, the NGOs and CSOs have played a significant role in supporting the income needs of WHHs. It is important to note that in the study districts, most importantly in Jaffna and Mullaitivu, the involvement of diaspora in local development is highly visible. During the KIs and FGDs it was mentioned how the diaspora involvement is supporting the war recovery in many areas.

[19] When different members of the family contribute to income, the power is shared among members within the family. However, it is important to consider as to what extent they can exercise power, which is highly dependent on the patriarchy and other socio cultural hierarchies

Figure 5.12: Income source of the unemployed respondents

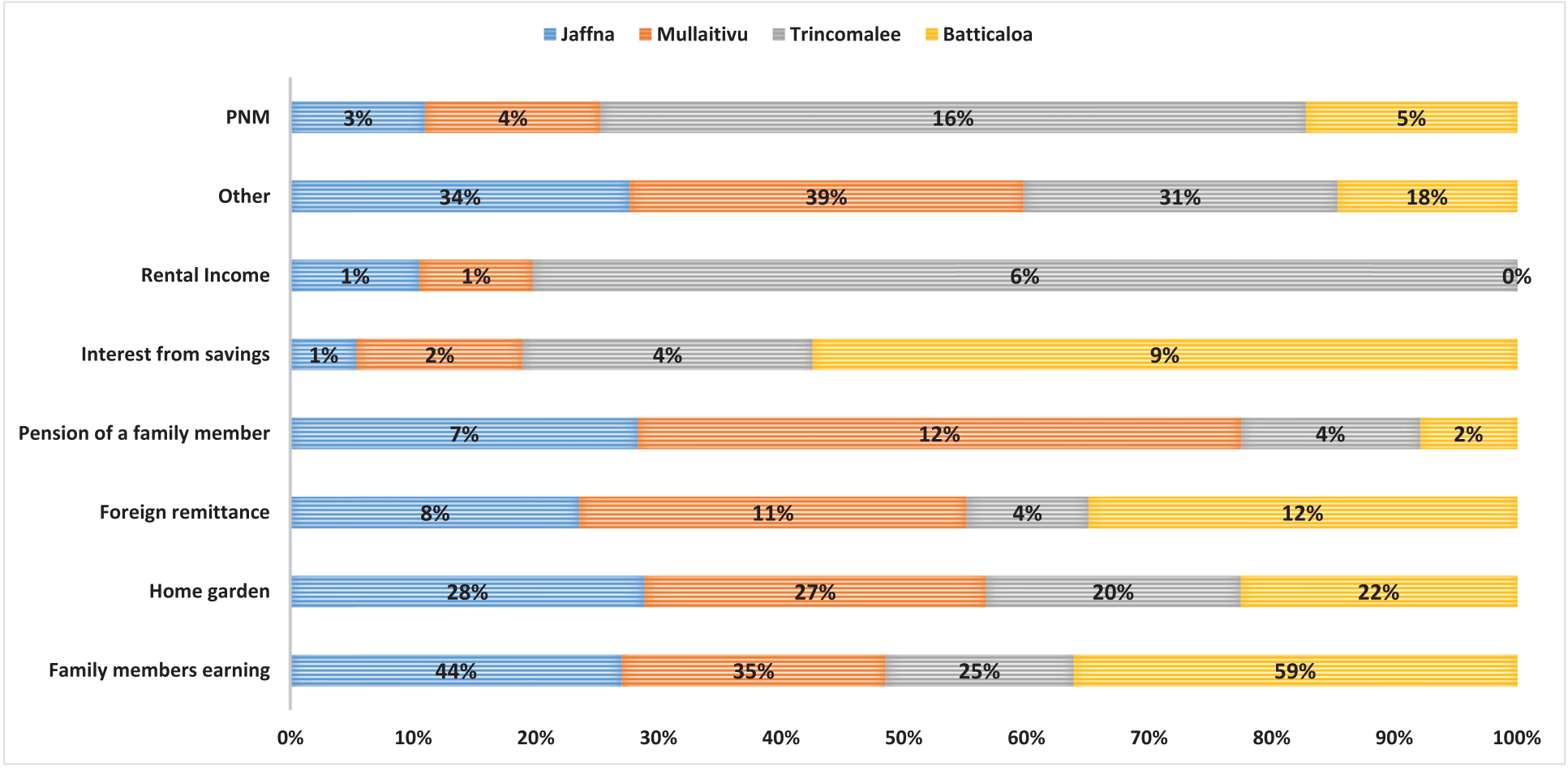


Figure 5.12 indicates the income source of the unemployed 506 respondents, who expressed one or more income sources. 40% of the respondents have their family members earning and one fourth (25%) have income from home gardening. There were significantly 9%, 7%, 3% and 2% respondents who have foreign remittance, family member's pension, and savings interest and rental income respectively. Among those who received income from family members' earnings, 30% are from Batticaloa district and 29% are from Jaffna district.

5.7.4 Types of Jobs

Figure 5.13: Types of jobs of the employed respondents

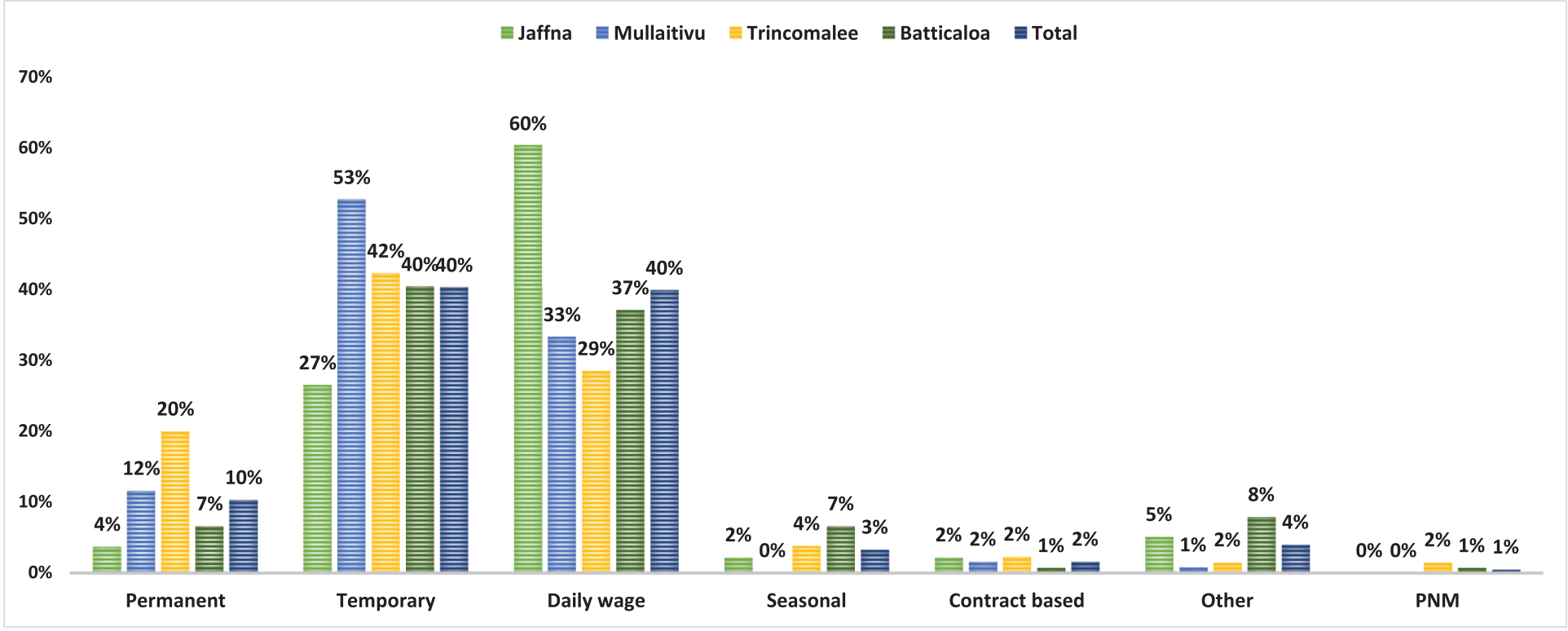


Figure 5.13 describes the WHHs employed in the temporary employment category which was considerably high in Mullaitivu (53%) and Trincomalee (42%) districts. However, few WHHs are engaged in permanent employment.

The temporary nature of their jobs shows that the WHHs are in an economically vulnerable situation. WHHs in four districts are engaged in very unstable jobs that fall into seasonal, contract based and daily waged categories. The seasonal employment of WHHs included making food for agricultural labourers during the harvesting seasons, engaged in post-harvest fishing, making food from palmyrah palms and selling by the sides of roads, working in prawn farms, cooking for ceremonies, festivals and tailoring during festival seasons.

Epidemics, natural hazards, economic crises at the national level and many other factors have also severely affected the livelihoods of women who have been engaged in such unstable economic activities. The percentage of daily wage women workers are noticeably high (82%) in Jaffna while comparing with other three districts.

> *"We are unable to do full time employment as we are tied up with other commitments. Some of us are doing home gardens and selling food items. We can't do any full time jobs as we are not qualified. We know some WHHs who are qualified to work with NGO/ CSOs. However, our family situation will not allow us to do anything permanently as we have lots of household responsibilities"*
>
> FGD Participant, Mullaitivu District

Making a living in the post war context is not easy for many WHHs. WHHs repeatedly mentioned that they can't engage in full time work due household responsibilities such as cooking. The situation is worse for women who do not have any support from relatives, friends and neighbours.

5.7.5 Multiple Income Sources

Figure 5.14: Income from multiple sources

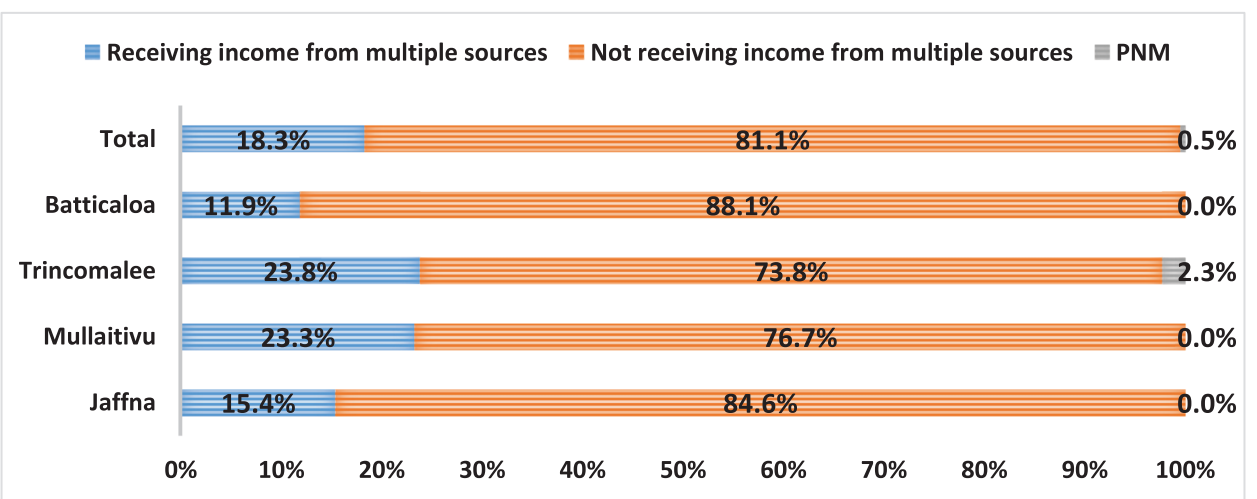


Figure 5.14 presents information about the income of the respondents from multiple sources. These numbers are presented from the respondents who expressed having been employed in one or the other way. Among the WHHs 81% of the women are not receiving income from multiple sources from all four districts. The percentage of WHHs who did not receive income from multiple sources from Batticaloa and Jaffna districts were 88% and 85%, respectively. However, the WHHs who do not receive their income from multiple sources were notably high in all four districts.

"Most of the women are multitasking in nature. We are providing several opportunities for them. Earlier, they were doing farming and tailoring. Now they are making greeting cards. I know most of them are engaged in more than one employment initiatives. WHHs who are involved in making greeting cards do something at their home. They have to do that due to their increasing needs."

KI Participant, Jaffna District

The new types of employment that they engage in might help them to increase their income. This type of innovative initiative is implemented by an NGO called "Solidarity" with the support of Tamil Diaspora. A NGO from the USA purchases the greeting cards on a wholesale basis to support the needy women. Initially, financial support with a considerable amount to buy the raw materials to prepare the cards are given to encourage their engagement. The women employees are paid a monthly salary. The WHHs were even paid during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The diaspora from the USA purchased the greeting cards during the festival and social celebration times such as Deevali, birthdays and weddings. This NGO does not support the traditional livelihoods such as poultry and tailoring but it promotes innovative sustainable livelihood initiatives such as making greeting cards. This initiative does not support the traditional livelihoods such as poultry and tailoring but it promotes other livelihood initiatives.

Figure 5.15: Number of income sources

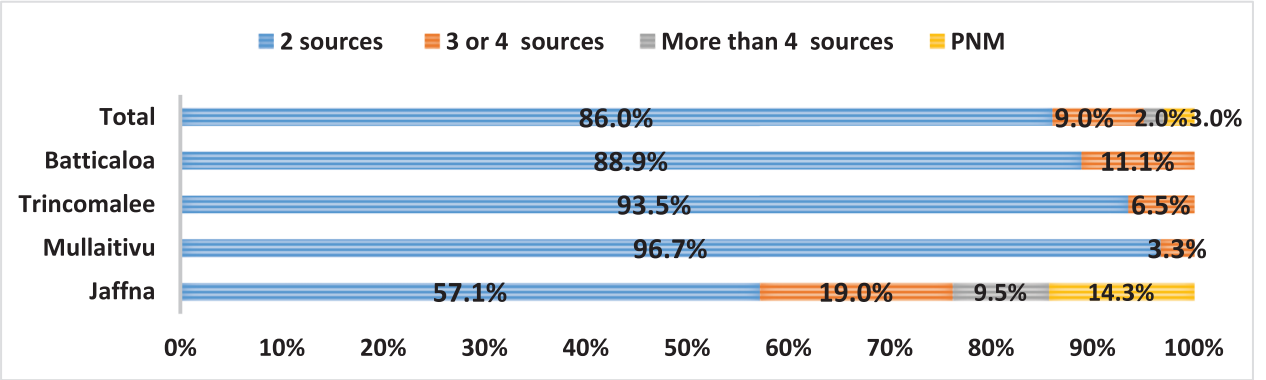


Figure 5.15 presents information on the number of income sources of the respondents, who expressed having income from multiple sources of the employed respondents. Nearly an overwhelming majority (86%) of the respondents said they are receiving income from two sources, whereas 9% and 2% each expressed receiving income from 3-4 and more than four sources respectively. 86% of the respondents, who said they received income from two sources, more than one third (34%) each are from Trincomalee and Mullaitivu districts.

"WHHs are able to get income not only from livelihood but also from other sources such as Samurdhi. Some WHHs do seasonal jobs such as agricultural labour, selling vegetables in markets and selling coconuts from their own garden or buy from others and sell with a small margin. Public Monthly Allowance or widow pension. However, there are no plans or programmes to promote entrepreneurship among the WHHs in the government sectors"

KI, Jaffna District

WHHs are involved in different livelihood activities and make use of financial support provided by state sectors. Most of the WHHs receive a public monthly allowance and *Samurdhi*[20] (state welfare). A

[20] *Samurdhi* is a state sponsored poverty alleviation programme implemented since 1995.

considerable number of families are on the waiting list of *Samurdhi* beneficiaries. The role of state welfare in meeting their needs is crucial for many poor families. They also receive support from Tamil Diaspora in the form of financial assistance for children's education and monthly living expenses. This support is particularly provided for WHHs by Tamil Diaspora. They know how to make use of all the income generating avenues and meet their family needs. Being dependent on all these different sources of financial assistance is inevitable until they become financially self-reliant. The precarious nature of temporary or daily wage livelihood engagement, pushes the WHHs to require state welfare and other welfare support. At the same time, depending on various financial supports makes them more vulnerable and reduces their agency.

5.7.6 Current Eemployment

Most of the WHHs' current employment confirms that they are engaged in gender stereotypical income earning activities. Such employment confirms that they do not need specific skills to engage in those employments as they have considerable experience. Their traditional gender roles-such as cooking- have provided necessary experiences. Their decisions to engage in income earning activities are influenced by the domestic care arrangements, distance from home, and low level of capital and training (if any). Young WHHs, with children preferred home based employment as they can combine both their income earning activities and household chores. Other WHHs with dependent family members such as sick, aged or with disabilities also preferred home based income earning activities. One of the informants from Batticaloa, who was approached in the follow up interviews mentioned:

> "*I worked for a garment factory. But travelling back home in the afternoon is difficult as we don't have good transport. One of my neighbours helped me to look after my son after he came from school. As I am getting late from work to reach home every day, my neighbour said she cannot help me. So I quit the job*"
>
> FGD Participant, Batticaloa District

Figure 5.16: Current employment or livelihood of the respondent

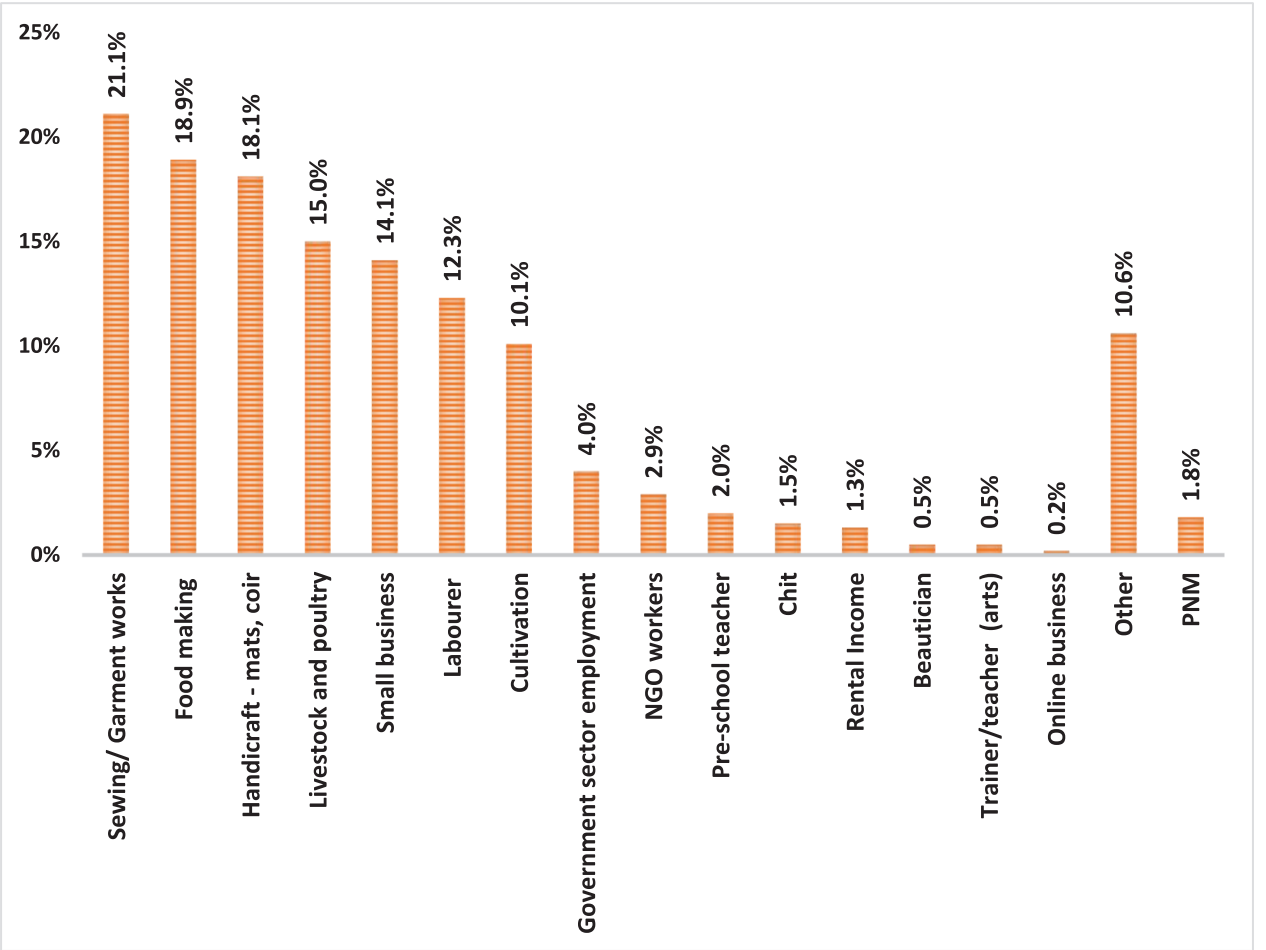


Figure 5.16 lists out different types of current employment or livelihood of the respondents. More than one fifth (21%) of the respondents engage in sewing/garment work and less than one fifth (19%) engage in food making/spice making/snack making livelihood. 18%, 14% and 12% of the respondents engage in income generation activities such as handicraft making, petty shop business and labour work respectively. There are 15% and 10% engaging in traditional occupations such as livestock farming and cultivations respectively. Around 9% of the respondents engage in government clerical work, NGO/ CSOs and pre-school teaching. 36% of the respondents, who engage in garment or tailoring work, are from Batticaloa district, whereas a majority (54%) of those engaged in food production/spice production/snack making are from Jaffna district. Similarly, 42% of those engaged in handicraft making are from Batticaloa district and half (50%) of the respondents, who engage in government sector employment are from Trincomalee district. Other categories of WHHs employment include business (own a small retail shop), work in small shops, cleaning, working in a private bank, engaged in child care, domestic work and nursing. (See Appendix D.5)

When WHHs do not have support systems in household care, they are forced to end up unproductive, low income earning activities. It was interesting to note that WHHs have managed to enter the male dominant spaces in employment too. During the reflection meeting, it was mentioned that some WHHs are engaged in auto rickshaw (three wheeler) driving. They are engaged in school hire services. However, such types of unconventional occupations have shown limited success due to prevailing gender norms (Sarvananthan et al. 2017). It should also be pointed out that such employment was severely affected by COVID-19 pandemic as schools were closed.

Some of the WHHs who worked as domestic workers have been asked not to come back to work due to the COVID-19 pandemic fear. Families who were involved in selling food have been compelled to close their business as lockdowns and curfews were imposed frequently. However, WHHs engage in fishing as they do not have other options. Even though women are not trained in fishing they engaged during the pandemic as

they do not have any other options. Some NGO/CSOs and government officers also motivate WHHs to do so. It was also found that some WHHs started to send their under 18 children to work after the pandemic.

5.7.7 Barriers to Current Employment

Figure 5.17: Barriers in current work/employment of the respondents

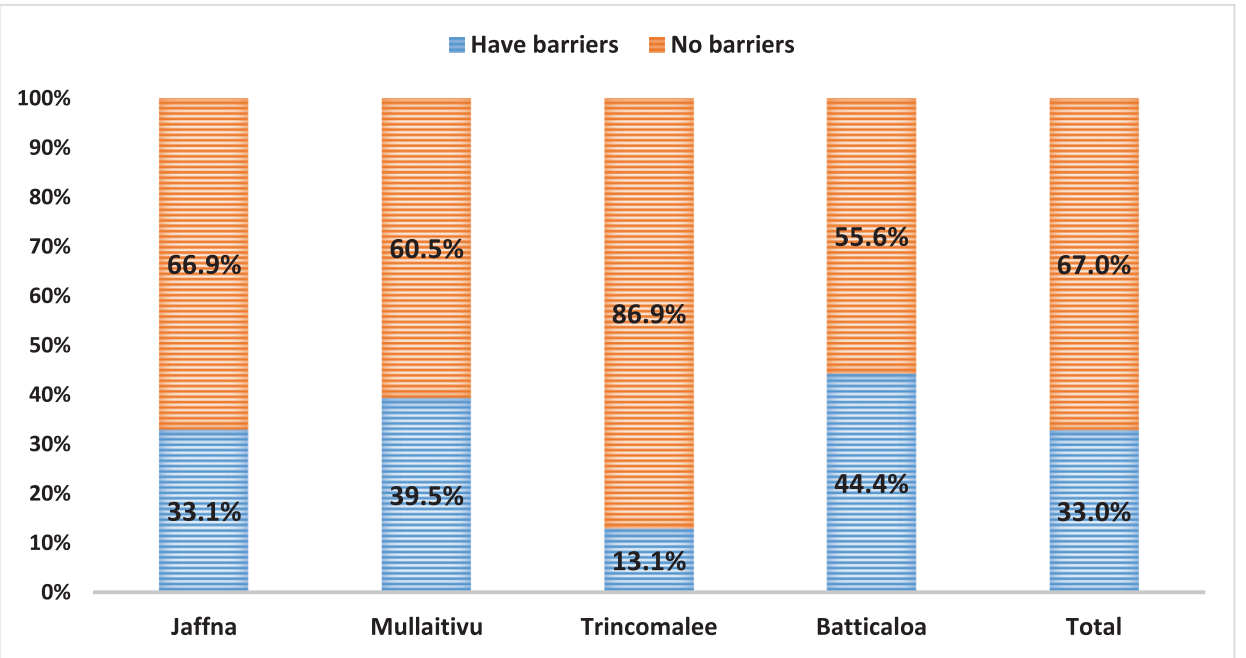


Figure 5.17 presents the barriers in the current employment of the respondents. Among the respondents 67% expressed that they didn't have barriers to participate in their current work/employment. Of them, 87% are from Trincomalee, 67% are from Jaffna, 60% are from Mullaitivu and 56% are from Batticaloa districts respectively.

5.7.8 Types of Barriers Experienced By WHHS in their Current Employment

Figure 5.18: Types of barriers to continue the current employment

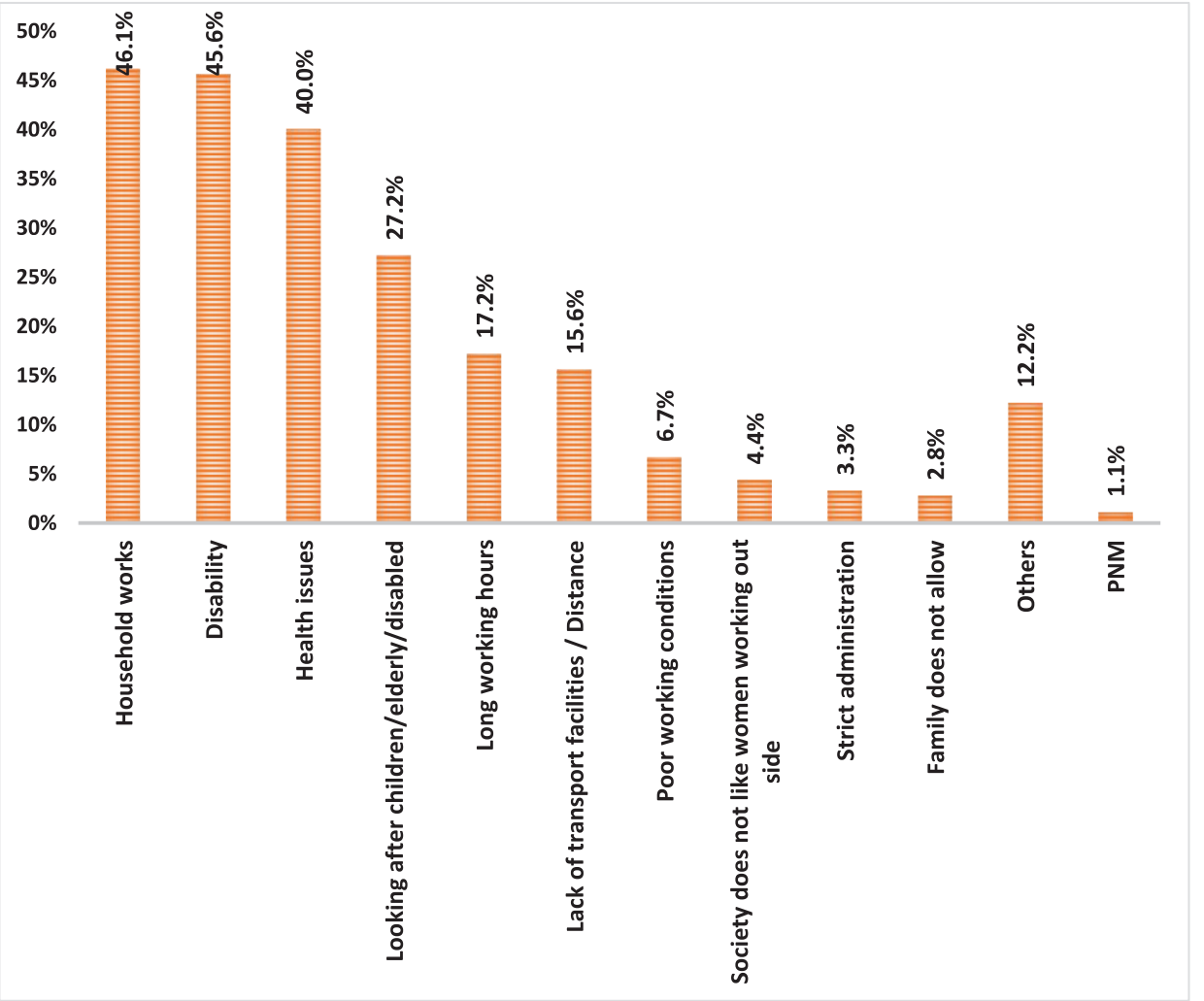


Figure 5.18 describes the specific barriers faced by the 180 respondents, who expressed facing barriers in their current employment. A detailed table is given in Appendix D.6. 46% each expressed that household work and their physical disability respectively were the barriers to participation in the current employment. Of those, who expressed disability as the barrier, 39% are from Batticaloa district and one third (33%) are from Mullaitivu district. 27% expressed looking after their children/elderly members/disabled members in their families as the barrier, whereas 17% and 16% expressed long working hours and transportation difficulties respectively as the barriers in their current employment.

Significantly, 4% including half of them from Batticaloa expressed the community's reluctance towards women going out for work as the barrier to participate in their current employment. It is pertinent to note that most of the state and non-state programmes targeting WHHs, fail to recognize the barriers WHHs face in engaging in employment in their programmes targeting WHHs. They should pay adequate attention to the fact that to what extent women's roles, authority, identity and functions change when they become WHHs and when they work.

"When women go out for work they face different problems. Sexual harassment is one of the serious issues. Another challenge is that relevant authorities do not work sincerely to create job employment for the WHHs. Therefore, women have only limited opportunities in their respective areas. Getting adequate training and relevant policies and programmes are also not in place. Some stakeholders do not come forward to create sustainable opportunities for these women"

KI, Kilinochchi District[21]

Many WHHs are responsible for their households in multiple ways. They play multiple roles simultaneously, which push them to face challenges in the public and private spaces. When such a woman goes for work, "*she carries the whole home"* with her literally means the multiple responsibilities she has to shoulder. They focus heavily on economic empowerment programmes. WHHs, when attempting to fulfil all the roles as mothers, wives, daughters and in laws within a patriarchal system, they have to bear a great deal of pressure. One of the activist we interviewed expressed her concern:

"*When she (WHH) is going outside for work, she is carrying the whole home with her. She has to travel for work with the restrictions within the family…Her spatial moment outside is very limited….as new WHH, she might face shocks….it would take time to adjust to new roles...due to war and tsunami many women suddenly became responsible for their families…"*

KI, An Activist and a Freelance Researcher, Ampara District

"When I became responsible for my family, after my divorce, I had to face a lot of problems. I was just 29 years old and I am not from this village. I come from the central part of the country. My parents told me not to tell anyone from my village that I am divorced. I had to find a job. I had children. The village was new to me. I underwent many issues that I can't discuss here openly. I thank at least Viluthu for providing me an opportunity to open my hearts in front of these women who are also having a lot of issues. When I smile, many people still think that I do not have any problems. They see only the tip of the ice-berg..."

FGD Participant, Jaffna District

Becoming responsible for multiple roles enforces them to work with pressure and work long hours. This can result in poor physical and mental wellbeing. The socio economic and cultural pressures exerted on them expose them to severe mental illnesses. The research assistants have encountered such women during the fieldwork. In the above figure (5.18) many WHHs (40%) reported health issues, as barriers to their employment. However, they continue to engage in their work as they do not have any other options to continue their lives.

[21] The KI interviewed is from Kilinochchi District, but she works in the district of Jaffna.

A large majority of the women have also pointed out that household work as a barrier to employment. Even in situations where able male members are present at home, the gender roles assigned to women in the society force many women to continue the traditional roles such as cooking, taking care of the elders, children, sick and differently abled, washing clothes, cleaning and drawing water. Gender roles in these communities (and generally) are articulated by patriarchal norms, which have direct bearing on what they do and do not do. Such norms continue to create, recreate, manipulate and sustain the expected gendered roles in communities. It is important to point out that few WHHs mentioned that their families do not allow them to work outside home and the community's perception on WHHs going out for work is a barrier for them to continue their work. Due to socio-cultural reasons that do not encourage certain categories of WHHs (young widows, unmarried WHHs) some women are forced to find work that they can do from home. If these WHHs go out for work they are more in the public eye and feel they are subject to social scrutiny and censure compared to other women. The community expects that their appearance in the public domain should be limited. Although such views are not openly spoken, they lead to rumours and slander. We can see that the gendered socio-cultural expectations and gender role stereotyping continue to dominate the perception that "work outside home is connected mainly to men." Hence, women's empowerment may continue to be an ambivalent goal for WHHs.

WHHs in the study have pointed out disability as a barrier for their employment. This particular reason was mentioned by 52% of participants from the district of Mullaitivu and 47% of participants from the district of Batticaloa. Although the war affected every woman in the country in different ways, these two districts had to bear the heavy cost of the war on many fronts. Women enlisted as combatants are higher in these two districts, compared to the other two study districts.[22] Our research also documents that the war affected WHHs are higher in the districts of Mullaitivu and Batticaloa in terms of numbers. The disabilities are related to visibility, audibility, mobility, etc.[23] which is a hindrance to active economic participation.

WHHs identified lack of transport facilities, distance to work, long working hours, poor working conditions and strict administration as barriers to their present employment. The 26 year war caused severe damage to the district's infrastructure. Under the post war development priorities the government of Sri Lanka launched a massive infrastructural development program which included building and rebuilding of roads, railway, electricity lines and water supply. However, several villages in the study districts remain far from inclusion in the planned infrastructural development programmes to this date. Among the study districts, Mullaitivu experiences the transport problem seriously. Due to poor roads and insufficient modes of transport, mobility of the people is constrained and these factors especially influence the WHHs' employment choices.

Adding to the above issues, workplace conditions are also barriers for WHHs employment. Long working hours, poor working conditions, sexual harassment and strict administrative barriers continue to pressurize WHHs adding to their existing social, economic and psychological problems. WHHs in the study are employed in various sectors. Among the WHHs, around 51% are employed. Those who are employed and working outside their villages are employed mainly in agricultural related activities (farms, paddy fields, vegetable/fruit gardens), fishing related activities, domestic work, working in factories, companies, shops and in the construction industries. These sectors require potentially lower skills and lower educational qualifications. In the absence of suitable employment opportunities, many WHHs are forced to seek

[22] Kilinochi and Amaparai Districts also have a large number of ex-combatants. These two districts are not part of the study.
[23] Impact of war is discussed separately in Chapter 7.5

employment in the said sectors. The WHHs mentioned that they work in the garment sector[24]. Garment factories in general on the island do not maintain good working conditions (Hewamanna 2020). Some WHHs did not prefer to mention the barrier they face in their employment. Such barriers could include gender based violence (GBV) and sexual bribery too.

> *"So the moment the service providers know that this is, these are single women or they are not married or they are, there's no man in the house, so they try to take sexual favours from these women. So, sexual bribery is one main issue that these women face. The second problem is, as we know, a lot of them are not employed, employed in the sense, they don't get a permanent income."*
>
> KI, A Development Practitioner, Colombo

> *"When men get to know that there are no responsible men at home for these women. They try to manipulate their vulnerability and coerce to have sexual relationships or pass sex-oriented comments and this is a crucial issue in a male dominated communities. Some women don't even go to any offices due to this issue"*
>
> KI, Participant, Jaffna District

GBV is a topic which is not commonly discussed among the researched WHHs. There are special units allocated for handling GBV related issues in the police stations and some NGO/CSOs conduct awareness programmes on GBV and issues related to GBV. However, adequate attempts are not made to address the root causes or impact of GBV. The State, though acknowledging GBV incidents, has not provided adequate institutional support to affected persons. Although NGO/CSOs are working on the issues, they have not been adequately supported by the government officers (Colombini et al 2018). The existence of GBV is openly accepted and remedial measures are also proposed by Amara Forum and Samasam women. Such measures include awareness and training programmes. It was mentioned that many WHHs do not openly discuss issues related to GBV. However, Amara Forum and Samasam delegates mentioned that at village level, they are approached by some women for help regarding GBV. They have spontaneously responded to such situations.

Nearly 12% of the WHHs mentioned other reasons as barriers for participation in the current employment that they are engaged in. It is also important to note that most WHHs are concentrated in employment sectors such as sewing/garments, food making, handicraft making and home based livestock keeping which are precarious types of employment in the context of COVID-19. The pandemic has severely affected the informants as they faced problems related to transport, outsource home based production to the market, and travel bans. Although some men were able to obtain curfew permits and hire vehicles to sell their product, accessing such passes were difficult for women and especially for WHHs (Saroor 2020). Men were able to engage in door to door sales, but women could not. Some WHHs have faced difficulties in getting permission from health inspectors to start a new business. In addition, as the schools were closed, WHHs had to shoulder heavier burdens along with their regular household chores.

Climate related factors have also contributed as barriers to WHHs employment. The study districts experience heavy rains and flooding during the North East Monsoon season, which lasts from December to February. These areas are also affected by prolonged spells of drought. WHHs engaged in agriculture, livelihood and fishing have to fight with adverse weather conditions related to climate change. Apart from

[24] Ruwanpura (2017) argues, how new garment factories in the former war areas show a militarized nation building effort and producing and reproducing power relations.

the climate-related factors, lack of capital was identified as barriers to their current employment. The WHHs find it difficult to access financial services to obtain a loan to start a business, where access is curtailed by the lack of financial literacy, the flexibility in loan amounts sought and the inability to provide assets as guarantees against the loan that banks and recognised financial services set as loan criteria. At the current situation the WHHs are forced to cope with new precarities and increased levels of risk and uncertainties. The WHHs under these circumstances have to depend mainly on physical and human capital rather than financial capital. During the FGD, members had two different views on the role of microfinance as a source of capital. While some members mentioned that microfinance is essential for livelihood improvements as they are excluded from formal bank loans. Other members raised their concerns over the exploitative nature of the microfinance companies operating. They acknowledged that microfinance systems exploited grantees and made them more vulnerable to the extent they felt it being responsible for suicides of women in some cases. They also discussed the perception that the lack of WHH knowledge in financial matters including financial management, could further lead to negative impacts.

While one group argued that the microfinance systems exploits the grantees and make them more vulnerable, even responsible for suicides in some cases. The other set argued that women who obtain microfinance do not have the knowledge of financial management and that leads to negative impacts.

5.7.9 Barriers in Getting Employment

"...women like us are unable to go to work due to the household responsibilities. If they need to go to a nearby shop to buy something it would also be challenging"

KI, Jaffna District

"They are less educated and do not have required qualifications or skills to work outside. And, most of the time WHHs are provided with self-employment by different stakeholders and they think that these women can't do anything other than self-employment"

KI, Mullaitivu District

Figure 5.19: Barriers to get employment

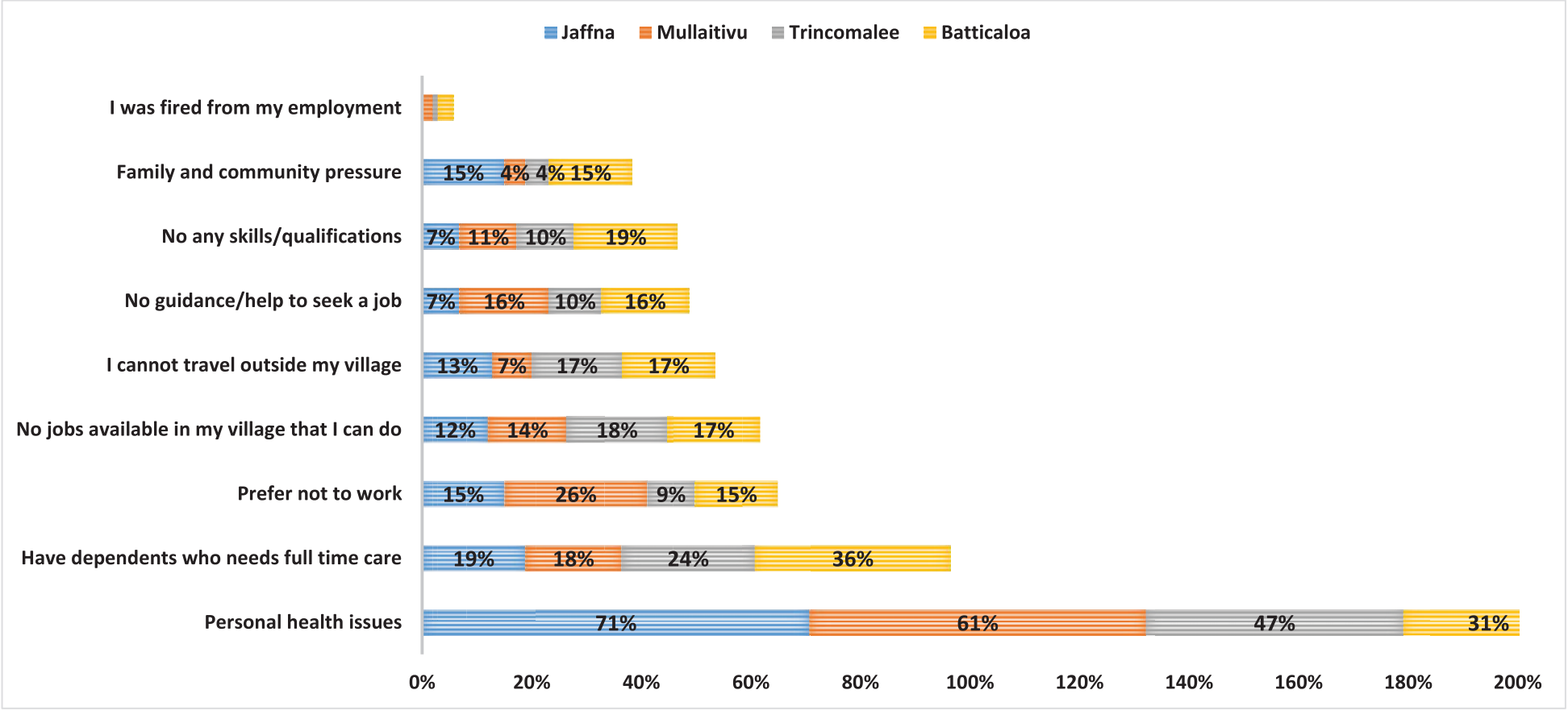


Figure 5.19 describes the specific barriers to receive employment for the unemployed respondents. A majority (54%) cited health issues, whereas nearly one fourth (23%) cited the availability of dependents as the barriers to go for work/employment. 17%, 15% and 13% of the respondents indicated their personal non-preference, non-availability of jobs matching their competencies and inability to travel outside the locality respectively as the reasons for not going to work. 23% said lack of guidance and skills respectively as the reasons for their inability to get employment. More importantly, 9% indicated family/community's pressure as the reason for not going to work.

5.8 Monthly Income

Figure 5.20: Monthly income of the respondents

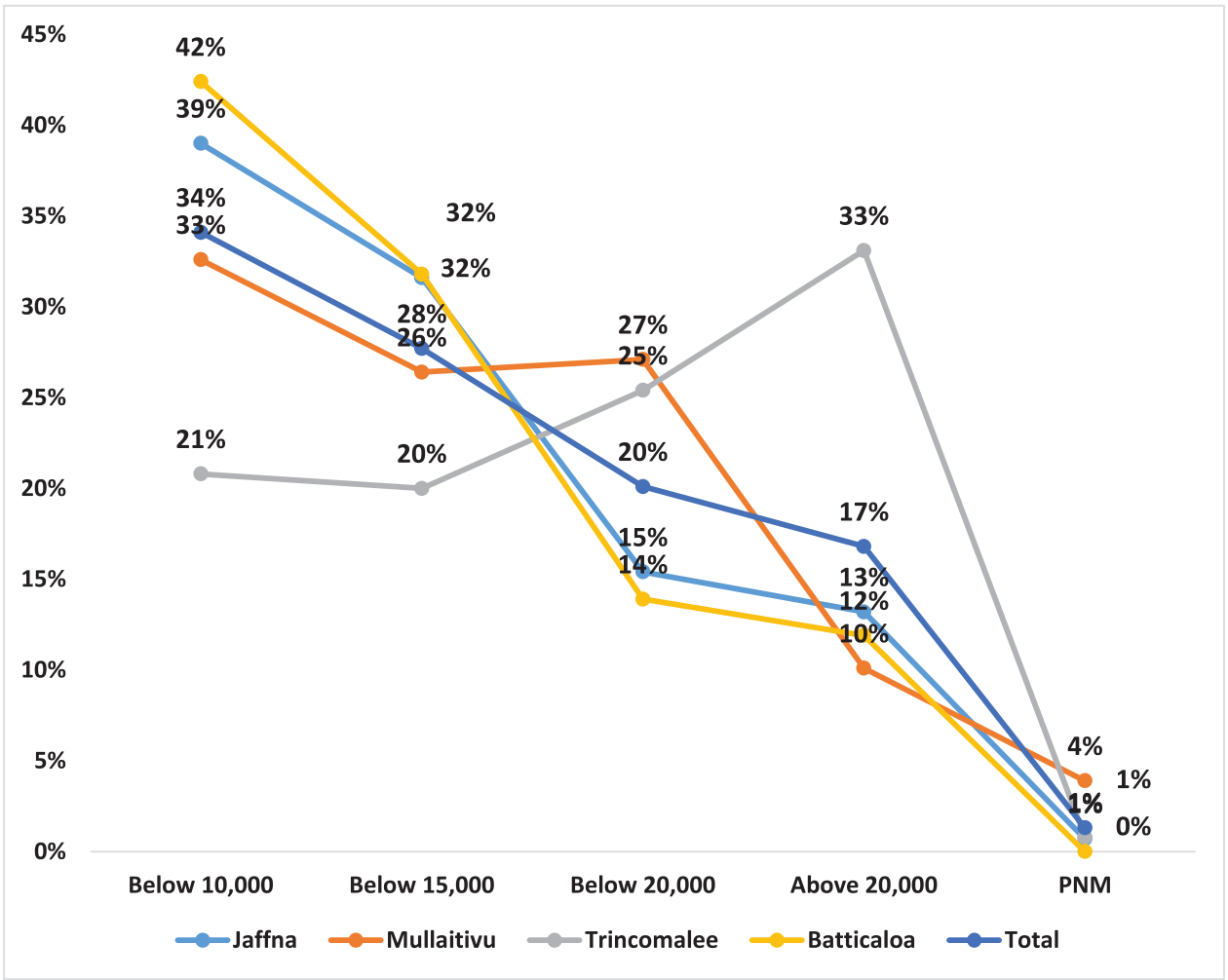


Figure 5.20 presents the monthly income of the respondents. Of the 546 respondents, who are employed and receiving income, more than one third (34%) receive income below LKR.10,000/- and 28% falls under the income range of LKR. 10,001/= to LKR. 15,000/-, whereas one fifth (20%) falls under the income range of LKR. 15,001/- to LKR. 20,000/-. 17% of the respondents receive income above Rs.20,000/- every month. Of those who received LKR. 20,000/- above, high number (47%) of the respondents are from Trincomalee district, whereas among the respondents fall under the income range between LKR. 15,001/- to LKR. 20,000/-, 30% each are from Trincomalee and Mullaitivu districts. More than one third (34%) among the respondents receive income below LKR. 10, 000/- are from Batticaloa district.

"Most of the women who work in our area are paid low wages. They are not like government servants. The WHHs' level of education is also not enough to get jobs. Therefore, their salary is also very small as they mostly do menial work such as taking care of women who gave birth or domestic work"

KI, Jaffna District

Figure 5.21: Monthly household income of the respondents

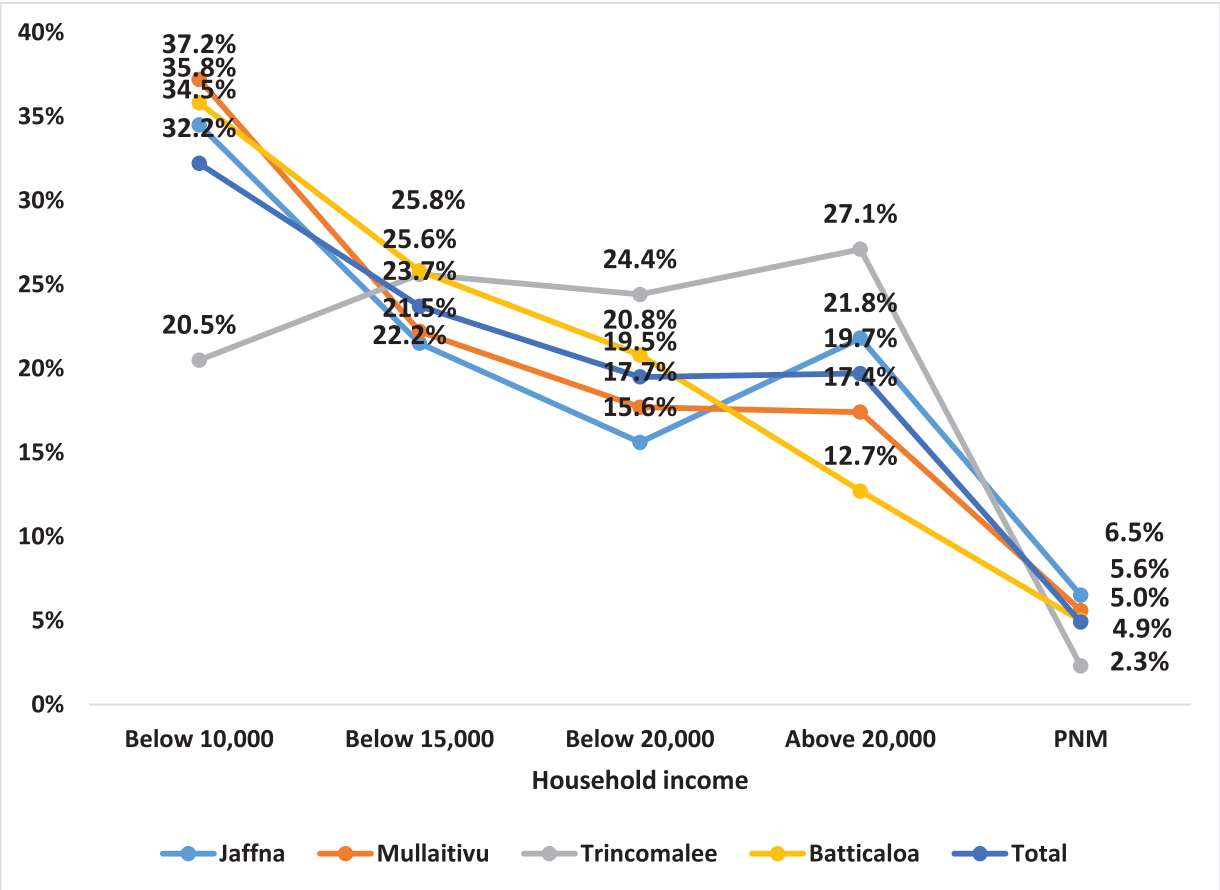


Figure 5.21 explains the low level of monthly household income of the WHHs projects that these families are confronting multiple dimensions of poverty. The low income may lead to poor health, nutrition, education, school dropouts and social exclusion. The expenditure related data shows that the WHHs spend on rent, education, water, repayment of loan, internet and data, transport, EMI/chit/insurance, medical needs, television, phone, electricity, food and other expenditures.

5.8.1 Adequacy of Monthly Income

Figure 5.22: Adequacy of monthly income from the employment of the respondents

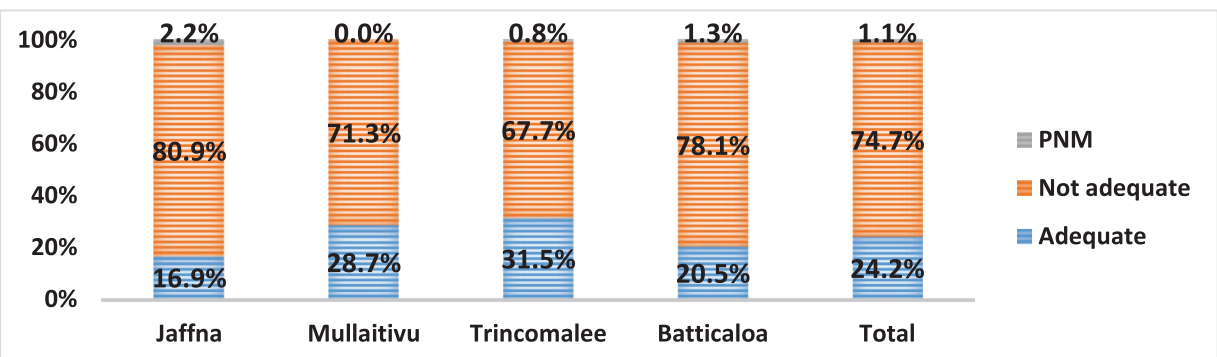


Figure 5.22 depicts the sufficiency of income that is earned by the 546 respondents from their employment for their day to day needs. Three fourth (75%) of the respondents expressed that their monthly income was not sufficient to meet the household needs, whereas nearly one fourth (24%) expressed that their monthly income was adequate. Of those, who expressed insufficient income to meet their household needs, 78% and 81% are from Batticaloa and Jaffna districts respectively. Of those who accepted sufficient income, 32% and 29% were from Trincomalee and Mullaitivu districts respectively.

"The major challenge that the WHHs faced is lack of income. Their income is not always sufficient to meet their daily needs. The WHHs need to manage or sacrifice their needs and try to fulfil other family members' needs. We do not spend money for any luxurious purposes. We can't buy good quality shoes or dresses for my children. We just look after our day-to-day needs"

KI, Jaffna District

"We are unable to meet all our needs with the income that we earn. Our needs are increasing when our children are grown up. Nowadays, we need more money for our children's education alone. We need money for the zoom class as well"

KI, Kilinochchi District

When WHHs face problems in managing the monthly income, they get help from different sources *(See Appendix D.7).* They draw from savings, pawning jewellery, obtain loans from *Samurdhi* banks, seek support from other government sources, receive help from community, religious and charity organizations, seek help from relatives, neighbours and friends, borrow money from microfinance organizations or lend money from local money lenders. While these avenues show that they have a fall-back position, it could also lead to sustain poverty and continuously keep the WHHs in the poverty trap. In the study districts, microfinance institutions have been identified as threats that push women into poverty and vulnerability. In addition the local money lenders do operate in the villages with high interest rates.

5.9 Asset Ownership

Ownership of assets is very important for WHHs, not only for their economic survival, but also for their social identity and security. Access and ownership of assets provide status for women. It is also considered an important source for women's empowerment. Enhancing their ownership and control over assets improves their bargaining power, economic independence and autonomy. However, it should be accepted that ownership and control do not necessarily guarantee her the ability to control the income gained through assets. The caste identity, ethnicity, social location, household structure, and class are some of the factors that could influence the position related to property rights and its use. Adding to this, land acquisition by the government, legal and administrative constraints and lack of proper documentation or no documents could also hamper access to land. Kadirgamar (2017) claims that although caste, class and gender identities have changed in the post war context, these identities are extending beyond the connection to land and influencing education, employment, infrastructure and state services opportunities. Caste based segregation in schools are pushing households to poverty. The situation could lead to keep many families in poverty, especially when they are headed by women.

During the war and tsunami, many people, including the WHHs lost their access and control over the assets. According to the present research findings, 68% of WHHs mentioned that they own assets, while 31% said they do not own any assets. A minor percentage preferred not to answer. Figure 5.23 shows the types of assets owned by the WHHs in the study. It also shows the district-based differences.

Like in many South Asian communities, in Sri Lanka jewellery is considered an important asset. Within the patrilineal and patriarchal social systems, gold is a very important metal that is gifted as dowry and is considered as an asset of investment. Gold jewellery also provides financial and social security during difficult times including war and COVID -19 lockdowns and restriction measures. Whenever the COVID-19 lockdowns were lifted in Sri Lanka, more people were queuing in pawn centres and banks to pawn their jewellery to face the economic challenges.

Among the WHHs, only 3% mentioned that they have savings or insurance. The saving and insurance behaviour of many Sri Lankans is not commendable. It should also be noted that poor income and higher cost of living are also influential contributing factors. As most of the WHHs do not have adequate savings and insurance, during the times of crisis, they are some of the first to be affected. In the absence of good saving behaviour, their social security is at risk. Among the districts, Mullaitivu has a higher percentage of WHHs who have savings or insurance. It is important to acknowledge that WHHs are heavily dependent on financial assistance from the government or from other sources such as charities. In such a situation, savings are impossible. Rather than saving, most of them have borrowed multiple loans from formal and informal sources.

Figure 5.23: Assets owned by respondents

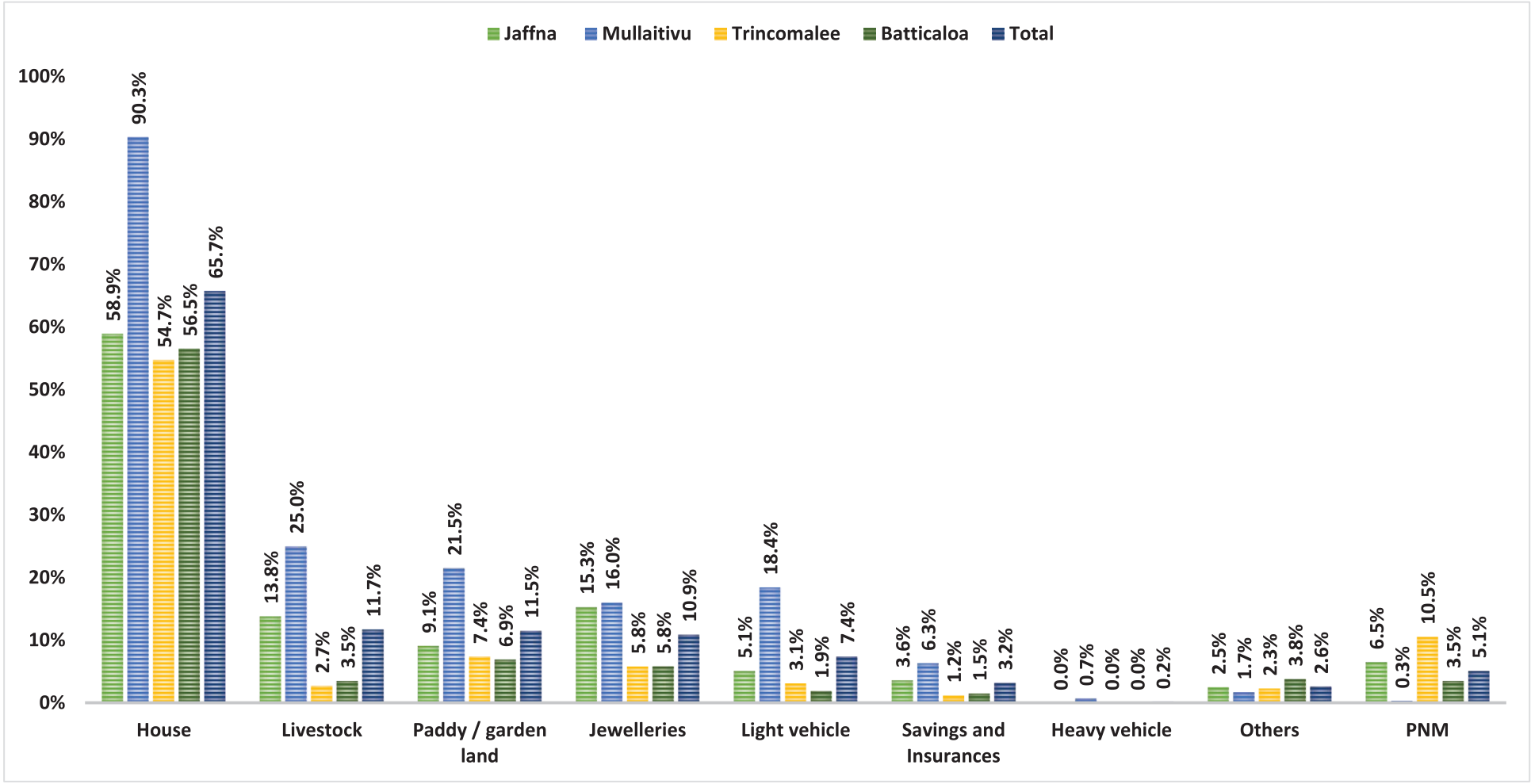
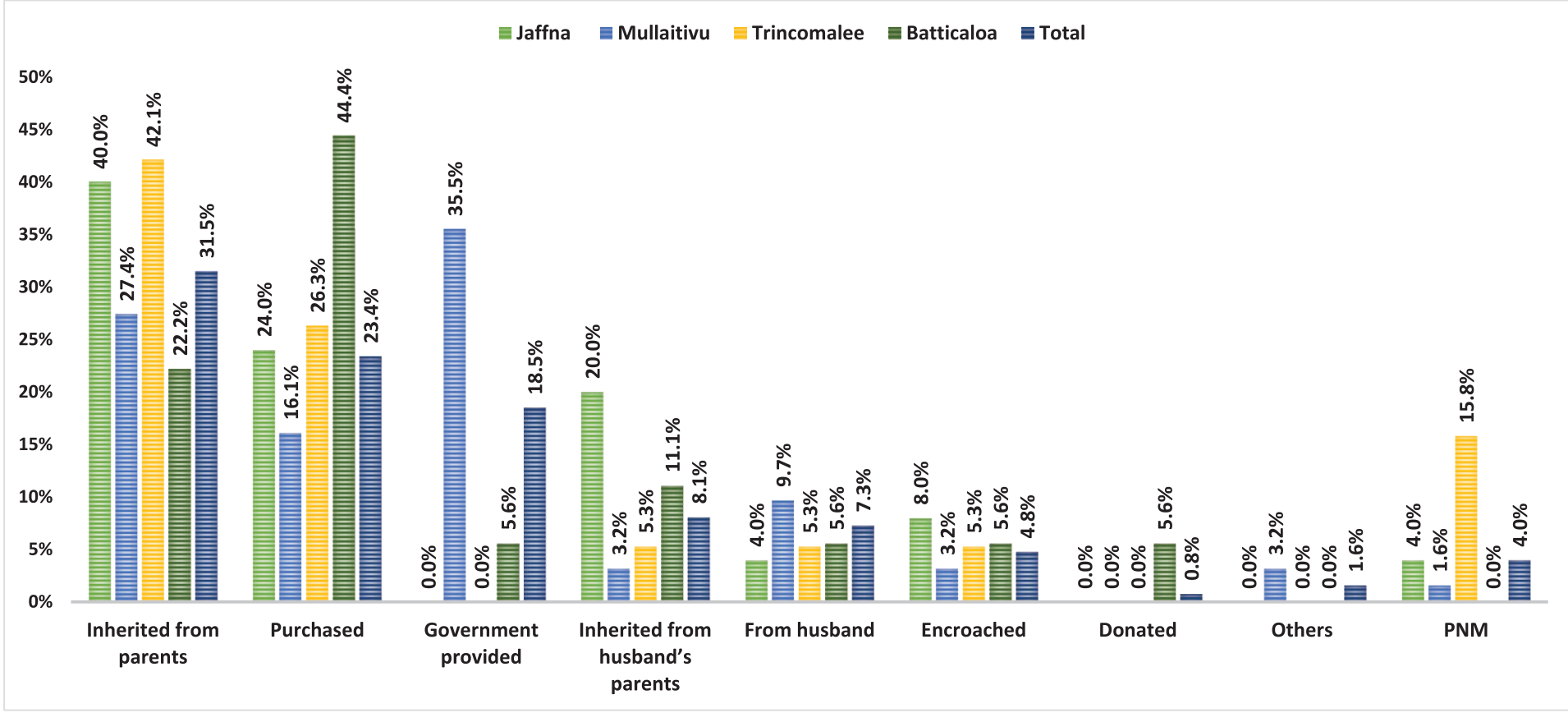


Figure 5.23 indicates, among those who owned assets, 66% mentioned that they owned a house. It is important to note that among the informants from Mullaitivu district, 90% own houses. House ownership is very important for WHHs as houses are used for their home based employment too. Further, houses are important property in dowry. Being an agricultural community, ownership of livestock (12%) is also an important asset. Nearly an equal percentage own paddy land or gardens. The ownership of land is high in the district of Mullaitivu.

5.9.1. Right to Use Land

Figure 5.24: Source of land owned



The figure 5.24 shows that the majority of the WHHs have inherited their land from their parents. 23% of the WHHs have purchased the properties. Another 18% of the WHHs have obtained the land from the government. Nearly 8% of the WHHs have inherited from the husband's parents. While 7% of WHHs mentioned that they obtained the land from their husband, nearly 5% have got their land through encroachment.

In Sri Lanka, apart from the general law, Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities have their own legal systems related to property inheritance though they are practised to different degrees in different geographical locations within the country. In terms of property inheritance, Tamil women are said to be enjoying a strong inheritance right to land, though this may vary in the North, East and the Central parts of the country, due to the dowry system[25] (Jayatilaka & Amirthalingam 2015). Although religion does not permit dowry, Muslims have practiced a dowry system that includes transferring of land, house, jewellery and vehicles to daughters or their son-in-law. In the above figure, a majority of the WHHs who inherited land are from the districts of Jaffna and Trincomalee. This could be related to the fact that they have received the land from their parents as dowry.

It is also important to note that although many WHHs had land, they could not access their land during the war. Land occupation by the military continues to be a problem in the North and East. Some people could not return to their land, even after the end of the war due to competing claims, loss of documents, land grabs, ownership disputes and the declaration of high security zones. With the end of the war, the government has also provided land for affected people. Among the respondents 18% mentioned that they obtained their land from the government. The WHHs from the district of Mullaitivu outnumber the other districts in obtaining land from the government. The resettled families have been issued with permits[26] by the government in the beginning of the resettlement programmes and arrangements made by the Department of Provincial Land Commissioner. This may be connected to the fact that during the war, Mullaitivu district experienced and recorded the highest number of displacement. Similar to ownership, for WHHs, the nature of land ownership is also important. Although the government was able to resettle the majority of the displaced, land issues in terms of nature of ownership (deeds or permit) continue to exist (Lindberg and Herath 2014). Figure 5.25 shows the nature of right to use the land.

[25] The customary law of the Northern Province is called 'Thesawalamai'. At present, the application of Thesawalamai is limited to matrimonial and inheritance rights and pre-emption.

[26] Under the Land Development Ordinance of 1935 and the Crown Land Ordinance of 1947, state redistributed land to individuals. Land permits are given under these ordinance for people as an annual permit.

Figure 5.25: Nature of right to use the land

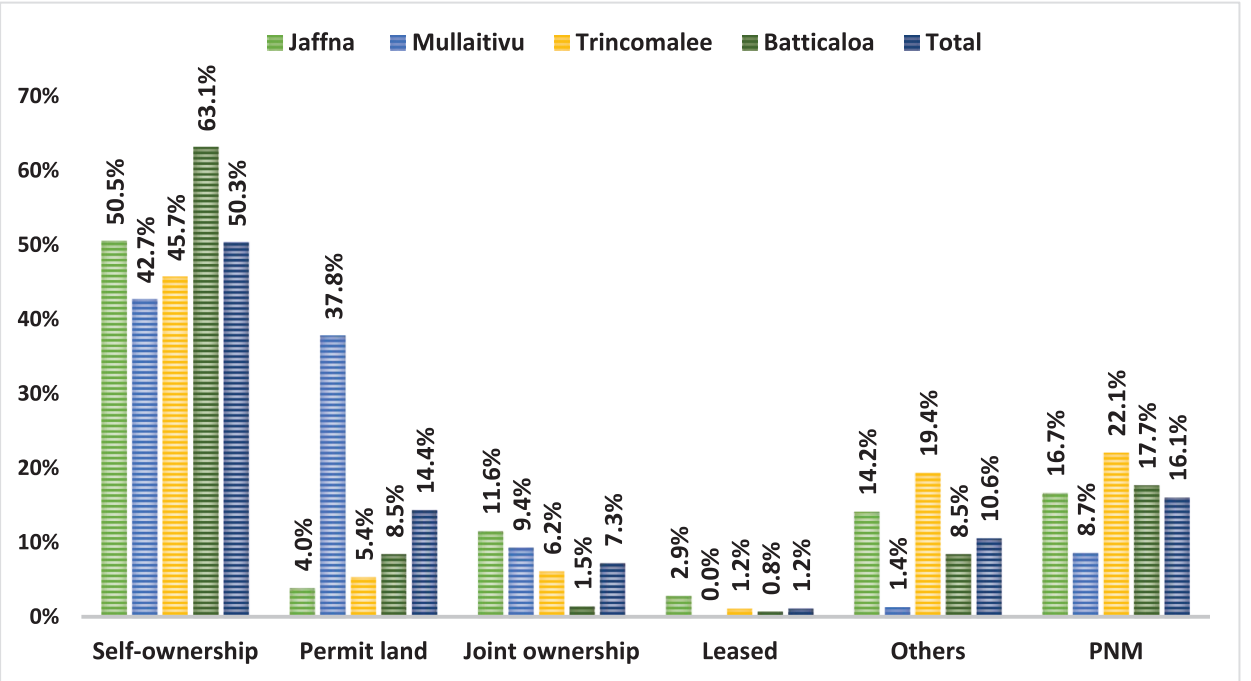


Figure 5.25 demonstrates the nature of land ownership. Majority of the WHHs mentioned that the land they own is under their names. Nearly 14% have access to permit land. Joint ownership accounted for 7%. Nearly 11% mentioned other categories that include the land ownership under the names of their family members who they are living with, land ownership under the names of foreign settled relatives/friends, lands without any deeds and encroached lands. About 16% of the WHHs did not prefer to provide answers. It is also important to note that, WHHs have also encroached on state land when states fail to provide land or for various other reasons.

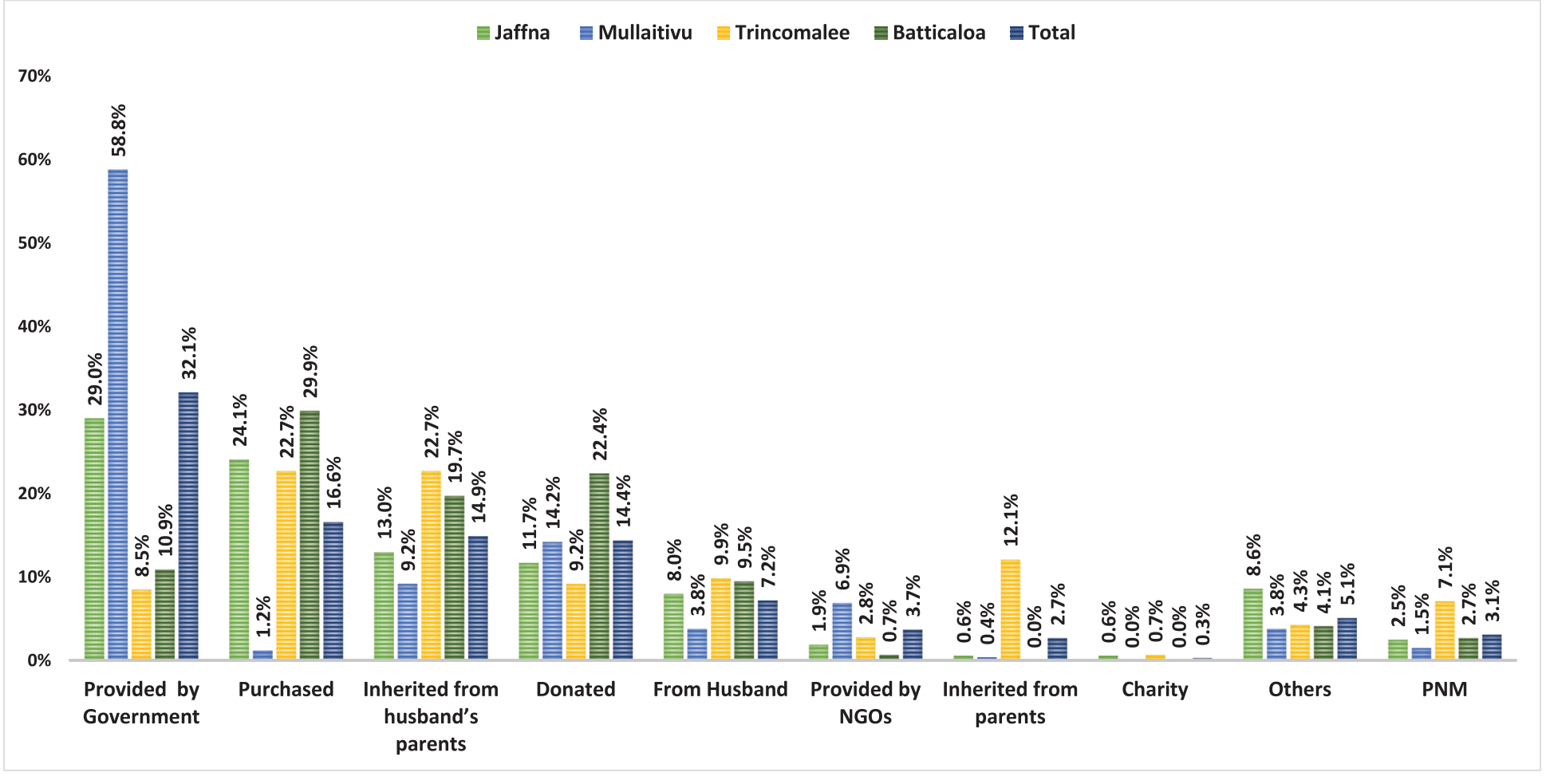
5.9.2 House Ownership

The analysis of data on the nature of house ownership revealed that 84% of the WHHs claimed that they are the sole owners of the house, while 11% of them admitted joint ownership. The joint ownership is mostly with their husband or immediate family members. Nearly 5% of the respondents did not want to answer the question.

Figure 5.26 shows the ownership roots of the houses they own at present. Majority of the respondents mentioned that they obtained the houses from the government. In the post war development process, several housing projects were sponsored by foreign governments (such as the Indian government housing project) and the UN. The government also participated in housing provision. The figures are higher among the WHHs from the district of Mullaitivu. Around 17% of the WHHs have purchased their houses. It is also pertinent to note that nearly 15% of the WHHs mentioned that they inherited from their husband's parents, which is normally the husband's share of the family property. It is also important to note that nearly 14% of the WHHs have obtained their houses as donations from relatives. Some of the WHHs' relatives who live abroad helped them to build a house or donate their land or houses to those affected. NGO/CSOs have also been involved in the provision of houses.

It is important to note that many locations from which the informants came were affected by the tsunami. Therefore, WHHs have obtained houses from various sources. As different actors worked simultaneously in the field, without proper coordination, in the post-war and post tsunami context, WHHs might have obtained more than one house too, due to lack of appropriate mechanism followed by the government and other institutions in identifying and selecting the proper beneficiaries. Burn and Lund (2008) point out the corrupted practises in housing allocation in the post tsunami recovery in the context of war.

Figure 5.26: Source of house provision



6 Headship and Household Responsibilities

The following sections provided various perspectives on headship and household responsibilities. It is important to understand different views of different stakeholders. Due to changing socio economic, cultural, political and social processes, it is important to understand headship and household responsibilities from the perspectives of the participants.

6.1 Perspectives of the Participants on the Responsibilities of a Household Head

In a changing world, the traditional affiliation of household headship with males has been constantly challenged. The breadwinner role of males that defines the headship of the households have been questioned as discussed in Chapter One. During the FGDs, KI-s and reflection meetings, participants asserted that some men and women equally contribute to the household income and the responsibilities in many families. Hence, associating household headship with only economic role and only with men is not justifiable. A similar perspective was endorsed by KIs from the districts of Mullaitivu and Jaffna respectively:

"I know most of the families can be considered as WHHs because their husbands do not either economically contribute or take up any of the responsibilities. The male members are also looked after by the female members of the households and they are dependents for their day-to-day expenses"

KI, Mullaitivu District

"How can these males be considered as responsible family leaders? In some families, even though the male members do contribute economically, they are not prepared to take any risky decisions on behalf of their families"

KI Participant, Jaffna District

These claims endorse the fact that household headship is no longer tied neither to men nor to the economic contributions alone. The following figure 6.1 shows the responsibilities of household heads, according to the informants.

Figure 6.1: Opinion on the responsibilities of the household head

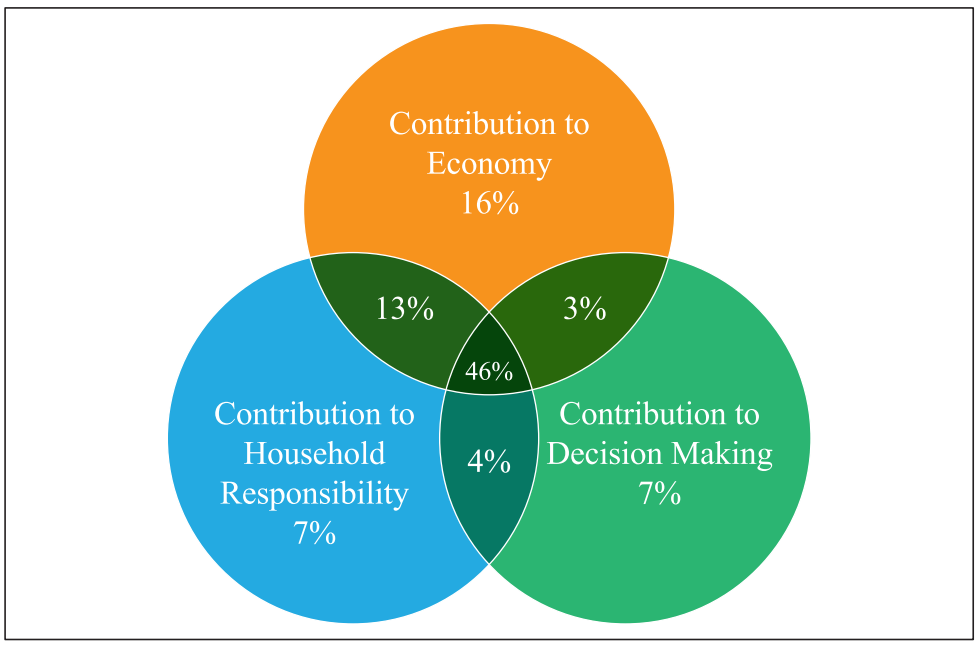


Figure 6.1 describes the responsibilities of the household head in the respondent family. On asking about the respondents' opinion on the responsibilities of a household head, the majority (46%) said that they should contribute to the economy, decision making and household responsibilities.

6.2 Contribution of Male Members to Household Income

Figure 6.2: Contribution of male members to household income

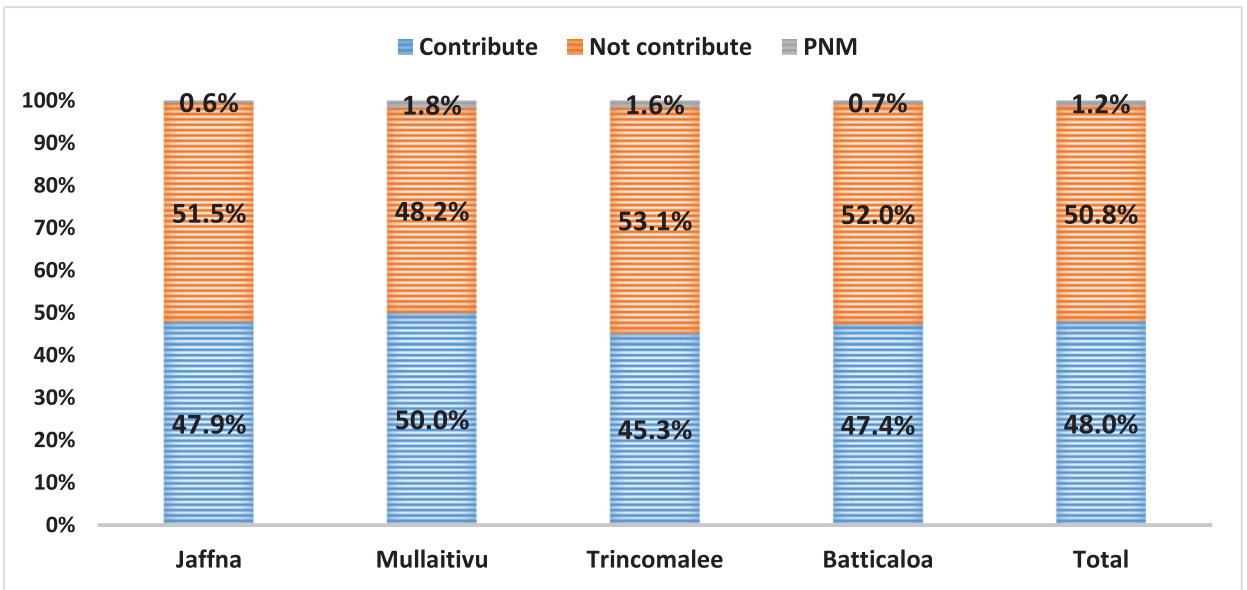


Figure 6.2 indicates the contribution of male members to the household income in the respondents' families. Of the 661 respondents who have male members in their households, the majority (51%) said that males do not contribute to their household income, whereas nearly half (48%) respondents have their male members contributing to their family income. Of those who don't have contributions from their male members, Trincomalee recorded high numbers with 53%, whereas Jaffna and Batticaloa Districts recorded 52% each. In Mullaitivu 48% WHHs mentioned that male members of their households do not contribute to their household income.

"Most of us do not have husbands or breadwinners in our families. We lost husbands and male members during the war. We became widows and hapless."

FGD Participant, Mullaitivu District

"Even though the male members are with us, most of them do not contribute economically or are supportive in decision making. I know there are more than three kids in some families and the father will be a different person for each child. Every child has a different father in one family. Most of the men are not economically productive but they are mentioned as family leaders in their family cards. Men of WHHs have extra marital affairs or more than one family. In Kilinochchi I have noticed that one male person keeps more than three wives. He can't help the whole family regularly but the authorities consider that these women have their husbands with them and they do not consider those families for any support"

KI - Participant, Kilinochchi District

The male partners of the WHHs who are not financially supportive or productive are also considered as responsible family leaders by the authorities and the legal guardianship of the family is still with the male partners in many families. In reality, however, the male partners are alcoholics or unemployed and create more challenges to their families. The males claim the woman's earnings for themselves and spend for their own needs. In such cases the potential contribution of the woman and her headship is overshadowed by the presence of men.

6.3 Community Acceptance of Household Headship

Figure 6.3: Acceptance of women's headship by the community

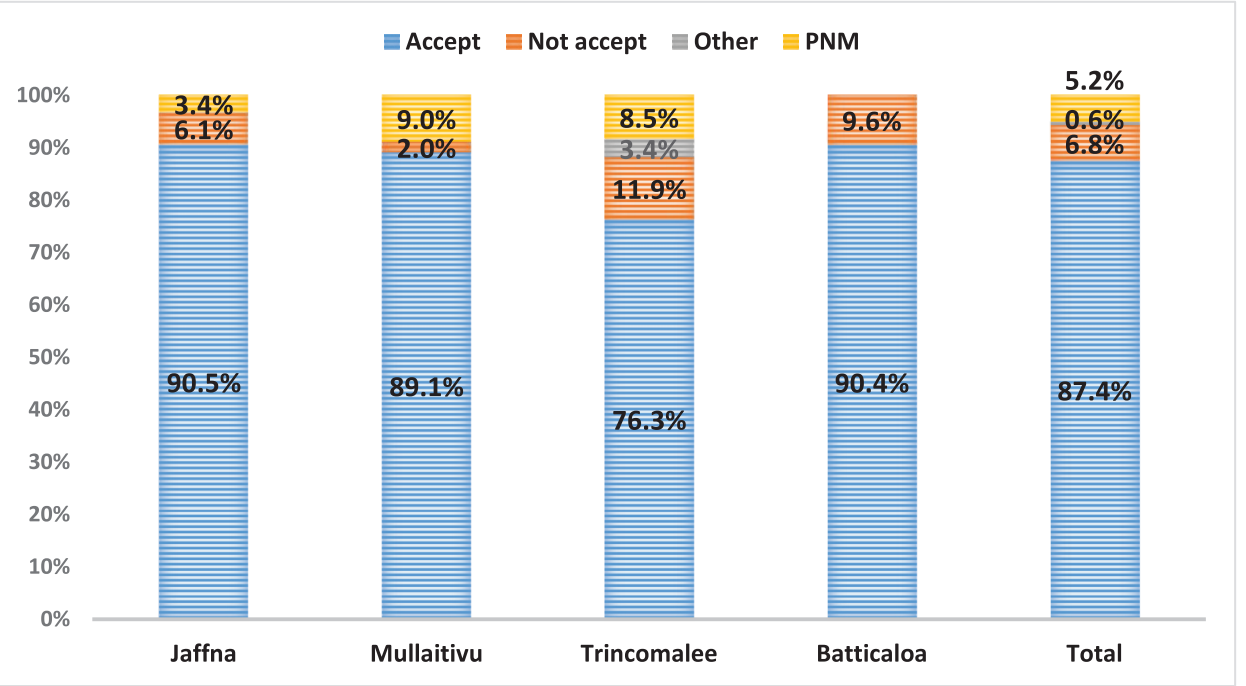


Figure 6.3 presents the acceptance of headships of the women heads by the community, according to the responses of the 633 respondents who identified themselves as the Women Head of Household. Nearly the vast majority (87%) of the respondents think that their headships are accepted by the community, whereas the least number (7%) of the respondents think that their headships are not accepted. In Batticaloa and Jaffna Districts, an overwhelming majority (more than 90%) think that their headships are accepted by the community, whereas in Trincomalee District, according to the respondents, the acceptance of their headship is comparatively lower than other Districts. Religion and ethnicity play a main role in the context of accepting the WHHs.

> *"Whether a woman or a man or a girl or a boy, who is under those circumstances in a particular household, if that person has to take the responsibility of being the head, society and the government have to accept it"*
>
> KI, An Activist, Kandy District

In the view of the KI, Sri Lanka has been witnessing the evolving categories of WHHs since the early 1970s. Therefore, the categorization of women as WHHs is not new and not necessary. She insisted that it should be considered as a normal social phenomena. An interesting point regarding the WHHs was expressed from Eastern Sri Lanka:

> *"There is no such term as Women Heads of Households. If only women are there, then we can accept that it is a household headed by women. When we are using the term Women Heads of Households, we need to think, are we using the term Men Heads of Households? The definition I would like to propose is ``Men alone heading households, Women alone heading households or households headed by both men and women."*
>
> KI, An Activist, Kandy District

"Getting acceptance of the community members for the WHHs would be challenging. The community would always consider them as inferior. They think a family would not be complete if there are no male leaders there"

KI Participant, Kilinochchi District

The KIs interviewed come from two different ethnic, social, cultural and geographic backgrounds. The contexts where they live might have influenced their views.

Another participant mentioned:

"WHHs try their best to fulfil the needs of the family members amid many challenges. Household headship is something new to them"

KI Participant, Jaffna District

A similar concern was raised:

"Our neighbourhood people do not consider us as family leaders but we do not need that. They cannot do whatever we do with our limitations. We are better than many of the male headed households in many ways"

FGD Participant, Jaffna District

The WHHs opined that though they lead their families amidst many challenges their headship is not appreciated by their neighbours. Sometimes, their neighbours and relatives perceive their success with a suspicious mind. However, some families believe in their ability and they think that they are self-made and they do not expect others' recognition. In many instances they acknowledge that the neighbours and relatives are jealous of their achievements and refuse to recognize them. They believe that the family leadership is relative and men-headed households also have lots of issues and they also fail in different domains of their life.

7 Vulnerabilities and Precarities

The WHHs are diversely represented and are differently positioned in the communities where they live. They are in different vulnerable and precarious situations.[27] In our research we found that the WHHs are caught up with different vulnerabilities and precarities, which could be identified as constraints to lead a decent life in their societies. In the section below, we discuss some of the vulnerable and precarious situations in which the WHHs are living their lives in. We noticed that the precarious situations in which these women live are dynamic, which are also contributing to the formation of new types of WHHs. It is also important to note that as vulnerabilities WHHs face are complex and intertwined with everyday life in various spheres, in this report, certain aspects of vulnerabilities are discussed in other chapters too.

7.1 Early Marriages and Under Aged Marriages

The age of marriage for girls in the Muslim community has been a controversial topic in Sri Lanka from rights, religious, historical and social change perspectives[28] (Schenk and Hasbullah 2021). Early marriages are linked to poverty, lower educational levels, war and cultural practices in the study districts. Some girls were married off at a younger age when their parents couldn't look after them or to prevent conscription by armed groups. The consequences of early and under age marriages on education, health, power, agency and wellbeing at both household and community levels, makes them vulnerable in society. Figure 7.1 shows total and district-based differences in age at marriage among the married respondents.

According to research participants religion plays a major role along with economic factors in underage marriages. Although the trend regarding early marriages and under age marriages have been declining according to the participants, since the end of the war, it varies by district as noted in the above table. Women mentioned that the contributions made by NGO and CSOs through awareness programmes are important in the reduction of underage marriages. Many families have understood the value of educating their daughters and the importance of getting a government job. Even though they face economic hardship, mothers are attempting to educate their daughters. During the FGDs it was mentioned that only the families that had government servants had three meals a day during the pandemic. By educating their daughters they want to ensure a good future for their children as well as them.

[27] Rigg et.al (2016) differentiates between vulnerabilities and precarity. Accordingly, vulnerability (low caste, class, and identity) is identified as inherited (old) and precarity (exposed to market changes, lack of credits, changing government policies) is identified as (new) produced.

[28] Though this is not the first time, the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (MMDA), made headlines by questioning the age at marriage, polygamy and absent of the need for brides consent.

Figure 7.1: Age at marriage

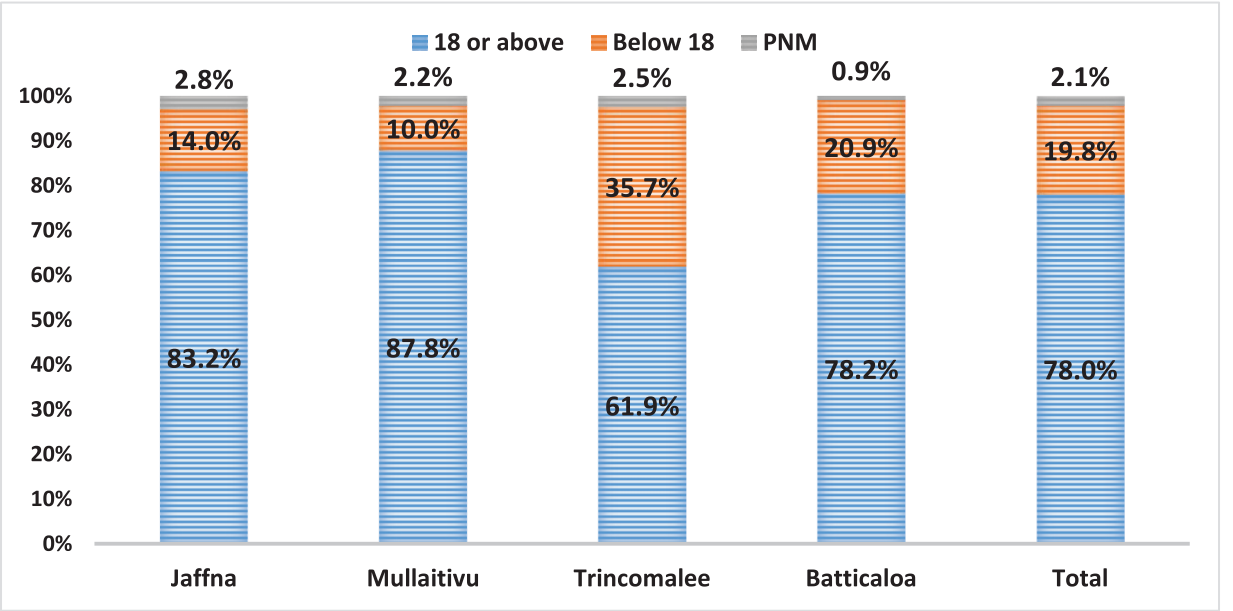


Figure 7.1 describes age at marriage. Early and underage marriages are creating and sustaining social issues. The majority (78%) married at 18 or above, whereas one fifth (20%) of the respondents had early marriages in their lives. Comparatively Trincomalee district had the highest percentage of underage marriages.

However, this is not unique across different ethnicities. Through information gained from the KIs, it was revealed that, there is a continuing trend of early marriage in the district of Trincomalee among the Muslim community. It was also noted that divorce rates are high among those who married at early ages.

7.1.1 Reasons for Under Aged Marriage

Most of the WHHs we interviewed had faced the direct impacts of the war. Economic hardships of their parents have forced them to marry early. Most of them could not continue their studies. It is also important to note that some of them have married at early ages to avoid forceful recruitment during the war. For young girls when they are dropped out from schools or once they leave, marriage arrangements are inevitable. According to follow up an interview with an FGD participant from Trincomalee child marriages still continue for economic reasons:

> *"I know a WHH from my neighbouring village wants to go to Kuwait. But she had five children under the age of 17 and all of them were schooling. As her mother was feeble and there is no one to look after the children, she decided to arrange marriage for her elder daughter who was just 17 and handed over the family responsibility her daughter and son-in-law"*
>
> FGD Participant, Trincomalee District

Figure 7.2: Reasons for early marriage of the respondents

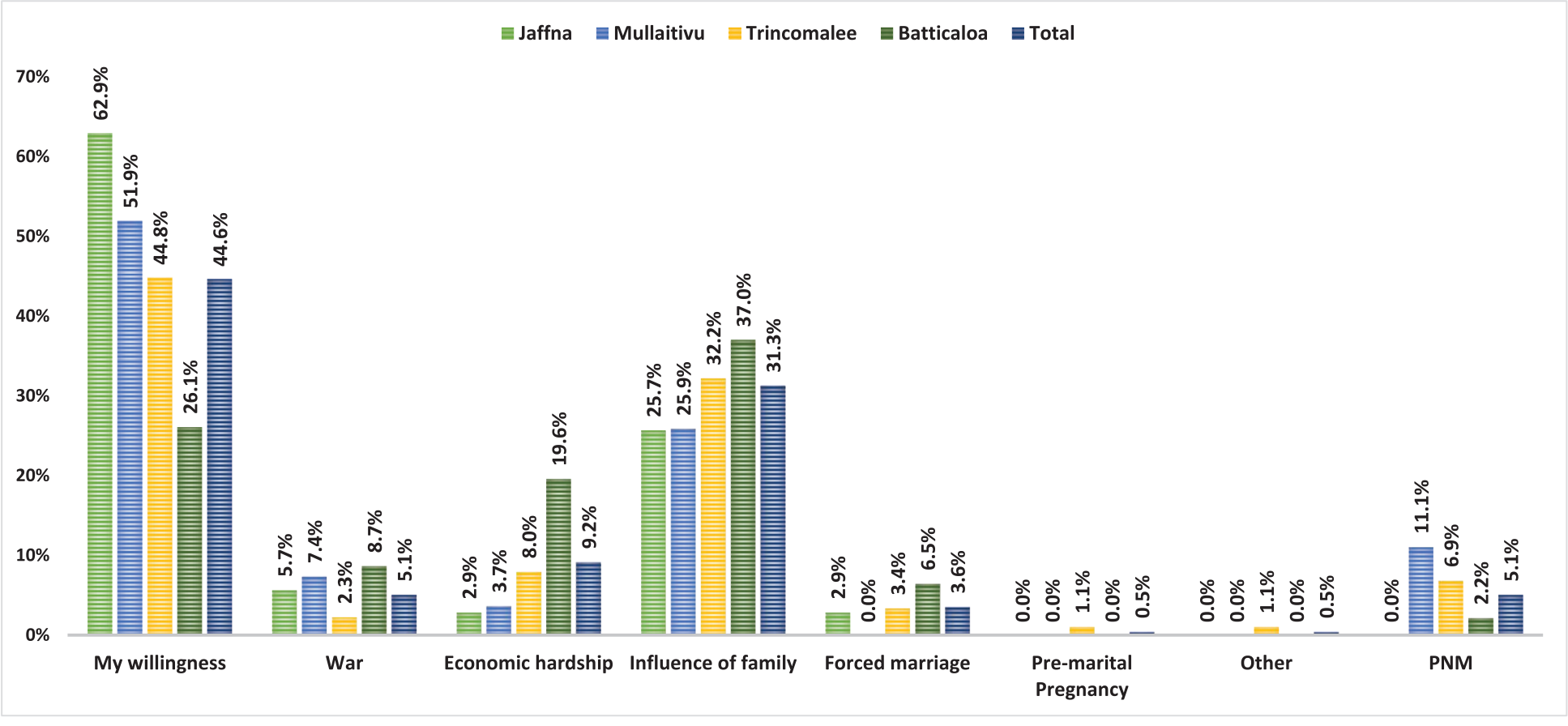


Figure 7.2 presents the reasons for early marriage of the respondents. Of the total 195 respondents, who had early marriages below the age of 18, 45% had their marriage on their own volition, whereas less than one third (31%) had their marriages by the influence of their respective families. Significantly, for 9% and 5%, economic hardships and war were the major reasons for their early marriages. Four percent of the early marriages were forced marriages and one of the respondents married due to premarital pregnancy. Of those, who had early marriage at their own consent, and of those, who had early marriage due to the influence of their families, Trincomalee District recorded high numbers with 45% and 46% respectively. It is important to note that Trincomalee had the highest number of underage marriages.

A government officer, who is currently serving as the GS, shared his experience in working in one of the remote villages in Verugal, in Trincomalee. He particularly raised the issues related to sexual exploitation, early and under age marriages and school dropouts in the area. He expressed his concerns over the caste based discrimination too:

> *"In one of the areas I served, the coastal Vedda community was living. They are living in about 7-8 GN divisions. They are marginalized due to their caste identity. In this community girls are marrying at very early ages, mostly immediately after they attain puberty. They are not physically or mentally ready for a family life. These children stop their education at very early ages"*
>
> KI, Government Officer, Trincomalee District

The GS raised his concerns over the issues of poverty, alcoholism and the lack of basic facilities in homes to protect a girl child that lead to under age marriages. Some girls are forced to marry early because of the aforementioned situations. The community does not have a regular income. Their employment is seasonal. They go to the forest during one season to collect honey, and during the next season they go fishing and during the off season in fishing, they engage in agriculture. According to the view of the GS, the security of the girls is one of the reasons for under age marriage. Nearly 31% among the respondents in our study had to marry because of the influence of their parents. Some parents force their daughters to marry at early ages to ease the economic burden on them and the problems of looking after their teenage daughters when parents go to work.

> *You know, but when it comes to marriage of a child, it has to be 18 years old. Don't rob the child, child's childhood……..the mother (married child) should have her childhood; she should have education. That kind of a social system Sri Lanka has to develop. And if new research can come with that, that is a big difference. And I really hope that it will not increase the numbers at all. It has to decrease.*
>
> KI, an Activist, Kilinochchi District

The above quoted activist, raised her concerns over the lack of commitment from the government, in addressing the issues of children who are married before turning 18 of age. She also raised her concerns over children who are raped and who become pregnant. Due to stigma, such cases do not come out. Significantly nearly 20% of the respondents were below 18 years at the time they were married showing the prevalence of underage marriage. The reasons set out by them include the above factors (Figure 7.2), and significant numbers (05%) as PNMs. Although they married before 18 years of age, most of the women respondents do not support early marriage.

In one of the reflection meetings, it was revealed that awareness programmes conducted by NGOs, CSOs, government offices and access to media have considerable impacts on increased age at marriage.

7.2 Poverty: Loan & Debt

Different sources of income are used by the 408 respondents with inadequate income, to manage their families (*See Appendix D.7*). A majority (60%) of the respondents use *Samurdhi* benefits to manage their families, whereas 41% use relatives' help to manage their families. Pawning jewellery (13%), receiving bank loans (12%), obtaining help from neighbours (11%) and friends (11 %) and getting public monthly allowance (11%) are the other sources for the respondents to manage when their income is inadequate. Nearly one third of the respondents from Jaffna district and 27 respondents each from Mullaitivu and Batticaloa districts respectively are from those who receive *Samurdhi* benefits to manage their families at the situation of income inadequacy.

> *"As I know many WHHs faced problems due to the high interest rate paid for the micro credit. They take loans without knowing the gravity and even the interest rate. This is a crucial issue and should be dealt with. We can't control the Micro Finance Institutions but WHHs are not vigilant when they obtain loans from them"*
>
> KI Participant, Jaffna District

> *"Lack of income and lack of livelihood opportunities appeared to be the main challenges for these families. The WHHs are unable to manage their day-to-day expenses due to lack of income. I know WHHs manage their daily expenses with the Samurdhi aid and public monthly allowances. These are not sufficient but help to manage. Some find support from Diaspora and NGO"*
>
> KI Participant, Kilinochchi District

The primary issue identified by the majority of respondents was the lack of income. Respondents strongly believed that they face a slew of additional challenges as a result of their lack of income, either directly or indirectly. Their earnings were insufficient to meet their basic needs. The likelihood of rapidly increasing multifaceted needs, as well as frequently imposed price hikes on essential commodities and services, were common challenges that had a significant impact on their families. Many other problems stemmed from a lack of funds. The majority of those who took part in the labour market worked in seasonal or menial jobs. Finding consistent opportunities was impossible because the summer cultivation was hampered by infrequent irrigation and heavy rain. Respondents were afraid of becoming indebted to people and banks. Furthermore, because of the existing dowry system and unsafe conditions, participants with female children were concerned about their future, safety, and marriage life.

WHHs are anxious when they borrow money from others to meet their basic needs. It was difficult for them to be successful in income-generating activities, and they felt their best alternative was to borrow money or obtain loans through micro-finance schemes. It also poses the question of how many of these WHH are eligible for loans from licensed banks and institutions. WHH progress is hampered by this.

7.2.1 Financial assistance received

Figure 7.3: Financial assistance received by the respondents

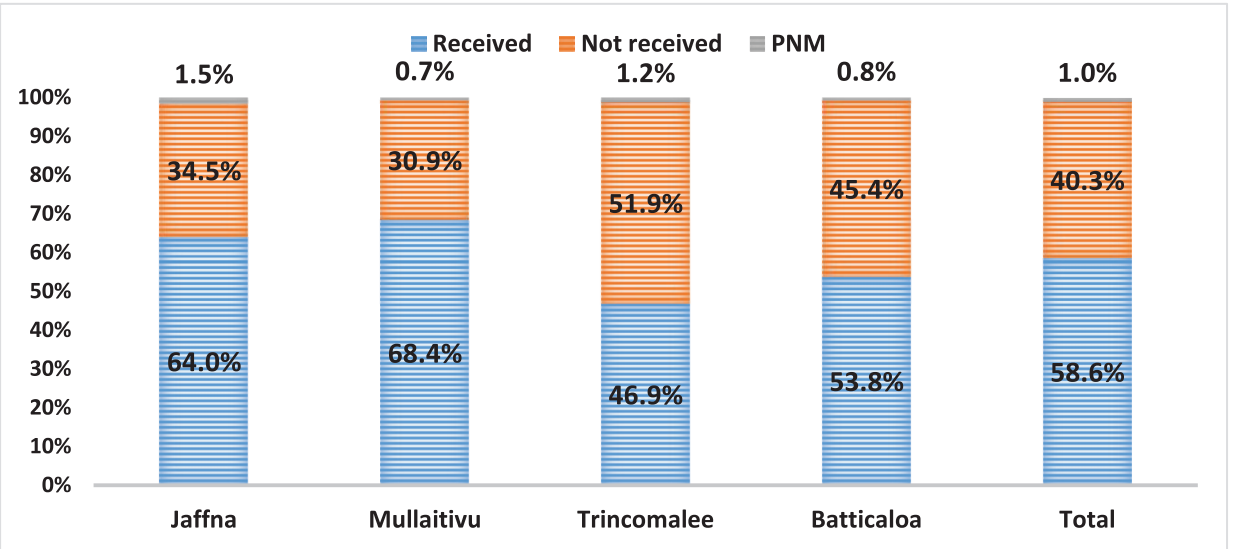


Figure 7.3 presents information about the financial assistance received by the respondents. A majority (59%) of the respondents including 68% from Mullaitivu district and 64% from Jaffna district expressed receiving financial assistance, whereas 40% expressed not receiving financial assistance. Among those who don't receive financial assistance, 51% are from Trincomalee district and 45% are from Batticaloa district. A smaller percentage preferred not to answer.

> *"I know Tamil Diaspora families and organizations have adopted some WHHs and support them. There are many families who receive support from their relatives, friends and family members from abroad. Some religious institutions also extend their support to these women. Local CBOs also supported the WHHs during the lockdowns"*
>
> KI Participant, Jaffna District

> *"WHHs have formed organizations on their own and obtain support from different sources and share the resources among them and they mutually support each other…"*
>
> KI Participant, Mullaitivu District

To deal with their survival challenges participants sought formal channels for assistance. These include receiving assistance from government and non-government agencies as well. The interviews frequently focused on various programmes implemented to assist affected women. 11% of the respondents received PAMA of LKR. 500 per month. However, they acknowledged that it was not worth the time and effort (money, loss of income for the day, long travel etc.) it took for them to collect this money as the value was so minimal. However, they also did prefer to renew the PAMA card's validity period and obtain this assistance on a regular basis.

It is important to notice that some women who have no relatives' support have achieved a respectable social position through their dedication and hard work, with little help from NGOs.

7.2.2 Loans: Current Situation

Figure 7.4: Respondents who have loans to pay back

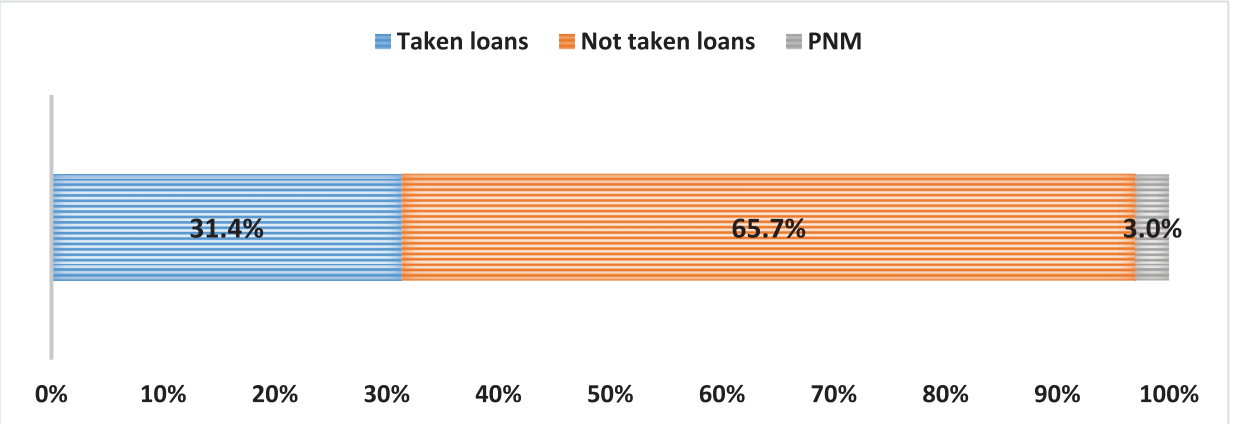
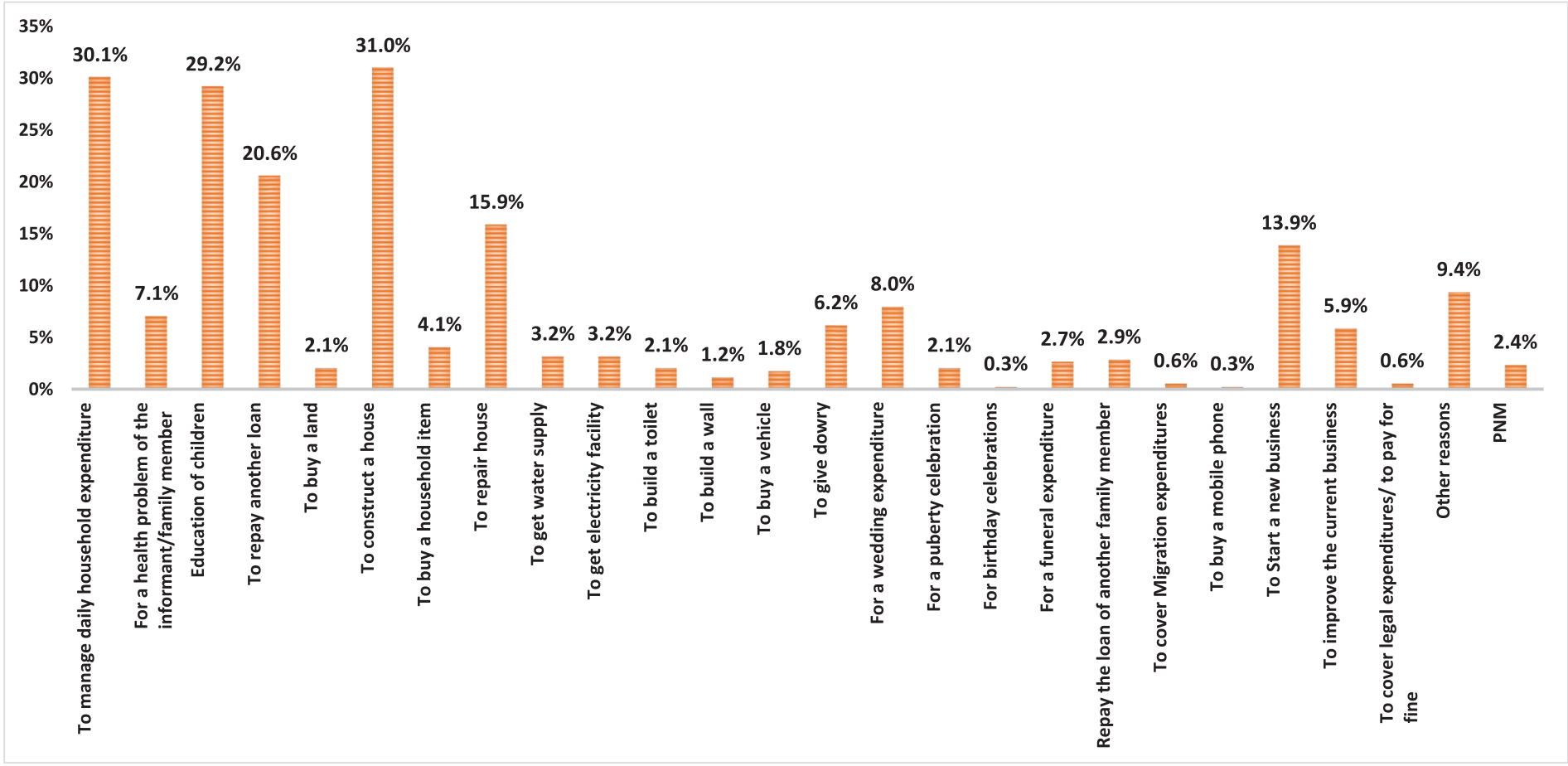


Figure 7.4 depicts the loan taking ability of the respondents. A two third majority of the respondents (66%) have not obtained a loan, whereas less than one third (31%) obtained a loan. Of those who obtained a loan, 40% are from Mullaitivu district, whereas nearly one fourth (24%) are from Jaffna district and 23% and 17% from Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts.

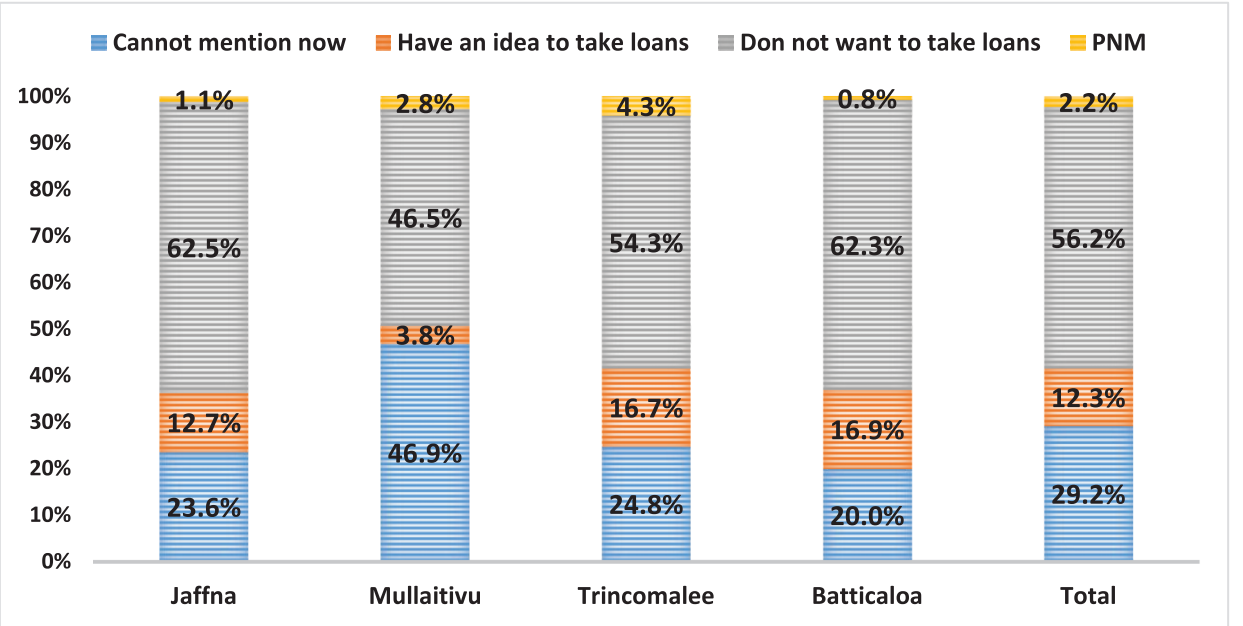
Figure 7.5: Purpose of loan taken



The respondents put forward various reasons for which loans were taken by them in the past. Nearly one third (31%) obtained a loan for constructing a house, of them, the majority (54%) are from Mullaitivu district. 30% received loans to meet the household expenditure, of them, 31% and 28% are from Mullaitivu and Batticaloa districts. Education of the children has been the reason for 29% of the respondents' reason for taking a loan, whereas more than one fifth (21%) of the respondents had obtained a loan to repay another loan. Another one fifth (20%) of the respondents have taken loan for business purposes, 19% of the respondents have taken loans for weddings, puberty ceremonies, birthday celebrations, dowry and funeral expenses of the family members. Significantly, less than a percent of the respondents, all of whom are from Mullaitivu district, obtained a loan for migrating to another country.

7.2.3 Intention to Take Loans in the Future

Figure 7.6: Intention to take loans in the future



From figure 7.6, it is learnt that a majority (56%) of the respondents answered "no" to the question on intention of taking a loan in the future, whereas 29% said that they "cannot mention now" and 12% responded "yes". Among the respondents who are willing to take loans in future, most of them intend to take loans for their education and occupation (*See Appendix D.8*). 44% including 62% from Batticaloa district who expressed that they would obtain a loan to either start a new business or expand the existing business, whereas 27% including 47% from Batticaloa district expressed to obtain loan in the future for their children's education. 38% altogether expressed taking a loan to either construct or repair their house in the future. There were 19%, 11% and 8% who expressed taking a loan for a wedding, as dowry and for repaying other loans respectively. There were less than 20% who totally expressed taking out loans for different reasons such as building walls, establishing electricity supply, buying vehicles, building toilets, etc. in the future.

7.3 COVID-19 Pandemic

In addition to deaths and infections, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in changing everyday life of ordinary people. It has had devastating impacts on WHHs and has led to the formation of new WHHs as well. The socio economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has indiscriminately affected the WHHs who are already trapped in poverty. The lockdown and curfews imposed by the government has restricted the mobility of the WHH. Those who were responsible for maintaining the household chores and engaged in income earning activities were faced with a heavier burden. Particularly as the pandemic limited support by other community women.

As a result of COVID-19 control measures, lockdowns across the country have led many businesses to shut down or move to online work. The layoff measures taken by employers resulted in high unemployment which have not been measured adequately yet for both men and women. The informal sector job losses go unnoticed or undocumented. Closure of schools demanded more involvement from women to engage in care work and forced many women to adjust or leave their paid work. The disruption to work and family have already resulted in deepening pre-existing inequalities. However, the patriarchal norms have not altered even in pandemic. Those who were employed in precarious employment even before the pandemic became the first victims of the economic fall out of the pandemic, resulting in family breakups too.

Although the government provided financial support to some affected people, as it did not have a clear policy based decision on the definition of WHHs, many women were left out in programmes implemented by the government. One of the government servants interviewed mentioned the arbitrary method of classifying WHHs, posing a huge challenge to them too. The lack of an inclusive definition has led to the generalization of the concept and led to the exclusion of marginalized and vulnerable categories. Financial and material benefits were granted for 10[29] categories of people, including the low income and vulnerable families and individuals. However, WHHs did not receive adequate attention.

COVID-19 pandemic impacted the livelihoods of many WHHs. In Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Mullaitivu districts, the loss of livelihood has forced many WHHs and their school going children to resort to illicit liquor production and sale. WHHs alone or jointly work in illicit liquor production while the children are used for selling liquor. Serious concerns were raised during the reflection meetings about this emerging socio economic issue.

> *"If WHHs find making kasippu (moonshine) more profitable, they will continue the business. More men will become addicted to kasippu. In our villages, young people are addicted to drugs, if more kasippu is coming to the village for cheap prices, it will create big problems in our village"*
>
> FGD Participant, Trincomalee District

> *"In our area, all the rotten fruits from fruit stalls are bought by illicit liquor producers. The business started to boost during the pandemic. We have informed the GS and other responsible people to take actions to close such businesses"*
>
> FGD Participant, Batticaloa District

During the pandemic, liquor and wine shops in the Island were closed. Although production of illicit liquor is not new in the country, the distribution of illicit liquor was curtailed by lockdowns, curfews and mobility restrictions during the pandemic. Demand for illegal liquor increased, resulting in price increase too. The regular price for such a product, which was around LKR 350, went up to LKR 1000-2000. As a consequence, people started to brew liquor in their homes, using the family labour or with the help of neighbour resulting in multiple production sites for illicit liquor. The WHHs, who lost their income earning opportunities, gradually joined the industry. Some women, whose husbands lost their jobs, found working in the illicit liquor industry provides them a reasonable amount of daily income. In the absence of any viable livelihood options or lack of or no government support for adequate recovery, many men too joined the illegal liquor production.

Participants in the reflection meeting expressed that they are worried about the social issues relating to illicit liquor brewing (drug dependency, SGBV), particularly, their concern about the future of school going children from such families and in those localities. Children who were left out from online schooling due to poverty and, spend their day time at home or in the streets. However, this would be sometimes perceived as the only viable option for vulnerable women who have taken loans or intend to take loans to meet basic needs. As those children were left out from online schooling, due to poverty (or lack of equipment to participate in online learning), poor signals, lack of online teaching facilities for teachers, most of them spent their day time at home or in the streets. These children are easily used by the liquor producers to sell illicit liquor. It is pertinent to note here that if these children are not properly guided and protected, when normal situations resume after the pandemic, there may be an increase in school dropout rates.

[29] https://www.president.gov.lk/more-concessions-to-public-in-the-face-of-covid-19-outbreak/ (Accessed 03.11.2021)

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, in Trincomalee district, places selling alcohol have increased. As a result domestic violence has also increased. Although we try to minimize this, we cannot do anything, such places are increasing. Through Viluthu we are working in the areas of women's empowerment, protection from domestic violence and right to language (when reporting cases). Although we have informed these matters to the relevant government authorities, so far no proper actions were taken. We all are speaking in Tamil here. But no complaints are written in Tamil. Domestic violence is increasing day by day…."

FGD- Amara Forum member Trincomalee District

Domestic violence and alcohol consumption are closely related. During the pandemic it has been reported elsewhere that there is a sharp increase in domestic violence and abuse. According to the participants, the study districts are not exceptional. Many women find it difficult to reach the proper channels to lodge complaints. During the pandemic they could not go out. Even if they go out, as mentioned above the formal ways of making complaints are not available due to language barriers.

During the reflection meetings, Amara Forum and Samasam women mentioned how they organized some relief work for WHHs within their capacity. It was also noted that WHHs, who are not from Amara Forum or Samasam, have helped their neighbours. The WHHs during the reflection meetings valued the social support system that still exists in their communities and how they become active during a crisis situation.

7.4 Sexual Harassment

Neighbours, public servants, politicians, employment agencies and blood/close relatives were frequently accused of harassment and nuisance. Men were accused of coerced sex, threatening and manipulating women if they do not comply with them. WHHs and their households were reluctant to go to the police or approach activists due to fear of reprisal. Their state of dependency and vulnerability prevented them from talking about this with others. They were afraid of aggravating the existing negative condition.

"Neighbours and relatives are curious to know about our personal lives and activities. We, therefore, experience unnecessary interference. The neighbours were vigilant to watch as to who is coming to meet us, where we go, and what we do. Our children are also frequently subjected to interrogation."

FGD Participant, Jaffna District

The respondents from different districts acknowledge that WHH and young girls have faced sexual harassment while using mobile phones. Given the nature of the dependency of WHH to the social welfare system and vulnerability their numbers are shared with and without their consent to men who sexually harass them through the phone resulting in repetitive abuse and psychological harm. Even though the abuse and problem is so prevalent, the women and girls do not have sufficient coping or protective mechanisms provided by the State or other agencies to address this. This has a huge negative impact on the lives of WHH. In some instances children were lured and subjected to sexual abuse. Male neighbours, armed personnel and political supporters managed to get the women's/girls' mobile numbers and it resulted in different challenges.

7.5 Impacts of War on WHHS

Impacts of war still continue to unfold in the lives of many WHHs. WHHs regardless of their ethnicity and religion suffered and continue to suffer from the legacies of war. Although comparatively a smaller proportion of female combatants were directly involved in the war, most women were impacted indirectly as they had to face harsh realities of war and post-war situations. Our data shows that 2% of the respondents identified themselves as ex-combatants, of them, 44% are from Jaffna, whereas 28% and 22% are from Mullaitivu and Batticaloa districts respectively. Less than a percent of the respondents expressed being part of the armed forces, Police and Civil Defence Force.

7.5.1 Victims of War

Figure 7.7: Victims of war

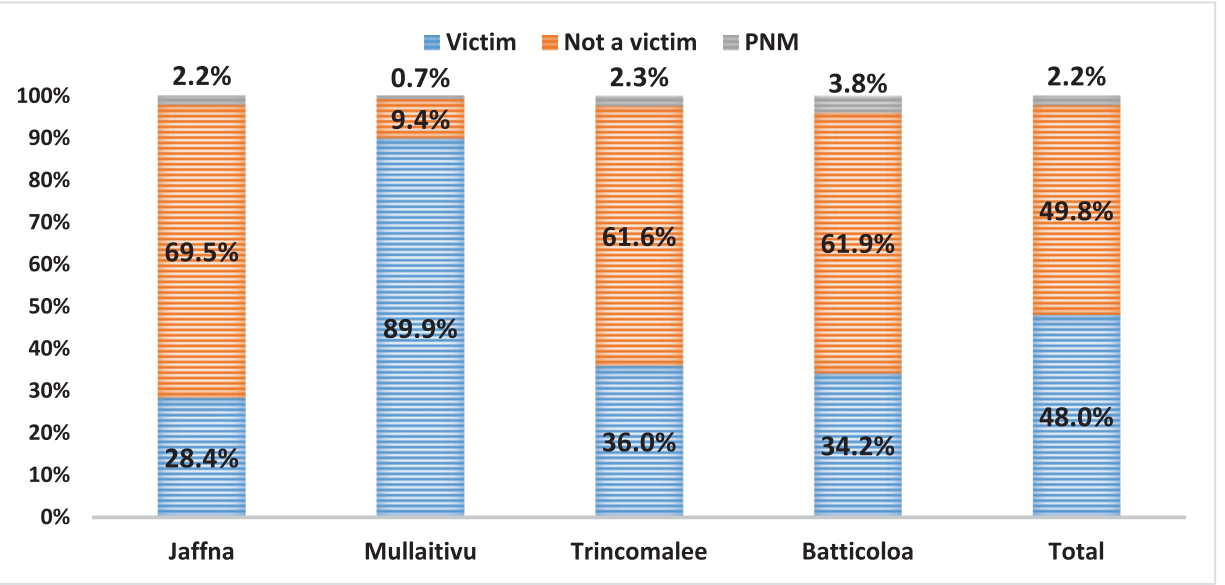


Figure 7.7 assesses whether the respondents were war victims or were affected directly by the war in terms of disability, injury, displacement, status as ex-combatant, loss of family, loss of property. Nearly a half (48%) of the respondents were either affected by war or a war-victim, of whom, 90% of the respondents are from Mullaitivu District. Mullaitivu district was in the frontline of the war. During the last stages of the war in 2009, a large number of casualties were reported from Mullaitivu.

7.5.2 Disabilities Due to the War

Among our war impacted informants, 1% of WHHs have disabilities related to war, while 81% mentioned that their disabilities are not directly related to war. Another 3.50 % of WHHs did not prefer to answer that question.

Figure 7.8: Physical disabilities related to war

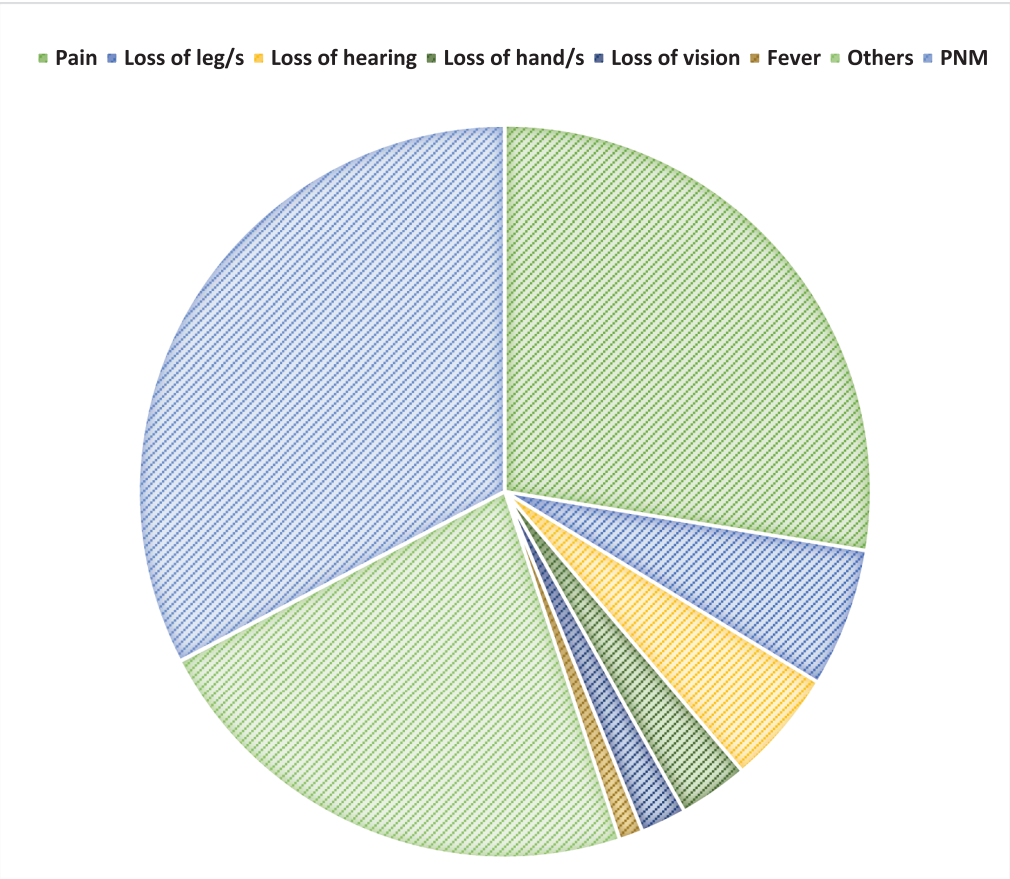


Figure 7.8 describes physical disabilities related to war *(See Appendix D.9 for more details).* Majority of the respondents prefer not to mention the disabilities that they are experiencing. One of the informants, who lost her leg as an ex-combatant, was contacted through a field researcher. She did not initially show interest for a follow up phone interview. However, she agreed to tell her story, with a request to anonymize her village and the name. She said:

> *"I was asked by my brother to join the iyakkam (LTTE) in 2003. I stopped schooling when I was in grade 7. I still remember the day that I lost my right leg.....it was in the middle of the night, we were rounded up by the military. I could hear the screaming voices of our team. I know that I will not be able to stand up. My right leg was bleeding, I could not shout though I was in pain. The following day, I was able to reach our camp. It was too late, my leg had to be amputated. Since that day, I have had nightmares....it is a long story. I married an ex-combatant who too had lost his leg. He passed away in a road accident. I have a son, who is in grade seven. My unmarried sister who is 43 years old, also lives with me. Now I am working in a garment factory. We do not get any support from the government except Samurdhi."*
>
> An Ex-Combatant, Location not disclosed

The various forms of visible and invisible disabilities[30] make the war affected WHHs more vulnerable. There are no appropriate support systems for disabled ex-combatants. Unlike the government forces, the ex-

[30] The physical disability experienced by the WHH may be visible while others are invisible. Embedded shrapnel/bullets or metal plates, clips that are inserted during surgery may not be visible. During the reflection meeting, it was reported that the invisibility

combatants do not receive any regular support. Lack of opportunities for employment in their villages have pushed them to struggle to make ends meet. Most of the ex-combatants did not have proper education which has put them in a disadvantaged position in the labour market where they are exploited. Being ex-combatants and WHHs, is very challenging in making their economic survival. Such WHHs are worried about their disability as they are perceived socially as open evidence to show that they have participated in the war. Even after going through rehabilitation, they find it difficult to get jobs locally due to negative perceptions existing in their societies. Further as most of them are still under surveillance, their opportunities for accessing economic opportunities become very slim. It was revealed during the reflection meetings and FGDs, that some of the disabilities are not recognized by the government officers, as they do not fall within their official categorization. Further some disabilities are not visible. As mentioned above when the victims do not disclose their disabilities, they would not be included in any support programmes.

WHHs have been victims of the war in several ways. Displacement, loss of livelihoods, loss of different types of property, loss or injury of close family members, relatives and friends characterized their victimhood. Multiple displacement has been one of the important impacts of war that WHHs from all four districts had to encounter. As discussed elsewhere in this report, displacement completely destroyed the socio economic fabrics of the community. Not all the displaced people are settled or resettled in their places of origin. The recovery process related to livelihoods has been haphazard and highly politicized leaving the most affected groups out, including the WHHs. Further, the war affected WHHs come from remote and marginalized villages in the country. At the end of the war, the ex-combatants who were directly involved in the war, went back to their villages, which were already caught up in the spiral of poverty. Those villages could not provide them any employment opportunities. The ex-combatant in the above narrative, lamented:

> *"We went back to our villages as burdens for our families. Our families were already poor. Our village had a large number of disabled and disappeared people. Many died during the last stages of the war. There are a lot of war widows in our village.*
>
> *Our village is an agricultural village. For the disabled people like us there were no jobs."*
>
> An Ex-Combatant, Location not disclosed

makes the WHH excluded in some beneficiary programmes. Although the government of Sri Lanka has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2016, incorporating this in the law is limited.

Table 7.1: Types of impacts

War Impacts	%age affected
Displacement	**64.0%**
Loss of livelihoods	**62.0%**
Loss of house	**59.7%**
Loss of other properties	**44.5%**
Close family member was / members were killed	**42.6%**
Loss of relatives	**40.7%**
Close family member injured/ members injured	**26.6%**
Loss of friends	**26.0%**
Close family member/ members were made disappeared	**11.9%**
Close family member/ members were is in the prison	**1.3%**
Close family member/ members were raped	**0.2%**
Others	**2.7%**
PNM	**1.2%**

Table 7.1 lists out how the respondents were affected in the war or how they were victimized. The respondents have chosen multiple choices for this question. A majority of the respondents (64%) got displaced. There were 62%, 60% and 45% who experienced loss of livelihood, house and other property respectively. 43% of the respondents had their close family members killed in the war, whereas 41% experienced loss of relatives and 26% had loss of friends in the war. Significantly, 13% of the respondents had their close family members disappeared or prisoned. A respondent from Mullaitivu District had their close family member raped during the war. More than one third (35%) from Mullaitivu district are among those 69 respondents who had their family members disappeared or prisoned after the war. Pointedly, a majority (58%) from Mullaitivu are among the respondents who got displaced in the war.

The impact of war was not bearable for many villages. They could not cope up with the loss of lives and livelihoods. The recovery processes also did not benefit the victims. Many WHHs do not possess any legal documents of ownership to land or any other properties, as most of them were fleeing for life during the peak of the war. They lost their access to the main livelihood asset, land. The disabled WHHs are the most vulnerable in their villages. They struggle just to survive every day.

The killing or death of close family members, relatives and friends were also identified by the WHHs as impacts of war. These losses have not only contributed to the economic hardships, but also to the long-lasting psychosocial issues too. The issue of forced disappearance continues to dominate Sri Lanka's post war discourse. There are no official statistics on how many were forced to disappear or went missing during and after the war. Among the root causes leading to WHHs, disappearance is a contributing factor. It has implications for WHHs' everyday survival, their identities and implications on their children. They are still worried about the fate of their missing and loved ones. During a follow up interview with one of the WHHs said:

> *"We are not ready to accept the government document on disappearance….it is almost like the death certificate, we want justice…."*
>
> A WHH Participant, Mullaitivu District

The lack of government's efforts to handle the issues of forced disappearance has made many families desperate. It is a challenge to the reconciliation process and transitional justice of the country. The government is making attempts to close the cases related to disappearance by issuing a death certificate for the missing person. It is also accompanied by financial compensation. Majority of the WHHs refuse or are not willing to accept the death certificate, as they hope the missing person might return. Some WHHs have had family members in the prison since the end of the war.

7.5.3 Challenges Faced by Ex-Combatants

Figure 7.9: Status of challenges: ex-combatants in the community

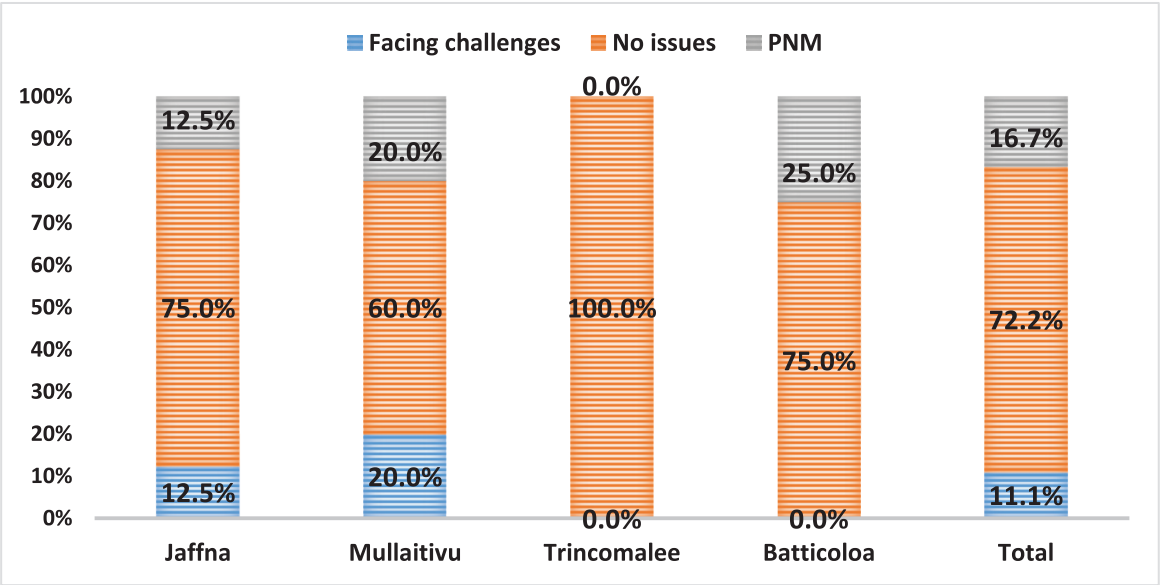


Figure 7.9 assesses whether the respondents with ex-combatant background face any challenges in the community. One fourth (25%) of the respondents in Jaffna, 40% of the respondents in Mullaitivu said they were facing challenges or prefer not to mention and one fourth of the respondents in Batticaloa (25%) prefer not to mention if they are facing challenges. Only one respondent in Trincomalee disclosed as being ex-combatants in this study.

The challenges faced by ex-combatants in the country have received attention among researchers though not with a specific focus on the WHHs. Although the majority of the respondents in our research said that they do not face any challenges, social integration remains a challenge for many. Whilst conducting this research, the research EPF stakeholders all acknowledged that there are huge challenges for ex-combatants to identify themselves and speak of their challenges given the high surveillance and exclusion they face in the present. The government's pressure on NGO/CSOs not to work on human rights issues and with certain communities, such as former combatants has diminished support for ex-combatants. Further, former combatants are being summoned by the Terrorist Investigation Department (TID), arbitrarily. This situation creates further stigma among the ex-combatants and puts them in desperate situations leading to isolation.

> *"It was difficult to face society, immediately after the war. I lived a life away from society. My mother was very supportive and a strength to me. Now she is not there with me. My siblings are living in other countries. I joined the iyakkam to serve my people. But they don't treat me well now. First of all I am widow and then I am a disabled….it is my fate"*
>
> KI- An Ex-Combatant, Location not disclosed

They are increasingly ignored by society. According to field researchers, although some WHHs have been successful in navigating social exclusion related challenges, many ex-combatants, especially the WHHs with disabilities are marginalized.

7.5.4 Government Sponsored Rehabilitation

Following the end of the armed conflict in 2009, the government at the time directed nearly 12,000 persons to what it termed as rehabilitation. This process was in violation of international human rights standards and entailed arbitrary detention. For instance, even those who were not combatants but had worked in civil institutions of the LTTE, as that was the only form of livelihood opportunity, were sent to rehabilitation centres run by the military for up to two years. Persons released from such rehabilitation centres continued to be subject to surveillance by intelligence agencies, which hampered their social reintegration as well as livelihood opportunities (Satkunanathan 2016). The following figure 7.10 shows the percentage of rehabilitated informants.

Figure 7.10: Receipt of rehabilitation from Government

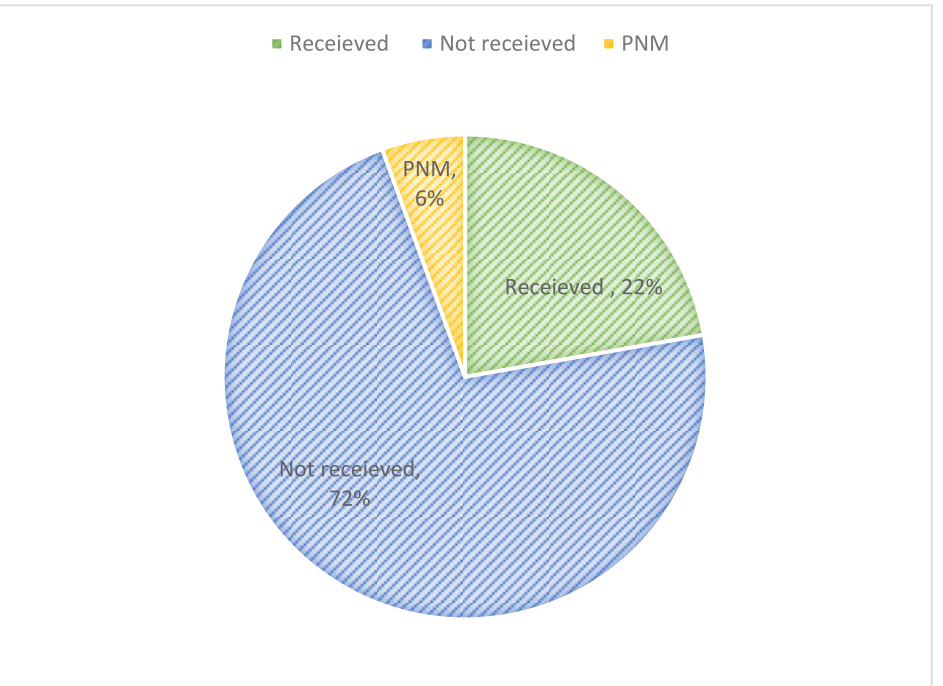


Figure 7.10 indicates receipt of rehabilitation from the government. Among the ex- combatants 72% claimed that they have not undergone rehabilitation. Most of the rehabilitated ex-combatants are from the Northern Province while many ex-combatants who were based in the Eastern province evaded rehabilitation after the LTTE broke into factions as a result of the *Karuna Amman's* defection.[31]

[31] Vinayagamoorthi Muraleetharan alias "Karuna Amman" was the former Eastern region leader of the LTTE. He broke away from the LTTE in 2004 and collaborated with the Sri Lankan government.

Figure 7.11: Thoughts of participants on rehabilitation programme

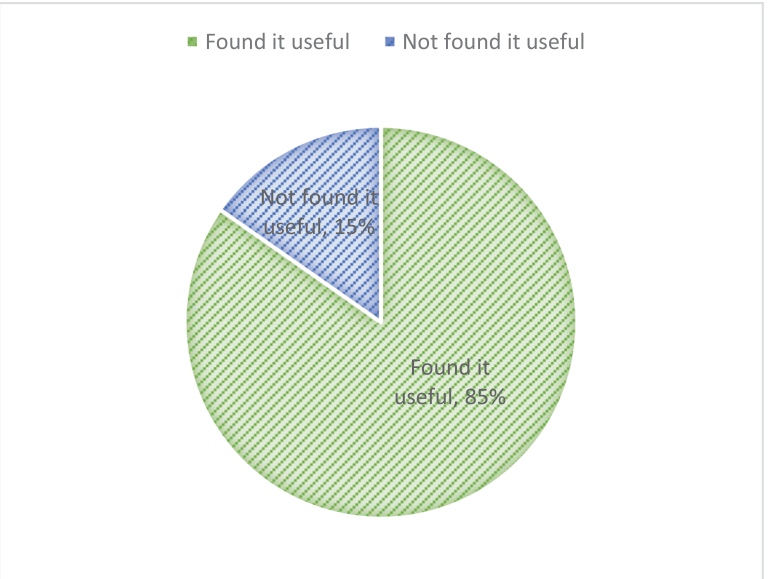


Figure 7.11 describes the thoughts on rehabilitation programme among the respondents, who participated in the questionnaire survey, 85% claimed it was useful while 15% mentioned that it was not useful.

According to field researchers, the rehabilitated WHHs are still under the surveillance of the military which hinders their full integration to the community. In this way, the WHHs might be in a disadvantaged position as they might be viewed as spies or even traitors, by the community. The community might also tarnish their characters. It is pertinent to dig deeper and examine what socio, cultural, political and economic issues are faced by the rehabilitated ex-combatants.

7.5.5 Psychological Impacts of War

Somasundaram (2010) discusses the impacts of complex situations that unfold after a natural or human made disaster impacts individuals, families, communities and the society. Using qualitative methods, Soamsundaram and Sivayokan (2013) discusses the common psychological problems faced by the people in the North, East and the border village due to multiple displacements, loss of family members, detention, torture, loss of properties and other productive resources. They further claim that the collective trauma experienced by the people have "resulted in the tearing of the social fabric, lack of social cohesion, disconnection, mistrust, hopelessness, dependency, lack of motivation, powerlessness and despondency" (Somasundaram and Sivayokan 2013, p, 8)

In our study, the war time experiences, losses and multiple displacements are important aspects of psychological issues WHHs face daily. Many of the psychosocial and mental health problems among WHHs according to youth lead researchers were observed for a long time. However, the post war situations have made things worse.

Many of them are struggling to deal with traumatic, painful and unbearable memories. The problems silently experienced by the WHHs have implications for the other family members too. The memories of what happened to them, their families and neighbours are still affecting their mental health. When they were settled in their former places and homes, those memories are revitalized. The state narrative of 'humanitarian rescue' needs to be placed within the narratives of the survivors/victims. Some field researchers expressed their experiences of talking with few direct survivors/victims of war who could not

control their emotions during the discussion with them. The WHHs still feel a sense of loss. They feel their agency is decreasing. The ongoing post-war context is also not conducive for WHHs as they are not clearly recognized or included in programmes.

Many of them do not have access to psychological treatment or other forms of assistance to overcome their trauma. In order to achieve a meaningful war recovery, psychological problems WHHs undergo should be addressed with proper attention and continuation. The context and space for recovery should be broadly understood without any feelings of lack of power, loss of agency, victimization and defeat.

The WHHs experienced trauma inflicted by the death and disappearance of family members, and relatives or the collective loss of community members. They also suffered physical challenges like loss of limbs. The findings also suggested cognitive dissonance, social stigma, and stress with multiple responsibilities, emotional immaturity and state of being controlled by host families. On top of these psychological issues, their children also manifested several challenges. The physical and mental health issues were prominent among the respondents who got injured during the last stages of the war. More than one third of the respondents had constant physical pain, whereas some of the respondents had lost their legs or hearing or hands or vision. A considerable number of respondents caught fever regularly that arise due to their physical disability.[32] The amputees suffer without financial support to receive advanced medical care. Furthermore, vision and hearing impairment, blood pressure, diabetic, and other prolonged non-communicable illnesses were also found to be the crucial challenges for their psychosocial well-being contributing to and being caused by the latter. . The findings also showed that the WHHs perform their daily routines even with their physical and mental health issues. Some of them were not aware about their health issues as they have not undergone any medical tests so far. However, some women acknowledge their health issues are not a challenge for their improvement and to be an achiever in their life. They tended to be more religious and tried to be more orthodox. They observe fasting and sometimes embrace other religions to alleviate their psychological issues. Some of the women affected by mental health issues sought medical support for their problems. They tended to receive professional counselling to cope with their stress and emotional problems as well. However, such facilities are very limited and out of reach for many WHHs. It is important to note some might not seek assistance for mental health issues due to the stigma attached.

> *"My leg was amputated following a shell attack. Since then I have been striving to excel in various domains of my life. My disability never ceased or prevented me from being involved in active social and political life"*
>
> KI Participant, Mullaitivu District

> *"She tried to commit to suicide many times but I help her to come out of that psychological pain. Today, she is a successful politician. We convert our challenges into good intentions. This is how we help each other to come out from our destructive challenges. The WHHs practiced this method to recover their mind from excessive thinking"*
>
> FGD Participant, Jaffna District

[32] It includes disability not confined within the government definition but as experienced by the respondents.

7.5.6 Feelings of Recovery

Figure 7.12: Feeling of recovery from the war impacts

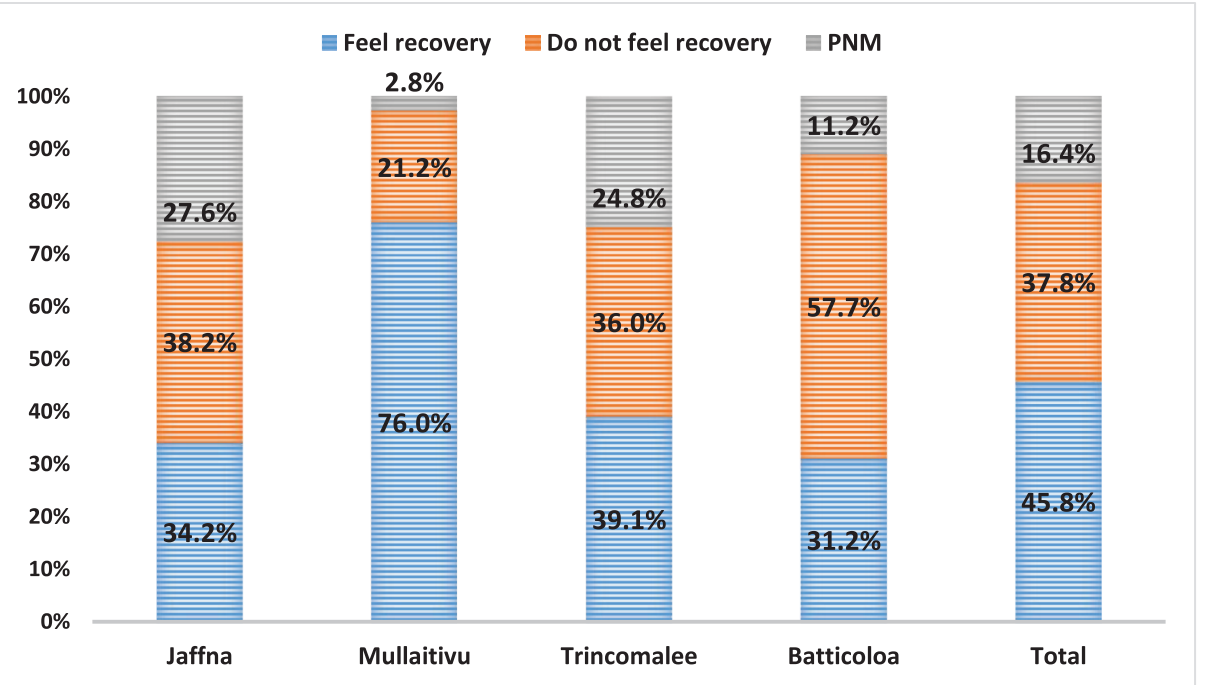


Figure 7.12 assesses whether the respondents feel that they are recovering from the impact of the war. 58% from Batticaloa acknowledged that they feel that they are not recovering from the impact of war whereas 38% of the WHHs from Jaffna stated that they are not recovering. This was 36% and 21% for Trincomalee and Mullaitivu districts, respectively.

Although 46% said that they feel they are recovering from the impacts of war, the total of those who said no and who did not want to answer, shows that it is very subjective. The research team did not have any detailed questions related to the feelings about recovery as it could not be simply captured through a questionnaire. A follow up interview with a couple of respondents reflected the following views:

"We don't have a house, employment and market to sell our products. I can't say I am fully recovered."

A WHH, Mullaitivu District

"No, I will say, I will not be able to recover from the shocks of the war in my life time."

A mother from Mullaitivu, who lost all her sons during the war

"I think we should not lament about the past. Whatever happened is not reversible. We have to see our lives in the future"

A WHH- widow of an ex-combatant

"We cannot say that the community is recovered, we have lost everything that we had in the past. Families may individually achieve many things as many of our relatives in other

countries. But, I will not say we will be able to get the same past village we enjoyed as children."

A disabled WHH from Mullaitivu

*We do not have any problems now. It was only in 1983, we had to leave Trincomalee. After the end of the war, we felt very happy. I do not have to worry about my sons who were in the Army and spend any more sleepless night**s***

A mother of two soldiers from Trincomalee

The above quotes show that recovery means different things to different WHHs. It is also connected to feeling of victors and victims and the socio-political structures built post-war.

8 Accessibility to Services

Access to services is very important in the everyday life of WHHs. As they have to lead different lives compared to the other women, proper access to services would make them engaged with the family and community more. However, the research shows that WHHs face many challenges in accessing services.

8.1 Types of Services and Access

Basic access to services shows an overall good picture. WHHs access to health, education, electricity, clean water, banking, security (police) and legal services are essential for their smooth functioning in their everyday life both at home and outside. In our study, WHHs value the importance of their children's education. With many difficulties they spend on their children's education. Even during the pandemic WHHs have provided assistance to their children to engage in online education. Generally, WHHs, in many parts of the world and in our study too, attempt to invest more on their children's education and health. The WHHs access to clean water and electricity give them an opportunity to reduce their work loads and time that they have to spend on household chores. However, how many of them are able to bear the cost for such expenditures is crucial to determine. It is pertinent to note that the access to counselling services, skills training and safe houses show low percentages. These services, especially counselling and safe houses are important for WHHs who continue to bear the wounds of the war.

Figure 8.1: Accessible services

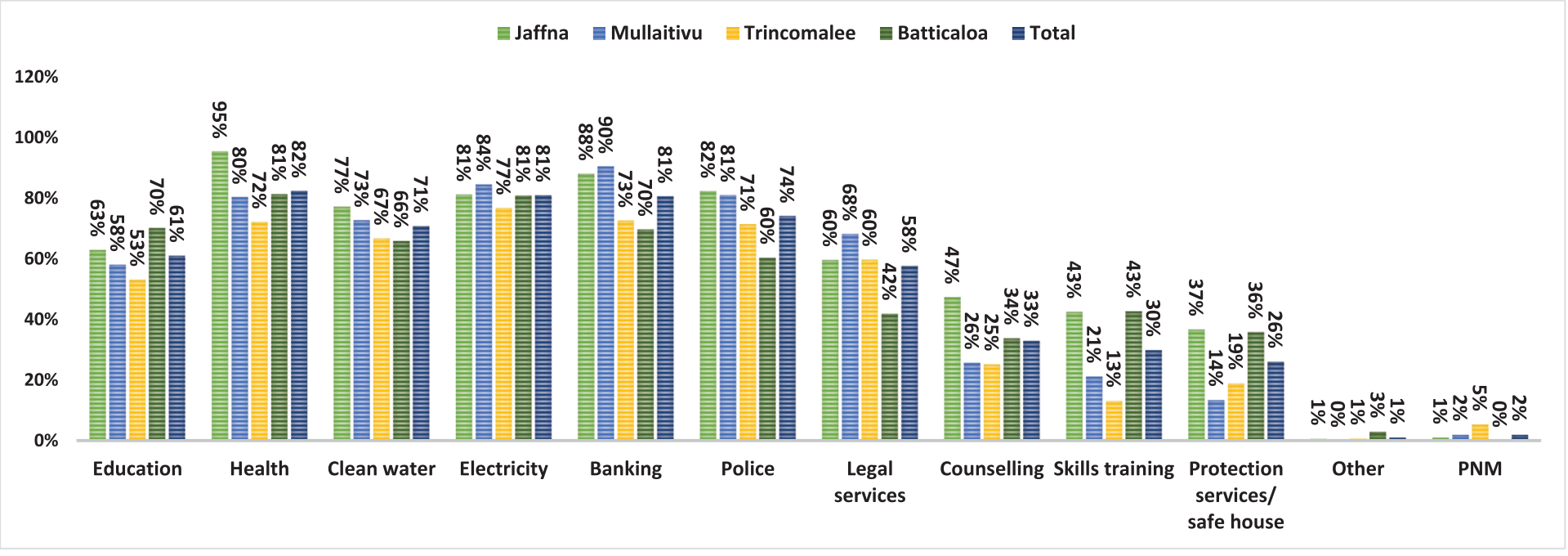


Figure 8.1 presents information about types of services and access. The respondents have chosen multiple choices of the services to claim that they have access to basic services. 95% of the respondents from Jaffna accepted that they have access to health services. This was 81%, 80% and 72% for Batticaloa, Mullaitivu and Trincomalee, respectively. When it comes to access to electricity 84% of the respondents from Mullaitivu district have said that they have access and 80% of the WHHs Jaffna district also have the access to electricity. This was 80% and 77% for Batticaloa and Trincomalee, respectively. And banking services have been accessed by a good majority of the respondents (Mullaitivu 90%, Jaffna 88%, Trincomalee 72% and 70% Batticaloa). 82% of the respondents from Mullaitivu said that they have access to police service and this was 81%, 71% and 60% for Jaffna, Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts. The WHHs who have access to clean water also considerably well and this was 77% for Jaffna District and this was 73% and 66% for Mullaitivu, Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts, respectively. Less than three fourth (74%) and 71% of the respondents had access to police and clean water respectively. Similarly, education (61%) and legal services (58%) have been accessed by a good number of respondents. Significantly, one third (33%) and more than one fourth (24%) of the respondents had access to counselling and protection services including safe houses respectively. Among the 764 respondents, who had access to clean water, 28% and 27% are from Jaffna and Mullaitivu districts. 36% and one third (33%) from Jaffna and Batticaloa districts had access to safe houses.

8.2 Barriers in Accessing Services

Figure 8.2: Barriers in accessing services

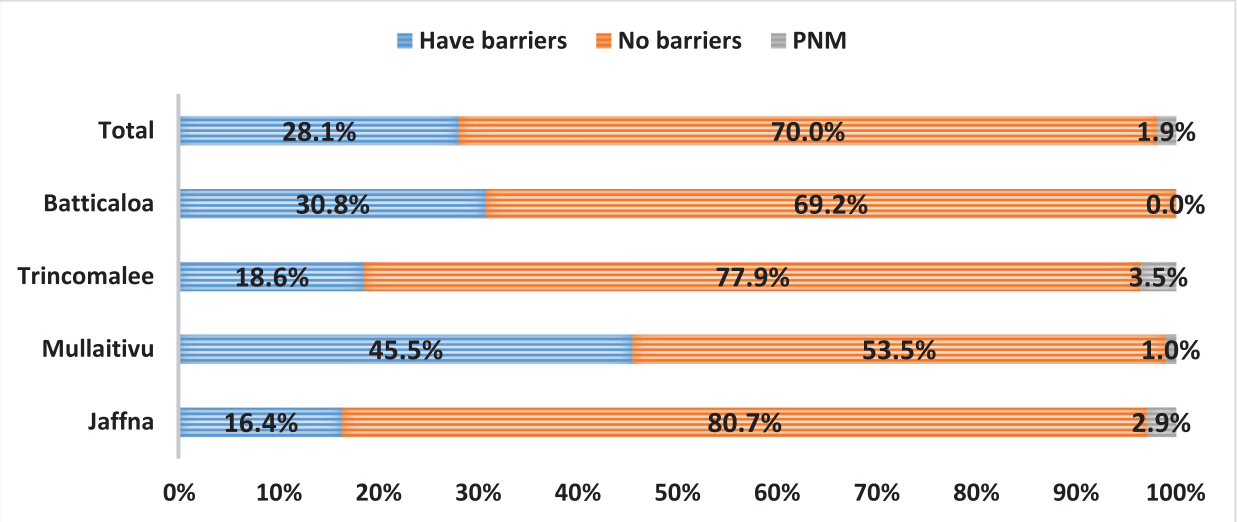


Figure 8.2 weighs whether the respondents had barriers to access the above services. A significant majority (70%) expressed not facing barriers to access the services. 46% and 31% from Mullaitivu and Batticaloa districts respectively expressed that they are facing barriers in accessing services.

> *"I had to struggle with the state employees such as GNs and Samurdhi officers to get some services for my beneficiaries. Sometimes, police show negligence in taking immediate actions against culprits. WHHs have problems in getting registered for Samurdhi services. They should be given priority in any service provision. I know many WHHs live in houses made with clay in my division. I urged the GN and DS to provide housing plans for them. The points system implemented for housing is really challenging and real needy families are left behind."*
>
> KI, Location Not Disclosed

Negligence and the ignorance of the state officials are the key concerns of the WHHs and Key Informants. The WHHs are kept on a *Samurdhi* waiting list for a longer period to get the entitlement. Some women also face challenges in getting the widow pension due to unprecedented delay in moving their documents, this issue was widely acknowledged by most of the KIs, FGD participants and household survey respondents.

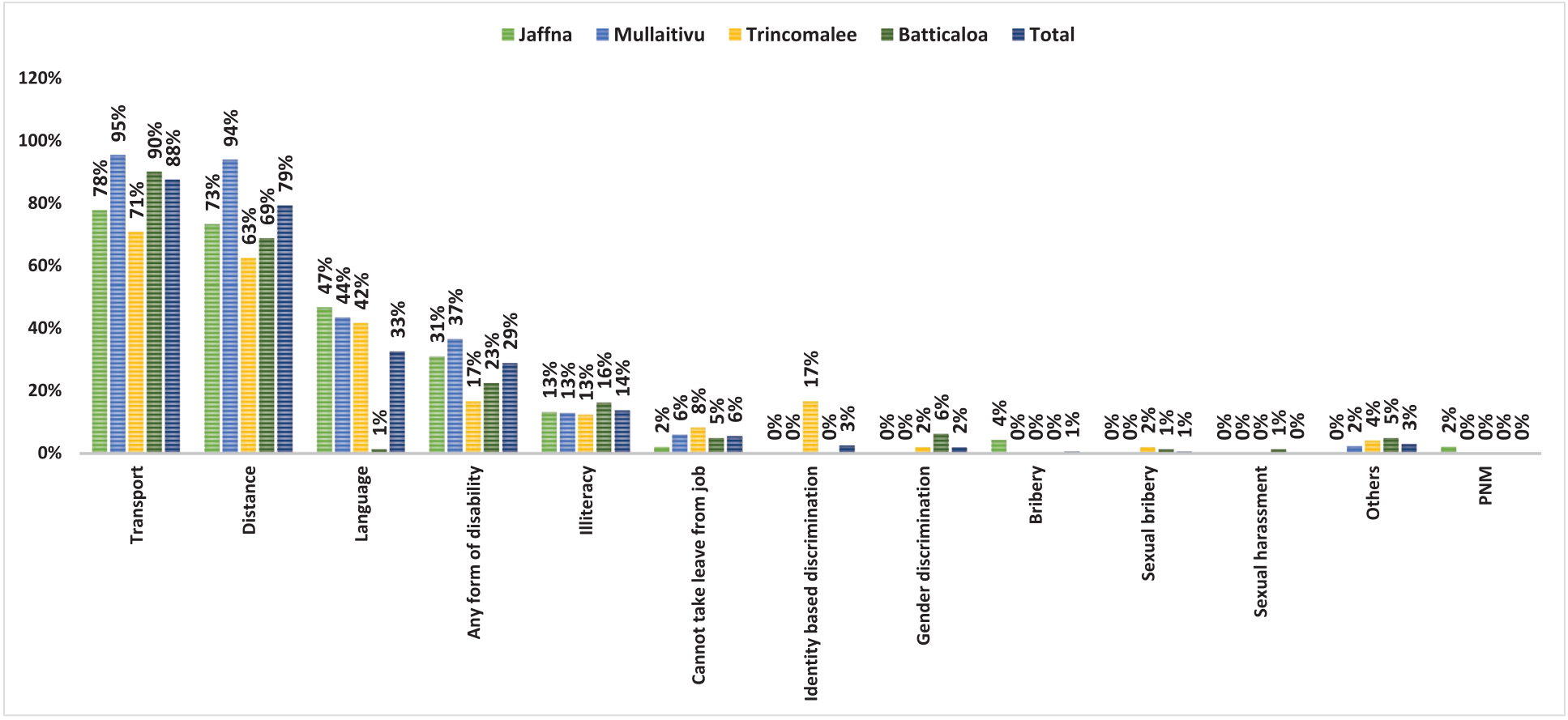
8.2.1 Types of Barriers in Accessing Services

> *"Sometimes, WHHs are unable to produce the relevant documents to obtain services from the officials. They are treated in a different manner. However, some officials demand bribes from the women to get their work done."*
>
> KI Participant, Jaffna District

In terms of barriers, respondents from Mullaitivu have pointed out transport and distance as main barriers. Due to poor connectivity of several villages with the main administrative town, WHHs would find it hard to spend time and money on accessing those services. They would not be able to compensate for the day's earnings for accessing services as most of them are the main breadwinners of their families. A few WHHs mentioned that they can't take leave from their work. Language and disability came next in the list. Language was highlighted as an important factor that prevents them from making complaints too. Disability related challenges of WHHs need special attention and any programmes targeting them should pay proper attention to the issue of disability.

Under other categories WHHs mentioned economic hardships, living in remote areas, negligence of the GN/GS and no one to accompany to access services are also barriers in accessing services.

Figure 8.3: Types of barriers in accessing services



The Figure 8.3 lists down different types of specific barriers faced by the respondents to access the services. Nearly an overwhelming majority (88%) had transport difficulties, whereas the distance was a problem to access the services for 79% of the respondents. One third (33%) had language barriers, whereas 29% had different forms of disability as barriers to access to services.

8.3 Bribes and Exploitation

In the 2020 Corruption Perception Index, released by the Transparency International, Sri Lanka ranked 94th among 180 countries.[33] Lindberg and Herath (2018) explicitly address the issue of corruption in the highly politicised and ethnicized land issues in the post-conflict setting of Sri Lanka. According to Lindberg & Orjuela. (2011) corruption and conflicts have become normal in the lives of Sri Lankans. Based on their field work in Sri Lanka, they discuss how people have to bribe politicians and other powerful people to get employment (both in the private and government sectors). Their study indicated 'women often become victims of and participants in corrupt practices' after they became heads of the households during the war. They point out the vulnerability of widows, who are expected to give 'sexual favours' to local officers to get their work done.

Under the barriers to access services money and sexual bribes are cited. The following figure 8.4 shows the types of bribes identified by the respondents.

Figure 8.4: Type of bribes

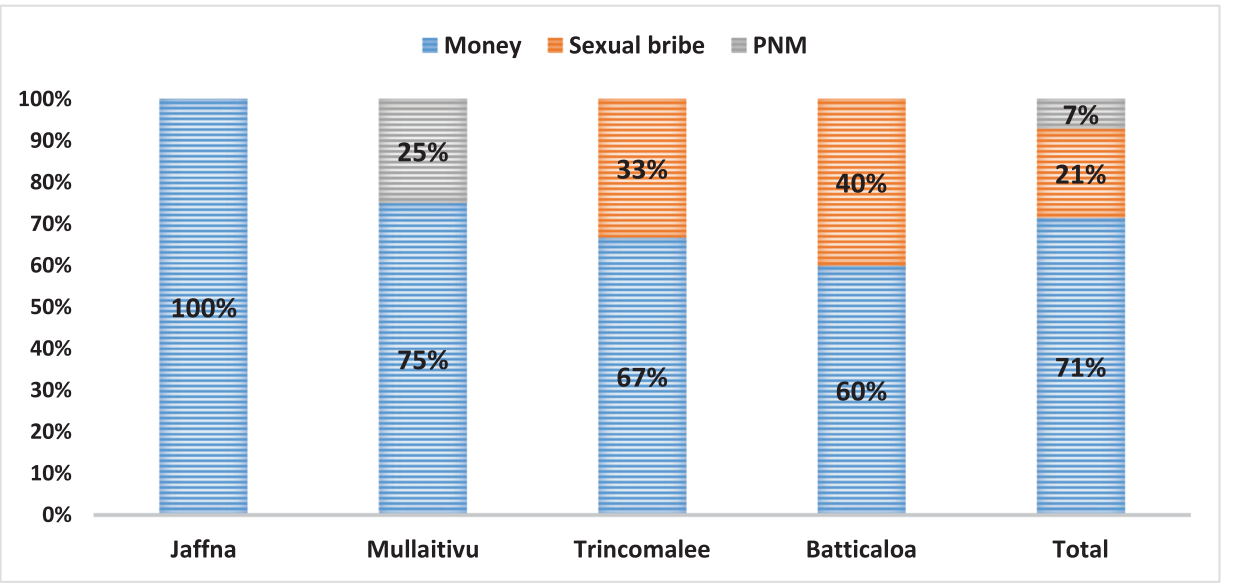


Figure 8.4 presents information about the type of bribes sought from the respondents, to cater to their service needs.

[33] Sri Lanka ranked 94th most corrupt country in the world in the Corruption Perception Index 202 by Transparency International https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/nzl Accessed 18.12.2021

"I know WHHs have been sexually harassed by the officials. If they get to know that these women are living alone they try to lure them with their power and authority. Sometimes they pretend to help them with their money. Most of the WHHs face this issue"

KI Participant, Mullaitivu District

"I have seen that some officials like GNs and Samurdhi officers demand for sexual bribery for housing schemes or Samurdhi stamps. Some women go behind the officials and get their work done. Officials manipulate the vulnerability of these women and make use of that for their personal needs. They face sexual harassment from the bus to work place"

KI- Politician, Mullaitivu District

"A NGO worker who is in an executive position said that these WHHs are prostitutes. How he could say those kinds of words. They should not say that. If a woman maintains a relationship with just one person whom she likes that won't be prostitution."

KI- Politician, Mullaitivu District

"Women are afraid of complaining about sexual bribery and harassment due to fear of retaliation and the potential questions that may be raised by the lawyers in the courts. The police also will drag the case further. It will take a long time to get the verdict. Therefore, women do not prefer to take any legal action against the sexual harassment or bribery"

KI Participant, Jaffna District

Many WHHs might not openly speak about sexual bribes or they do not have the ability to confront such situations. Accountability in the administration and legal system for instances of sexual bribes is a huge challenge for the WHH to overcome. Being WHH they are very careful in confronting this situation as the community perception still would blame the women. Under these circumstances, WHHs may resort not to access those services or provide the requested bribe out of desperation. Given the cultural background and impact the bribe has on women, WHHs may be more open to disclose about financial related bribes then sexual bribes.

Sexual bribe and harassment of WHH is one of the key obstacles which cannot be downplayed. This is also a major barrier for effective service provision. Some KIs opined that this was prominent, particularly during the allocation of housing schemes. The issue was not only confined to government organizations but also connected to some popular NGO/ CSOs and microfinance institutions. WHHs even do not know what kinds of legal remedies are available against sexual bribery and they think that their vulnerabilities will increase and the officials may take revenge from them. In addition, the present legal frame doesn't support to challenge, and recognise the exploitation and abuse that is a result of the form of the bribe and/or the subject of the bribe. The WHHs cope by trying to suppress the negative experiences with regard to sexual bribery and only sometimes discuss with their peer members. Social stigma attached to sexual harassment and bribery remains a critical barrier in addressing the same.

8.3.1 Seeking Remedies for Bribery and Corruption

Figure 8.5: Aware of institutions to complaint on bribery

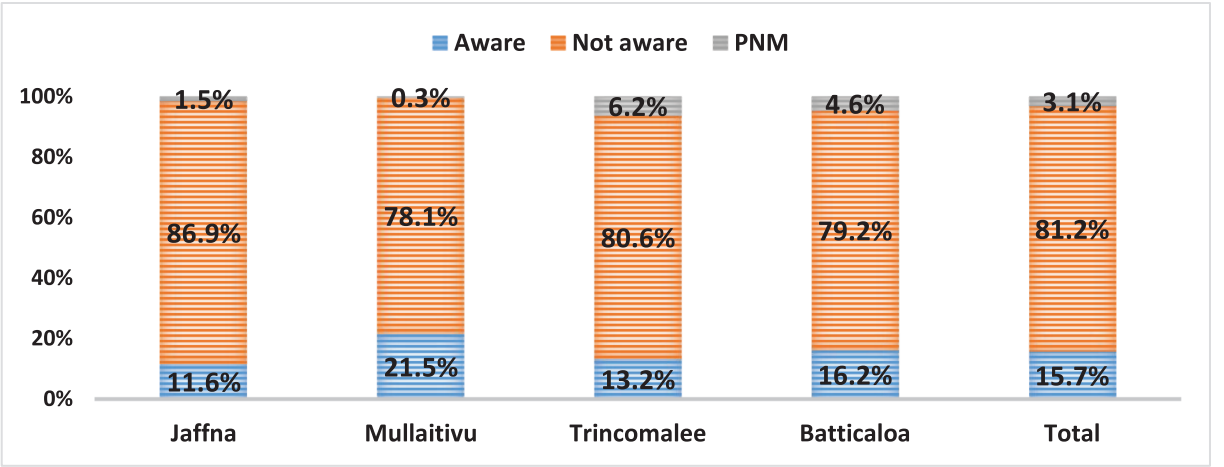


Figure 8.5 describes the respondents' awareness about institutions to make formal complaints on bribery. A good majority (81%) are not aware of the institutions, whereas 16% know about the institutions to make formal complaints about bribery.

Awareness regarding complaints is one of the areas the CBOs including Amara Forum and Samasam lobby for. But it should be noted that WHHs, in their capacities, may not spend time on making complaints even if they know where to do so, considering the legal process related to bribes, fear of reprisal and other related challenges such as cost, time and language barriers. The Centre for Equality and Justice (CEJ) (2018) has conducted a research on the prevalence and nature of sexual exploitation of Muslim women in the former war torn districts, who were being expected to give sexual bribes in return for government services or in accessing government services. The briefing paper showcases the results of a qualitative research done with Muslim women (most of them were heading households though they did not want to acknowledge for cultural reasons) who have solicited for sexual bribery by men in power, misusing their authority. The work done by CEJ also confirms that when women face such challenges they do not seek relief or redress due to social stigma and the reprisal from the powerful perpetrators.

8.3.2 Complaints lodged

Figure 8.6: Complaints made by respondents

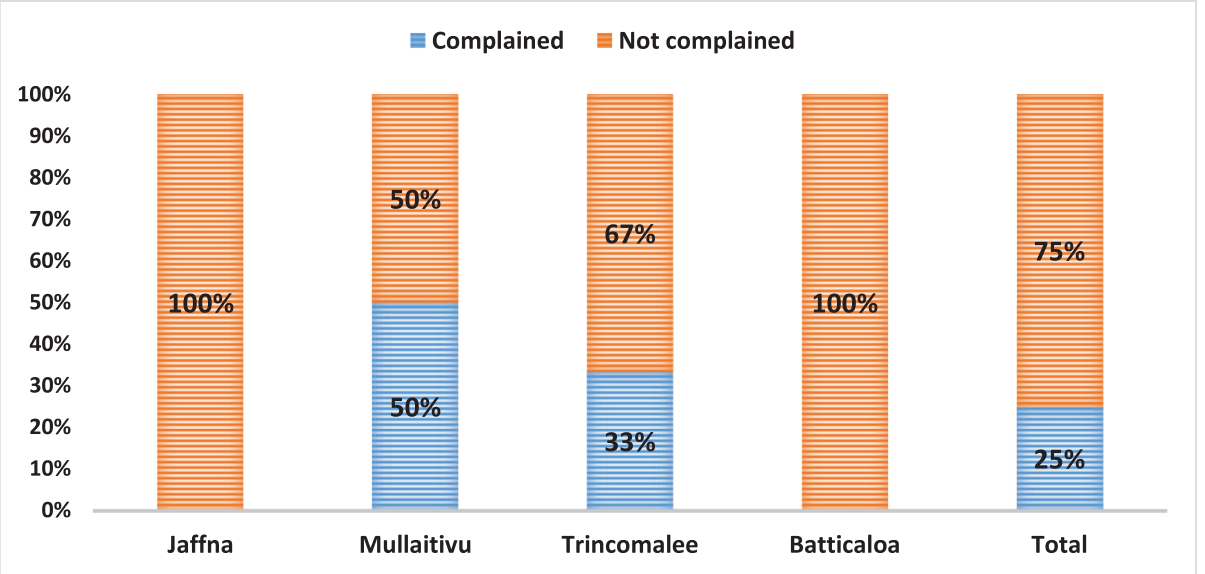
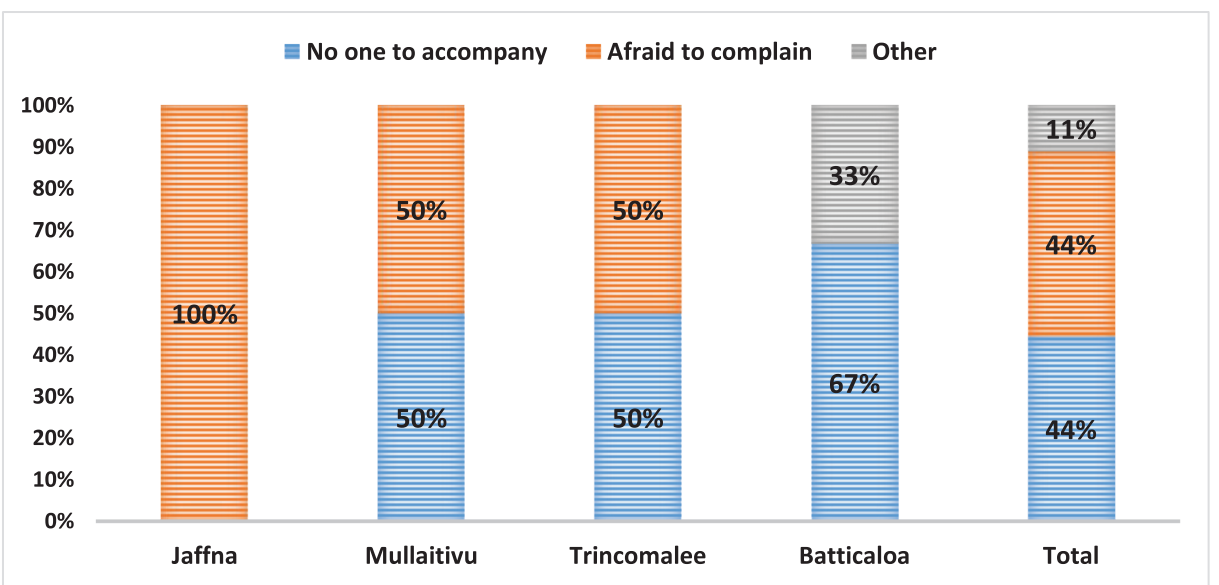


Figure 8.6 shows whether any complaints have been made by the respondents on bribery. A vast majority of them have not made any complaints, whereas only 25% have made complaints. According to the district level detail data, 50% from Mullaitivu and 33% from Trincomalee are among the respondents who have made complaints about bribery.

Figure 8.7: Reasons for not making complaints



According to the contextual analysis questionnaire, 44% of the respondents are scared to make complaints, and another 44% have no one to accompany them to make a complaint. The demand of bribery including sexual bribery found in police stations is highlighted as another reason for not filing a case. During the reflection meetings, a participant mentioned that if complaints are made, the WHHs might face other problems in accessing services.

Many of them are afraid of making complaints as it might lead to reprisals as they are already living in a vulnerable environment. Some WHHs mentioned that they do not have anyone to accompany them to make the complaint. Being WHHs, they always try to access government or other offices with another friend or

relative to avoid any unwanted consequences and to avoid rumours about them that tarnish their reputation and false allegations of alleged relationships with different men. Few WHHs identified language barriers too. Majority of the WHHs mentioned other reasons, which include time, money, distance, transport and lack of awareness. Many of them are not able to spend a day for this purpose as most of them are depending on daily wages to meet ends.

8.3.3 Action Taken Regarding Complaints

Figure 8.8: Actions taken on complaints made by respondents

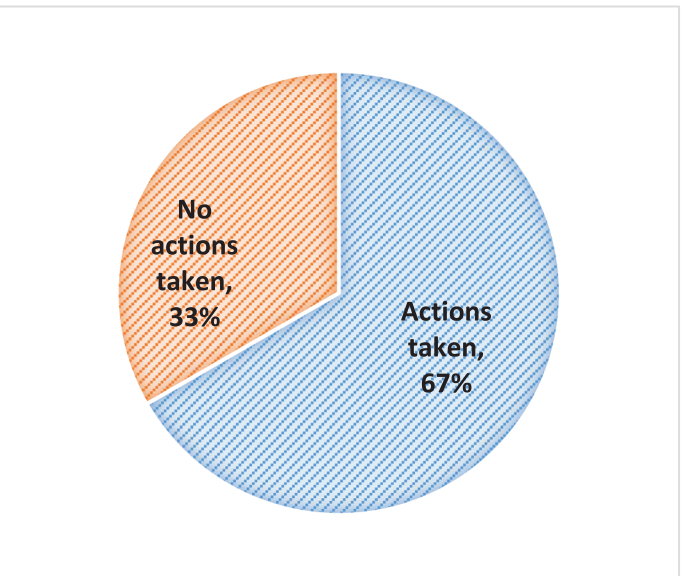


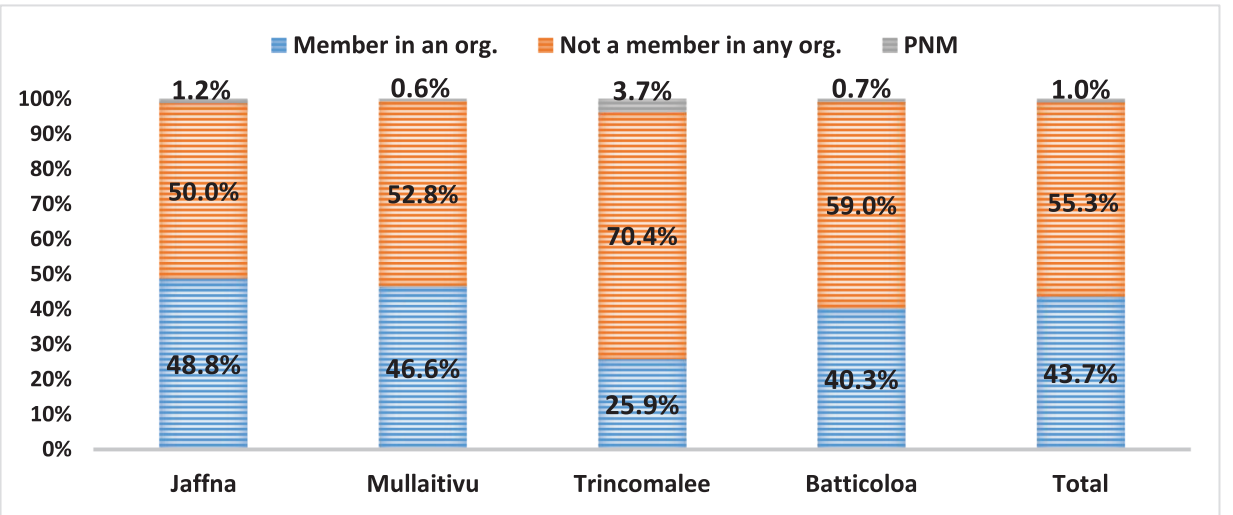
Figure 8.8 assesses whether any action has been taken regarding complaints filed by the respondents against bribery. A majority (67%) of the respondents' complaints have been attended to and action taken, whereas 33% said complaints have not resulted in action.

It is interesting to note that actions have been taken for the complaints lodged. If more awareness and facilities are made available for WHHs, they can confront these situations. It is important to note that the present system has enabled some action on the complaint matters, however, a significant one third of the complaints have not seen any action taken regarding them. It would be relevant to explore further on how far and what types of response and prosecution actions have been taken to better address this issue as well. Overall, given the challenges women face in accessing related services to make the complaints, such impressions on response mechanisms, and their experience of the same can lie as further deterrents to making complaints.

9 Social Networks in Supporting WHHs

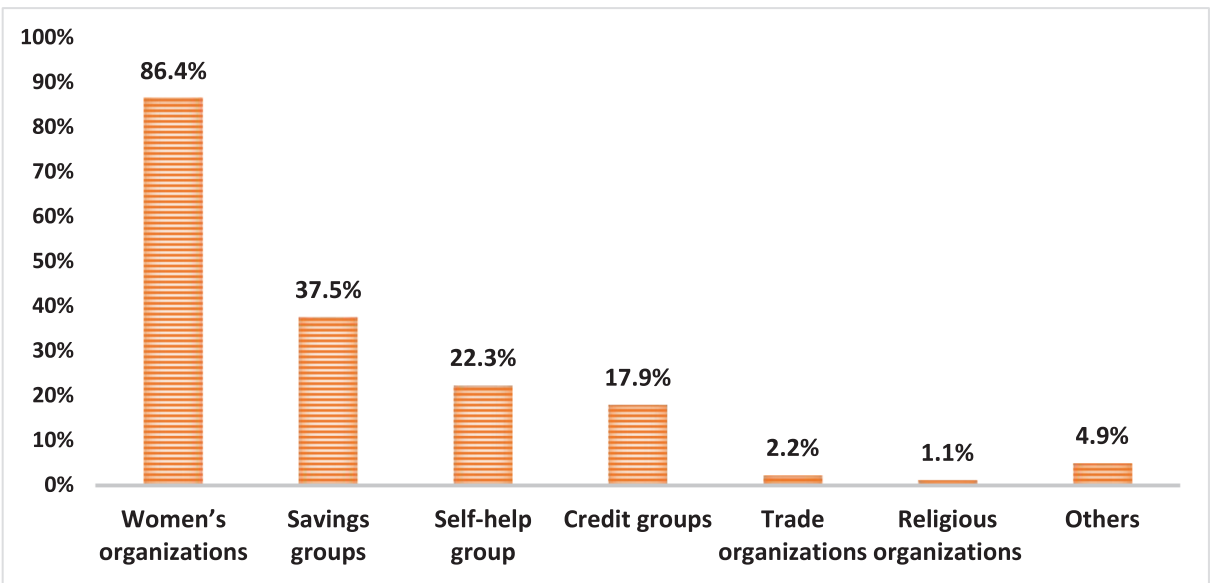
9.1 Membership in Social Organizations

Figure 9.1: Membership in social organizations



The survey shows that a majority of the respondents were not members of any organization, with 70% from Trincomalee and 59% from Batticaloa saying no. Non-membership was also considerable for other districts as shown in the table. Respondents being a member in any organization for Trincomalee district was only 26% whereas other districts were considerably higher in comparison.

Figure 9.2: Types of organizations

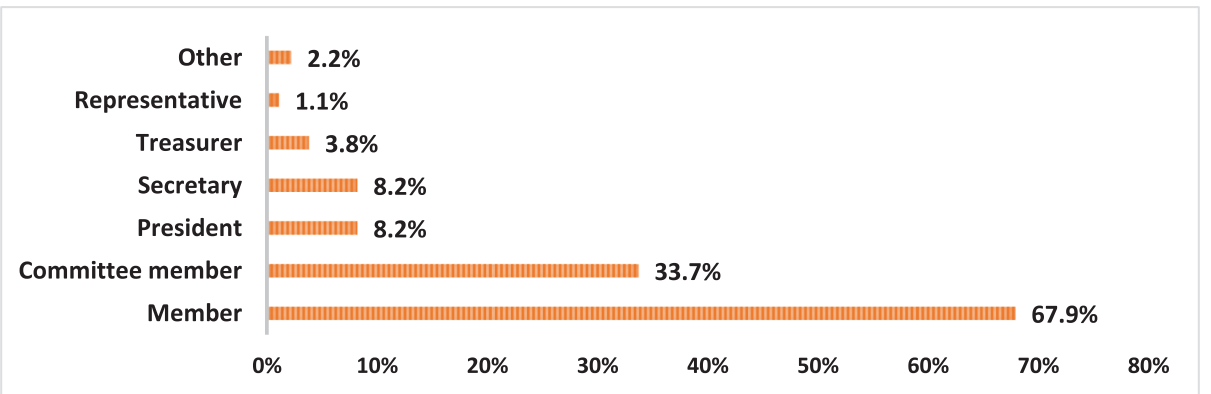


According to figure 9.2, 86% of respondents are having membership in women's organizations. 38% of respondents are being part of savings groups. Other membership is from self-help groups which is 22%. Other than these organizations, 18% of the respondents are part of the credit groups. While there is less membership in trade organizations, religious organizations and other organizations which is 2%, 1% and 5% respectively.

A number of women have membership in peace clubs, sports clubs, elders clubs, community centres, and WRDS. Suggesting that from being a member of such organizations, those people intend to receive support. As shown in figure 9.3 a very small percentage of WHHs are willing to take leadership roles in such organizations.

It was found that WHHs prefer to obtain membership in organizations for various purposes. Some of them acknowledged that they might be able to get some financial support in future. Whereas, some others agreed that being part of any organizations would help them to be engaged with something productive. However, obtaining support in the form of financial assistance or in-kind support in the form of materials or livelihood support forms part of one of the major reasons for being a member of an organisation. WHHs also benefited through organisational representation during legal crises such as approaching police to get remedy for any domestic violence or seeking support from them to eradicate brewing illicit alcohol. It was also reported that a considerable number of WHHs are members of *Samurdhi* groups and other self-help groups. And women from all four Districts expressed their gratitude for being members of such organizations at various levels.

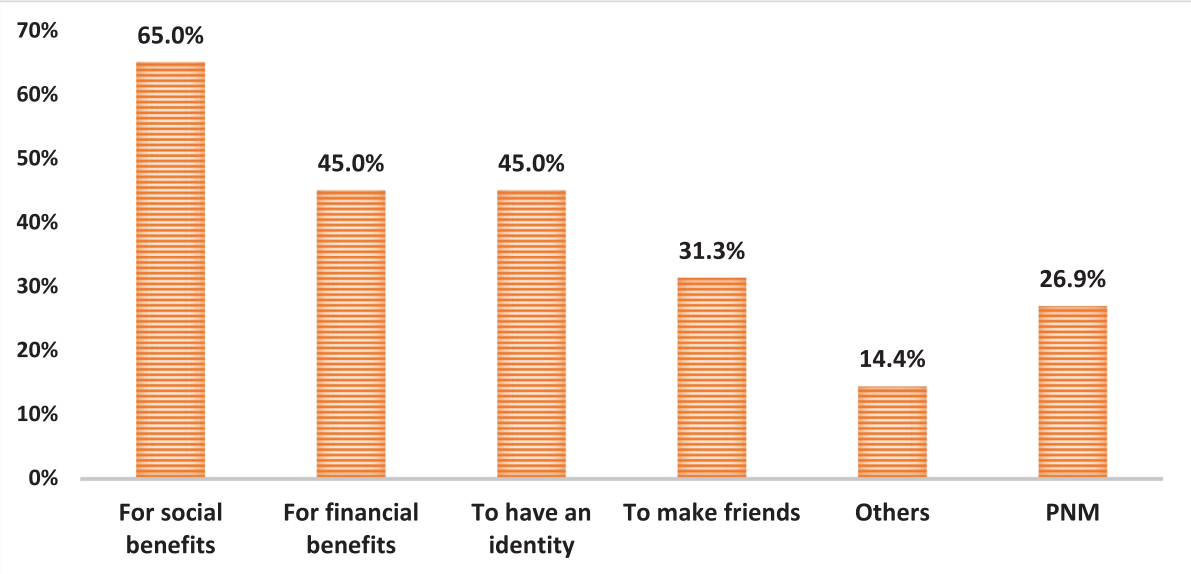
Figure 9.3: Roles taken in organizations



According to the survey, out of the 44% of the total respondents having membership in organisations, 68% of the respondents held member positions. Another small percentage of respondents (8%) held the top office bearers positions such as secretary and president. Out of the total respondents, the majority of the respondents (68%) acknowledged that they have the membership in an organization and another 34% also agreed that they are committee members in an organization. However, only a small number of respondents stated that they held any office bearer post such as president, secretary, treasurer, consultants and representative.

It was perceivable that the WHHs do not come forward to take up any leading role such as administrative positions due to various reasons such as family commitment and excessive workload. Lack of motivation and fear of unfamiliar responsibilities would be other reasons for not taking a leading role in an organization. They always prefer to play a passive role as members or sleeping partners and only few of them have put their trust in their ability. They are also shining in different domains amid challenges. Some of the women in Jaffna and Mullaitivu districts contested in local, provincial and parliament elections and were elected by popular vote. And, some others were trained mainly by local and international NGO/ CSO and served their communities as resource persons and activists.

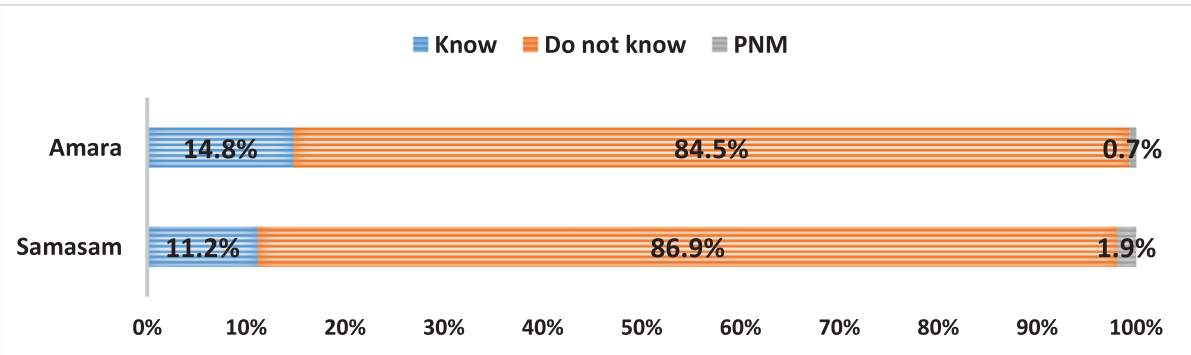
Figure 9.4: Reasons for holding membership in social organizations



According to the figure, a majority (65%) of the respondents agreed that they obtained the membership as it would provide them some social benefits. And, another 45% of them said that they expect financial benefits through the membership. Similarly, another 45% of them agreed that they enjoy a sense of belonging, feeling of togetherness as "we" and a social identity attained by the membership they have in these organizations. 31% said that they prefer to make friends and network through organisations.

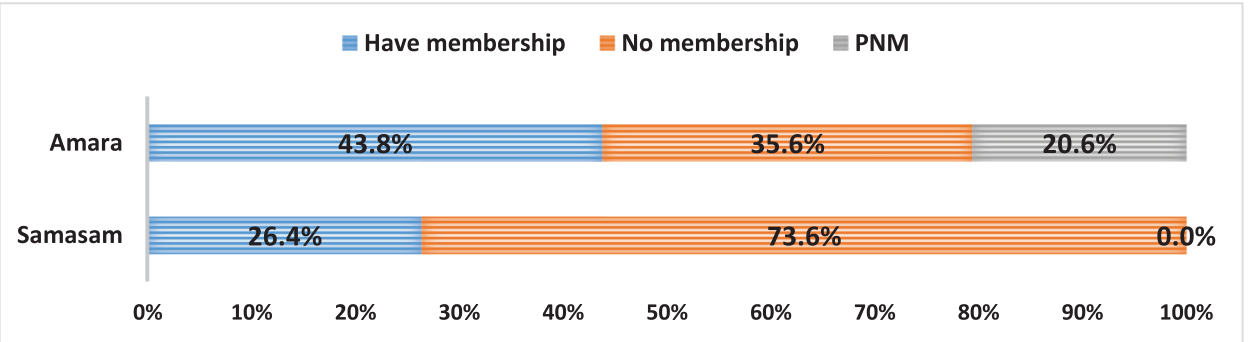
9.2 Amara Forum & Samasam

Figure 9.5: Knowledge on Amara Forum and Samasam



This result conveys a very crucial message to Viluthu organization in order to make Amara Forum and Samasam more visible among the WHHs in all four districts. A comprehensive strategy should be devised to promote Amara Forum and Samasam among the WHHs and other needy women. This should be immediately addressed by Viluthu with the support of the field workers and the district offices as the number of WHHs are increasing and new sub categories emerge after the outbreak of pandemic. However, the activities which are implemented by Amara Forum and Samasam are already commendable and it should be expanded among the needy women with a rapid action plan, understanding the issues and vulnerabilities of WHHs. It was also noticeable that the leading members of Amara Forum and Samasam are committed and dedicated to their services. The members of Amara played a key role in accessing legal service for WHHs who faced domestic violence and miserable situations.

Figure 9.6: Membership in Amara Forum and Samasam



According to the survey, out of the four districts, 44% of the respondents have membership in Amara Forum and 37% of them do not possess membership. However, a majority (74%) of the respondents were not aware of Samasam while 26% of them had membership in Samasam. Out of the respondents, 26% are members of Amara Forum and Samasam. 65% of people said that they are members for social benefits.

> *"I am a member of Amara Forum through which we try to empower the WHHs and help them if they have any challenges. We try to show them that it is important to work as an organization."*
>
> KI Participant, Kilinochchi District

Another two FGD participants from Jaffna said that they are working with WHHs and are trying to provide some services through Amara Forum. They said most of the WHHs are the members of the Amara Forum and Samasam.

> *"We tried to help some women even though their husbands are with them. Sometimes, the husbands are violent and create problems for their wives, they would come to us to get our support."*
>
> FGD Participant, Jaffna District

There were differences of opinion among the participants with regard to the awareness of Amara Forum and Samasam in their respective areas. Though a considerable number of respondents are not aware of Amara Forum and Samasam, some of them are active members of those organizations. They acknowledged that they have carried out various activities and contributed to solve different challenges such as domestic violence and negligence of the entities who are responsible for law and order. They have advocated on behalf of affected WHHs and helped in seeking justice. The members of Amara Forum also have closely worked with government officials to ensure impartial services are offered to the WHHs. The Amara Forum and Samasam are quite popular among the Jaffna and Mullaitivu participants. They have worked extremely hard to fulfil the essential needs of the economically vulnerable women during the pandemic outbreak. However, some participants were interested in knowing about the Amara Forum and Samasam and wanted to introduce them to the WHHs who reside in their area as well. Some also stated that they haven't heard about these two forums earlier. The WHHs who are already active members explained about their involvement with Amara Forum and Samasam and expressed their willingness to work with the youth leads in their respective areas. The activities which have been carried out by the Amara Forum and Samasam sparked new thoughts about their objectives and functions among the youth researchers. The youth researchers also suggested that the experience sharing should be frequently organized by Amara Forum and Samasam.

Figure 9.7: Social support to overcome the issues faced in day-to-day life

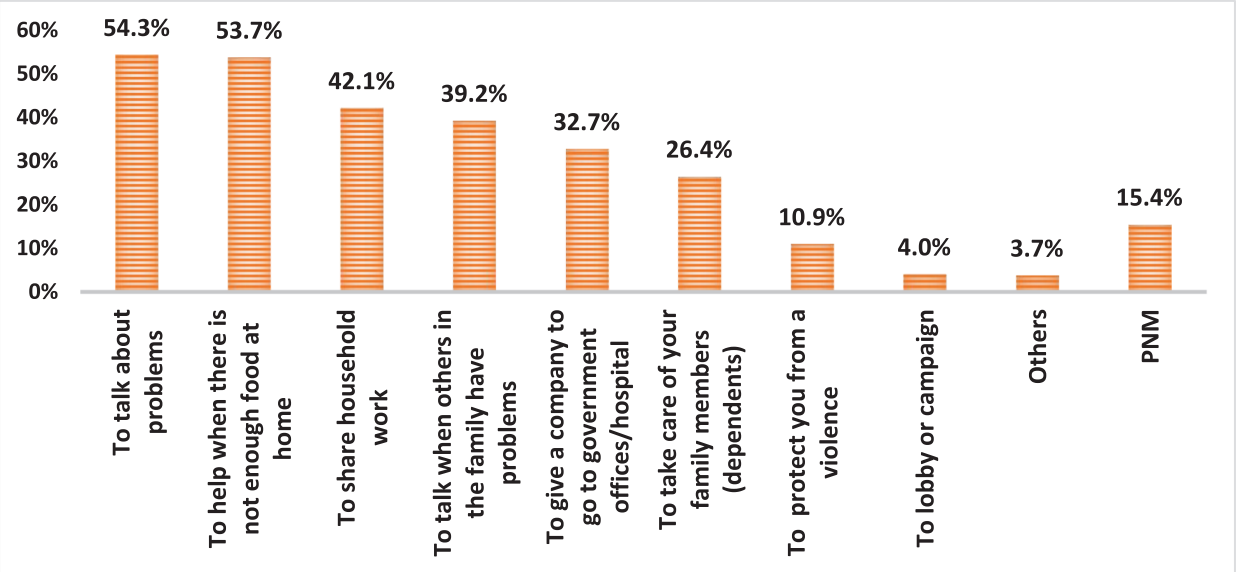


Figure 9.7 explains the help available with regards to issues faced by women and a detailed table is given in Appendix D.10. 54% said they have someone to talk to when they have problems. Another 54% said that they have someone to help them when they do not have enough food at home and 42% said they have someone to share household work with. About 26% of WHHs mentioned that they have someone to take care of their dependent family members when they want to go out. Another 11% WHHs have someone to protect them when there is violence. Only 4% mentioned that they have support for lobbying and campaigning. Significantly, nearly 15% of WHHs did not want to mention the issues that they faced and the social support they received from their peers (women).

> *"We work closely with family members. We helped them in many ways. We are very supportive. When someone faces any emotional problems we support them. Even as a politician I support to the transgender women within my purview."*
>
> FGD Participant, Jaffna District

Figure 10.1: Health and wellbeing

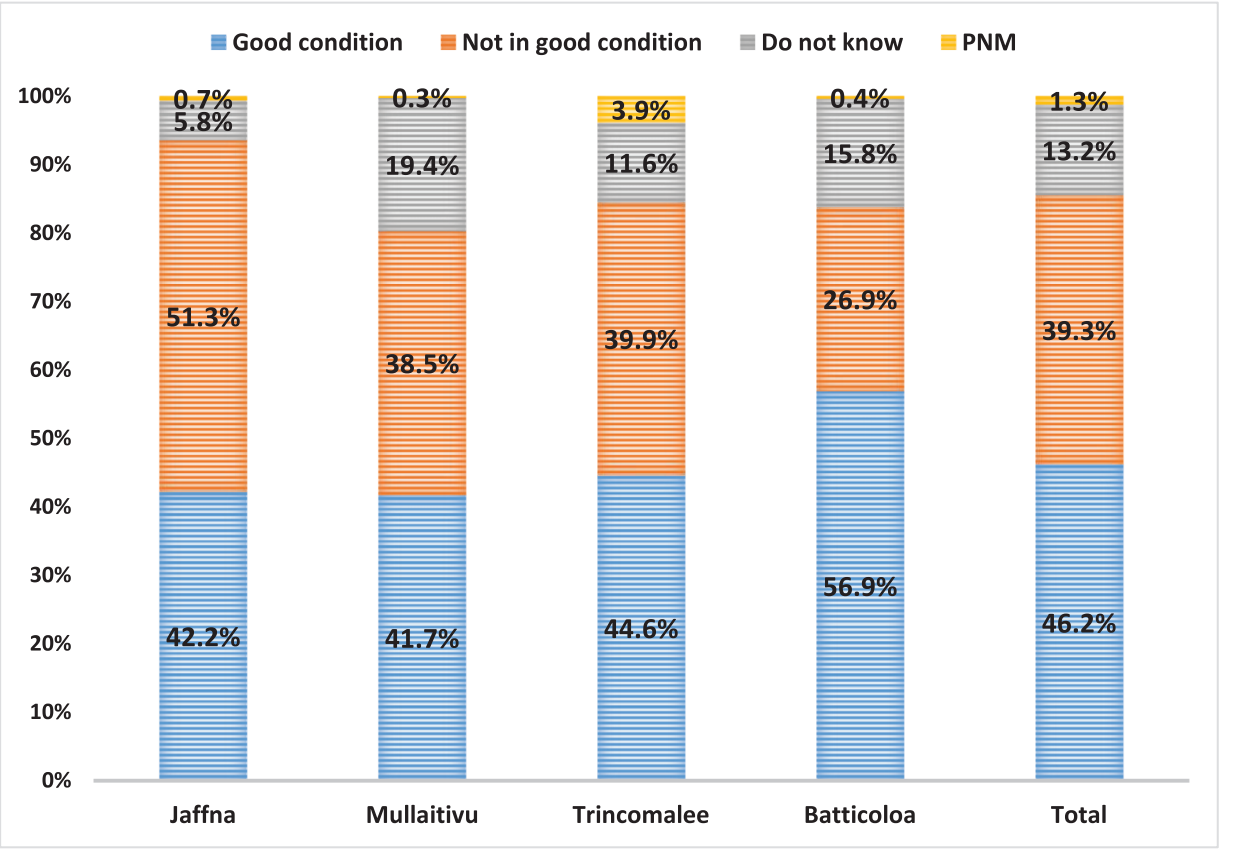


Figure 10.1 demonstrates health and wellbeing. According to the figure, 57% is the highest rate in Batticaloa among the four districts, where they acknowledged that they are in good condition in health and well-being. In the next level, 45% and 42% respondents who are from Trincomalee and Jaffna also acknowledged that they are good at health and well-being. When we see the overall sample, 46% of respondents said that they are being good in health and well-being. But 39% of the respondents acknowledged that they are not having good health and well-being among those four districts. However, 13% of respondents don't even know that they are in good health and well-being. Batticaloa district demonstrated the highest rate of 57% of the respondents acknowledging that they are in good health and have good well-being. This is followed by 45% in Trincomalee, 42% in Jaffna and 41% in Mullaitivu. Significantly overall over 50% of the respondents did not disclose that they were in good health. Out of all the respondents, 39% of the respondents acknowledged that they are not in good health, 13% did not know of their health condition and 1% preferred not to mention their condition.

Figure 10.2: Health issues

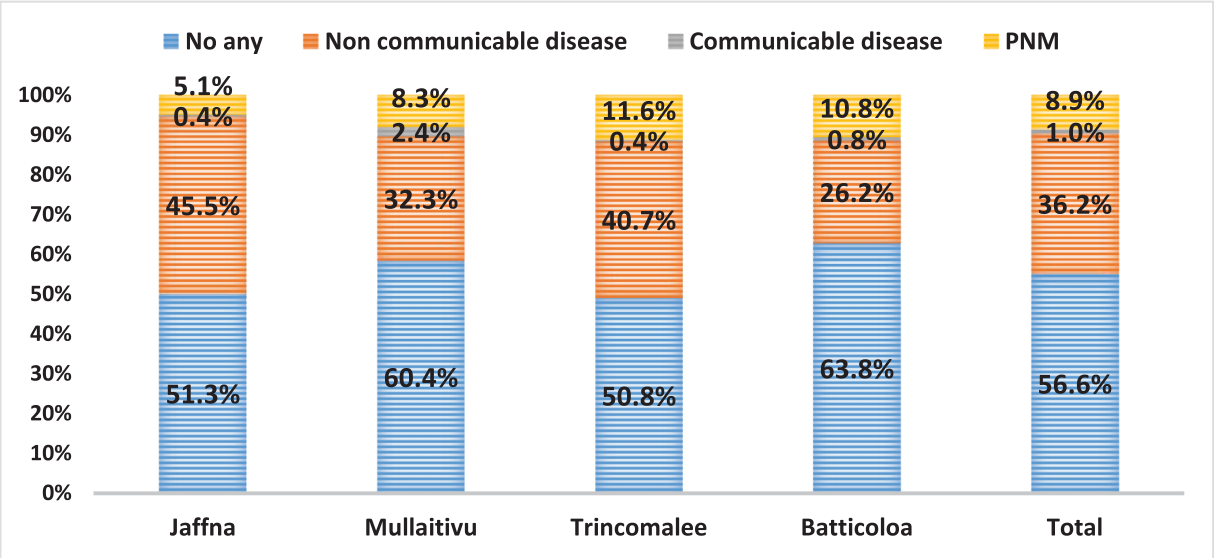


Figure 10.2 explains health issues faced by the respondents. In Batticaloa district where the majority of the respondents who said they were in good health and well-being were found, 64% of the respondents there said they did not have either communicable or non-communicable diseases. Respondents in Jaffna district had the highest rate of non-communicable disease with 45% followed by Trincomalee with 41%. Mullaitivu district respondents had the highest rate of communicable diseases showing 2% whilst Jaffna and Trincomalee had the lowest rate showing 0.4%. Overall 9% of the respondents preferred not to mention about their illness.

Figure 10.3: Women consulted a doctor during the last twelve months

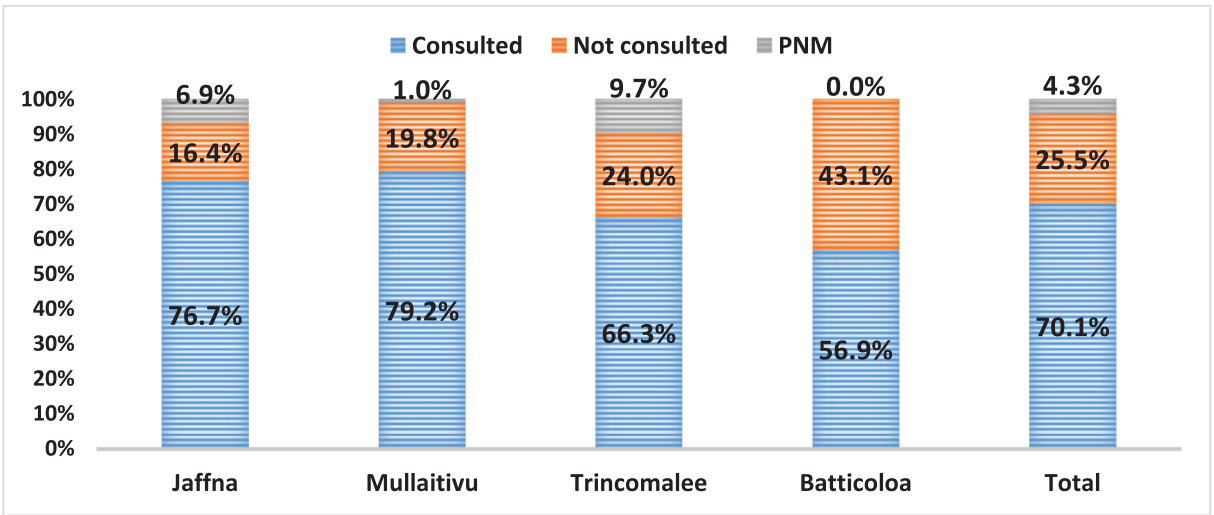


Figure 10.3 demonstrates respondent feedback on consulting a doctor during the last 12 months. The majority of the respondents (70%) have consulted a doctor during the last 12 months. This shows that people are more focused on their health. But unfortunately 26% of respondents were not able to consult a doctor in the last 12 months. In Jaffna (77%) and Mullaitivu (79%), people also focus on their health when compared to Batticaloa District. but also 43% of the respondents were not able to consult a doctor due to many reasons. Significantly, 43% of the respondents in Batticaloa District did not consult a doctor in the last 12 months. This was only followed by Trincomalee District that had 24% of the respondents. This shows a significant issue of not accessing doctors given that the second and third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic took place within the last 12 months period in Sri Lanka. Overall 70% of the respondents had accessed a doctor in the last 12 months. However, a further study is required concerning if such access to doctor's services included gender specific health issues and conditions including sexual reproductive health.

Figure 10.4: Reason for not consulting a doctor

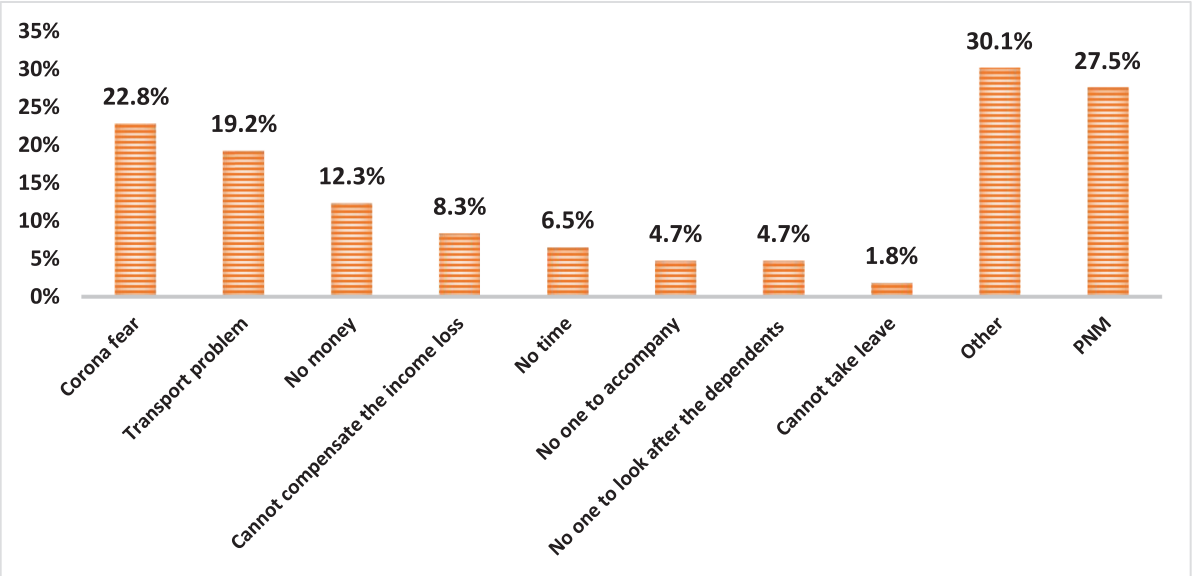


Figure 10.4 explains the reason for not consulting a doctor. Overall results explain that, the majority of the respondents (30%) choose 'other' reasons for not going to consult a doctor. Most importantly 23% of respondents said that due to corona fear they used to avoid consulting a doctor. Unfortunately 12% of respondents said that they have been facing difficulties with transportation. Due to the transportation problem, those respondents couldn't consult a doctor in the last 12 months. 12% of respondents have no money for their health care. They didn't go to consult a doctor due to this problem. Batticaloa district has the highest percentage (39%) of respondents facing difficulties in transportation when we compare to the districts such as Mullaitivu, Jaffna, and Trincomalee. *(See Appendix D.11)*

WHHs who have been victims of trauma, forced displacement, and violence have suffered greatly as a result of the armed conflict. Increased physical and mental health challenges were also linked to WHHs social and economic inequalities. During and after the armed conflict, women from marginalized/minority groups were also subjected to various forms of violence, inequalities, and related psychological challenges. The WHHs most common challenges were grief, psychosomatic complaints, anxiety, and aggressive behaviour. During the survey a considerable number of WHHs acknowledged that a health issue is the reason for them to leave from family responsibility. They also agreed that they discuss psychological issues when they meet their fellow women.

> *"As a psychosocial social trainer, I am aware that many WHHs suffer from various health problems. They are also given medication and counselling for their health problems."*
>
> WDO, Jaffna District

> *"The WHHs face mental health issues as a result of their constant dehumanization and destabilization. The symptoms of severe grief were found to be the most prevalent among WHHs, given the psychological challenges they face. Due to the long-term effects of war, it was also discovered that collective stress and mourning were on the rise."*
>
> KI- Jaffna District

Diseases and non-communicable diseases were spread among the participating their children. Health problems were caused by poor living conditions, a lack of nutritious food, and excessive physical workload without adequate rest.

> *"Due to our numerous responsibilities and concerns, the majority of us suffer from various health problems. We, on the other hand, go about our daily routines dealing with a variety of issues"*
>
> FGD Participant, Jaffna District

> *"In the Northern Province, sexual harassment and gender-based violence are major concerns, and women who have faced greater poverty and health risks will eventually become more vulnerable to mental health issues, receive less information, and have fewer job and educational opportunities"*
>
> KI, Jaffna District

During the focus group discussions, the WHHs revealed a number of psychological issues, which the Key informants confirmed. These included feelings of abandonment by their own families and communities, severe trauma, the burden of overwhelming responsibilities, and the possibility of becoming targets of violence. During the pandemic, the situation became even worse.

> *"Because of the insecurity, women are losing opportunities. The schools have been closed. There are few health services available. Working opportunities are no longer available. The ability to participate in social and political activities has been severely harmed. WHHs' mental health problems surfaced in the form of physical symptoms that were closely linked to their emotional health after the war."*
>
> WDO, Jaffna District

Transgender women also had feelings of being "depressed," "sad," and "afraid," and they acknowledged that when we think or talk about what happened, we experience increased worry and hatred toward all men, as well as social withdrawal and keeping it to ourselves.

> *"Many of the WHHs expressed a strong desire to punish those who had ruined their lives and caused them to be socially stigmatized. In the midst of a failing mental health system, none of the survivors received counselling or psychological first aid for their mentally ill status at the start of the resettlement process. The survivors' mental health has deteriorated as a result of the discriminatory practices and customs".*
>
> KI, Jaffna District

11 Contribution of WHHs

WHHs are not always passive victims of various socioeconomic, cultural, political and natural processes. However, such contributions sometimes remain unnoticed and unacknowledged in our research, they have made considerable contributions to their families and the community in various capacities. In this chapter we highlight a few success stories of WHHs. The KIs and FGDs revealed that the WHHs have made visible impacts in different areas: peacebuilding and reconciliation, employment provision, political participation, providing guidance and activism. It was also noticeable that the WHHs have improved some personal qualities including decision making, working in a team, helping other WHHs and needy, risk taking, self-motivated and being self-made personalities.

The case below showcases the contribution of a WHH to peacebuilding and conflict transformation. The WHH has also received an award for her contributions to peacebuilding by an Italy based INGO.

Peacebuilding and Conflict transformation

I am 57 years old and originally from a town in the central part of the country. I was educated in different schools, as my father was a government servant who worked in several places in Sri Lanka. My family is a big family with nine immediate family members. My mother was not employed. My father had the responsibility of looking after my mother's family too. Therefore, whenever we moved from one place to another, the whole extended family moved. Finally, we ended up in Trincomalee. My father and uncle bought lands in Trincomalee and we had our own house after long years of living in government quarters. My elder sister and other siblings gradually got married with the approval of my parents. All their marriages were arranged marriages. I had a love affair and my parents were fully against it. I waited six years and finally got married to the person I was in love with. My family did not come to my wedding. With time, I was able to convince them and within a year my parents invited me to stay with them. My husband did not like the renewed connection I had with my family. Besides, we had several other problems too that I do not want to disclose here. He started to fight with me. My parents also came to know about the difficult life I am spending with him. With many difficulties, our marriage lasted only two years, and ended in divorce. To protect the family honour, it was not known to others. I gradually stopped attending family gatherings. People asked questions about my husband. With time my parents passed away. I live in our family home with my younger brother and his wife. They do not have any children. Being the elder sister, I am currently the head of the household.

After my divorce, one of my friends helped me to find a job in the government sector. I worked in a government office for five years. As a young divorced woman, I had to face a lot of harassment in my workplace. I diplomatically confronted them. At one point, harassment by a senior officer went up to the level that I resigned from the job. I waited for a long time to get another job. Due to my trilingual ability an NGO that worked in Trincomalee during the tsunami recruited me. I joined for a small salary. But now, I am a leader in the NGO and I do actively participate in many of the outreach activities. I draw a decent salary. Even after several years of my divorce, my family members brought marriage proposals and I denied. I am free now. I can contribute to the development of society and continue to work as a social activist. In my career, I have worked in different capacities. My service is appreciated locally and internationally. I feel very much satisfied that I was able to contribute positively to society. Even in extreme instances and in the peak time of the war, I have met several LTTE leaders and government officers, to protect the innocent people. My role is very much important in the area of peace mediation, reconciliation and coexistence.

My WHH identity is not a problem. I enjoy more freedom to engage in community work. However, it is not without challenges. Social Activist, Trincomalee

The below case explicitly shows the struggles a WHH encounters in her life, this is contextualized within war, peace and displacement. Her case clearly shows her contribution to the development of her family and also her ability to contribute to her village economy and the district economy according to her capacity:

Employment Provision and Building a Successful Family

I look at my past…….I can't believe that I have achieved many things…I brought my children up, have a factory, provided jobs for 20 people, married my sons and daughter away, own a three wheeler, I have my own house and helped my sons and daughters to build their homes. Well, miss, it is because of Jesus. We are originally from Negombo. My father was a fisherman there and he was a migrant fisherman who came to Trincomalee during the season. He came to Trincomalee with my mother, even before we were born. I am 74 years now and a divorced woman. During those days, when my parents came to Trincomalee for fishing, they encroached on government land. That is what many of the migrant fishers did. But we, the children, stayed in Negombo with our grandparents, when our parents migrated for fishing. I have 10 siblings and I was the only one who studied up to GCE (O/L). Others did not study as my parents were not regularly at home. During those days, people did not give priority to education. When I told my mother that I wanted to do a job, she did not allow me. During those days, girls going for work was not preferred in our community.

Later, I went to Trincomalee with my parents. My brothers, who were also fishermen, settled in Trincomalee. Finally, the whole family decided to move to Trincomalee. We built a small house in the government land that my father later legally got. There was a CTB bus depot, closer to our home in Trincomalee. I developed a love affair with a bus driver who worked for that depot. He is a Buddhist from Badulla and I am Christian. Although my family did not agree at first, later they accepted our marriage. We had a Church wedding and our marriage took place in 1977. I have six children. We had a good family life, though we did not have a lot of money. My husband got a promotion after the sixth child was born and he moved back to Badulla. He travelled home often and showed his love with all six children. He also bought me two cows. With the passing of time, he gradually reduced the frequency of his visit to home.

I came to know from one of his relatives that he is having an extramarital affair with another woman from his own village. I lost hope for the future. One day, I wrote a letter to him, asking about the future of our children. He never replied. My parents and brothers supported me to look after the children. They spent on children's education too. Later my father passed away and my mother decided to move back to Negombo, with my elder brother's family. I felt the need to find a job for me. It was very difficult to find a job. I worked in fishing. Then in 1983, communal violence broke out and all Sinhala people living in Trincomalee moved outside the district. I went back to Negombo to live with my mother in Trincomalee with all my six children. I left, everything. We had about 18 cows by that time. Everything was lost. We just took our clothes and reached Negombo with the help of a Navy officer.

Life was extremely difficult in Negombo. I talked with the priest at the Katuwapitiya Church. He helped me to find schools for my children. I decided to go to work in a snack making factory. They paid me 45 Rupees per day. I have to work from morning to 12.00 noon daily. I woke up very early in the morning and prepared string hoppers for my children and I took some string hopper parcels to my workmates. They bought their breakfast from me. I was able to make some more money to feed my children. There were some days that I prayed to Jesus to help me to get my children food. When I got home from work, I stopped closer to

Katuwapitiya Church, with the hope that there would be someone distributing food for charity. When I see them, I thank Jesus. Jesus has never turned my request down. I have always got food for my children from people who distribute food in the Church as charity.

I spent nearly seven years in Negombo. As the situation was improving in Trincomalee, I decided to go back to my home, with my children. When I reached Trincomalee, my house was fully destroyed due to the war. I made a temporary hut with the help of my sons. Then, I started the snack making business. On the first day, I made snacks for one kilo. My children sold them on their way to school. Then a shop owner closer to the school asked me whether I could provide the snacks regularly to his shop. I agreed and many other people too started to place their orders. I increased my production. My children also helped me. But I always asked them to do their studies well. During that time as food and other items were not coming regularly to Trincomalee due to the war, the snack I made reached many places in Trincomalee and I got my orders. One of the neighbouring villagers helped me to transport the products to the nearest town and other shops in the village. My business started to grow. I was able to employ 20 people. I felt so happy. Later, I got some help from the government to buy a light machine to mix flour. I got a loan too from the Samurdhi bank as I showed progress in my business. As a woman without a husband, I too faced problems from men in our village. But I never let them gossip about me. Now, two of my sons are working in the Army. Others are also doing jobs in the private sector. My daughters are also married and I have grandchildren. I live alone in my home now. Three of my children have built their homes closer to mine. Still, I continue my work and support my children. I helped them to get educated, get jobs, get married and finally I helped them to build their houses too. My husband came for my third son's wedding and then he wanted to live with me. But I did not accept his request. He went back to Badulla and later we came to know he passed away. I did not attend the funeral, but the children did. I did not want to create any issues during the funeral. For the third month alms giving, I went and settled the property issues that cropped up after his death. His second wife could not own his house as she was not legally married to my husband. My husband also had 60,000 rupees in his bank account. We decided to give the money and part of the land to his wife, as she was helpless and living alone. I have done all my duties as a mother and it was a tough journey. Although my children are living closer to me, I live alone in this big house. It is good that you talked with me and thank you for listening to my story…..it is the story of many women in this village, when women do not have their husbands, their life is like walking in the thorn.

A WHH from a remote village in Trincomalee

The case below shows another avenue WHHs have taken that stretches from local to global: Her contribution to post conflict reconciliation is very important. She entered politics without political background, power and wealth.

Political Representation

I was born on September 10th, 1971. My parents were from the northern towns of Kankesanthurai and Chulipuram. Vasanthi, my sister, was a member of the EPRLF and was killed in 1989 by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). My younger brother was kidnapped while fighting for the LTTE.

I first came to public attention as Ezhilan's wife in the aftermath of the war. I appeared before the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) in Kilinochchi in 2010 and testified that my husband had gone missing after May 2009. I stated that I witnessed his surrender to the armed forces in the Mullaitivu district in May, 2009. At the time of my deposition before the LLRC, I was a government employee at the Kilinochchi district secretariat.

That revelation made me a sensation at the time. This was the first time after the war that the wife of a senior LTTE leader had dared to appear before a commission and testify that my husband had surrendered and was now missing. I spoke to the BBC Tamil service after my testimony and told them what happened to my husband. I stated that I and my three children were behind my husband Ezhilan as he went to surrender with other senior LTTE leaders. I attended Victoria College in Chulipuram. I met Velayutham Sasitharan (alias Elilan) at school, who was active in the political wing of the rebel LTTE. I fell in love with Elilan, but Elilan advised me to focus on my studies.

I studied accountancy after high school but dropped out in 1992 after landing a job at the Jaffna District Secretariat. Between 1993 and 1996, I worked for the Valikamam West Divisional Secretariat. Elilan and the LTTE relocated to the Vanni after the Sri Lankan military re-captured the Valikamam region in 1996. Between 1997 and 2003, I worked as a clerk for the Mullaitivu District Secretariat. From 2003 to 2013, I worked as a management assistant at the Kilinochchi District Secretariat.

On June 29th, 2017, I was sworn in as Northern Province minister of women's affairs, rehabilitation, social services, food supply and distribution, and industries before Northern Province governor Reginald Cooray in Jaffna. In the first Northern provincial election, I was elected from the Jaffna district with the second highest number of preferential votes, 87,770.

I drew national and international attention with my determined campaign to learn more about my husband's situation. As a result, I received a great deal of sympathy and empathy from Sri Lanka's long-suffering Tamil people. The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) capitalized on this by fielding me as an Ilankai Thamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK) candidate in the September 2013 Northern provincial elections. I easily won with the second highest number of preference votes in Jaffna.

After becoming a provincial councillor, I pursued an independent political path that frequently ran afoul of the TNA hierarchy. I was later "suspended" from the ITAK pending an investigation on disciplinary grounds. This hasn't stopped the unstoppable effort of mine from carrying on with my brand of contentious politics.

Going further back….

Elilan and I were married on June 6, 1998, in Mulliyawalai. Elilan rose through the ranks of the LTTE, eventually becoming the political head of the Vavuniya District. Following the Norwegian-mediated peace in 2002, he was appointed political head of the Trincomalee District. After the Sri Lankan military re-captured the Eastern Province, Elilan relocated to the Vanni and joined me at the Kilinochchi District Secretariat.

My family was among the 300,000 plus Vanni residents who fled as the Sri Lankan military advanced in late 2008-early 2009. My family surrendered to the Sri Lankan military on May 18, 2009, at Vattavaagal, along with senior LTTE leaders. After surrendering to the Sri Lankan military, Elilan vanished.
My three daughters and I spent time in IDP camps before returning to work as a Management Assistant in the Kilinochchi District Secretariat's Samurdhi Department. My children were relocated to Chulipuram to live with my family.

I ran as a Tamil National Alliance candidate in Jaffna District in the 2013 provincial council election and was elected to the Northern Provincial Council. Several attacks were launched against me during the

election campaign. On September 20, 2013, a vehicle transporting me was attacked by men on motorcycles near Chunnakam. On September 20, 2013, a group of about 70 armed men dressed in military uniform attacked my home in Chulipuram, injuring some of my supporters as well as an election monitor. On the day of the election, September 21, 2013, a fake edition of the pro-TNA newspaper Uthayan appeared, falsely claiming that I had defected to the ruling United People's Freedom Alliance. This fabricated story was repeated on the pro-UPFA Dan TV and Asian Tribune websites.

I was appointed to assist the Chief Minister with the rehabilitation of war victims following the election. On October 11, 2013, I took my oath as a provincial councillor in front of Chief Minister C. V. Vigneswaran.

My campaign has taken me to Denmark, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, and the United States since my election. The nationalist Island newspaper reported in January 2014 that the Sri Lankan military was considering sending me for "rehabilitation," a move that I have stated I will oppose.

I have been campaigning to find and release my husband Elilan, whom I believe is in the custody of the Sri Lankan government. I have also advocated for the families of others who went missing during the civil war, as well as war widows. During their visits to Sri Lanka, I met with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay and US Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues Stephen Rapp.

A local politician

The below case study shows the success story of a WHHs who has contributed to her family.

I am 60 years old and a widow. My husband died in 2006, but he has been bedridden for 18 years. I have four children, two boys and two girls. The eldest two, one boy and one girl are deaf. Now both of them are married. I am happy that they are having a good life. My third daughter is 23 years old and she is in the college of education. Once her course is completed, I am planning to have her wedding. She is engaged. The other son is working as a driver. He is 25 years old.

I am from Trincomalee and my husband is from Jaffna. My sister and her husband ran a business in Kurunegala. Before our marriage, my husband had his shop next to my sister's shop. During the 1983 riots, all Tamil owned shops were burnt and my husband's brother was killed in the riots. So, my husband came to Trincomalee with my sister and her husband. It is how I met him and later married him. When he married me, I was working in the government sector. After we had our first two children, I stopped working. When we came to know that both our children are deaf, we were very much worried. I looked after them, and when they were about five years and six years old, I admitted them to the school for special needs children. Both of them had to live in the school hostel. Although it was difficult for me as a mother to send them to hostels at the age of five, I convinced myself that the education and training that they will get in their schools will benefit them in the future. While my children were schooling, I worked for the private sector to support the family income. My relatives did not like me going for work in a private company. I had my third and fourth children later. They did not have any problems like the older children.

My husband bought a three wheeler. He hired it to supplement the family income. But it was not enough for a family of four. After two years, the trishaw had some problems and it was kept in our home. My husband had to face some financial difficulties. Without informing me, he bought a van on lease. Although during the

first three four months we got enough hires, we did not get regular hires after that. So, we could not pay the lease, and finally the van was seized by the leasing company. We lost everything. In 2006 when my husband passed away, he had a loan worth 1.2 million. I settled that slowly.

I have studied up to GCE (O/L). After my husband passed away, I joined several NGO/ CSOs. I am a member of the Amara Forum. In one of the NGO/ CSOs, I worked as a caretaker. I wanted to educate my children. So, I continue to do several things. Before I went to work, I made string hoppers and my son took them to the shops. I can make different varieties of food. I got a very good demand from my neighbours for my food. I maintain strict health and cleanliness. Whenever they place an order, I made food for them. I was involved with several NGO/ CSOs and I got training in food preparation, packing and marketing. A woman like me cannot be lazy, shy or afraid of society, if we have to bring up our children. Within my capacity, I have done many jobs to feed my children and educate them. My elder son has also studied up to GCE (O/L). But I was worried what job he could do as he is a deaf. One of my friends introduced me to a local politician. On that day, I did not have money to feed my children. I told him my problems and he gave me 1000 rupees and asked me to come to his office with my son. He gave a labourer job for my son in the department of agriculture. I was very happy that he was able to get a government job.

After the first two children were married, I had to think about the other two. My youngest daughter was very good in her studies. She got selected for the college of education. Now she is getting ready to marry. I did her engagement ceremony. I bought her many things within my limit. They know my hard work. To save money for my daughter's wedding, I worked at the 'hela bojun' (traditional food stall). I made ulundu vadai (a local snack). It was very popular among customers. As the demand increased, I bought a machine to grind ulundu. I got a loan from the government to buy a grinder. I have repaid the loan. I am not going to the food stall now, after I had an accident. It happened in 2020. The pan that I use to fry vadai fell on me accidentally and I burnt my legs and hand. Since then, I have not gone to work. I cannot stand for a long time and work. The food stall closes at 10 in the night every day. I do my business from home now. But I am happy that my children are standing on their own feet.

An Amara Forum WHH from Trincomalee

The stories highlighted above reflect how the WHHs despite the challenges they face in their everyday life, were able to navigate difficult terrain to contribute to the wellbeing of their families, society and country. The stories also reveal they had to navigate these terrains within the established gender norms and practices of Sri Lanka in general and more specifically relevant to their communities which are deeply embedded within a patriarchal framework which operates at different levels. In the above stories, the WHHs are coming from communities which are following stricter forms of patriarchy. As gender norms in Sri Lanka generally centre on the marital status of a woman, in the above success stories, all WHHs routes to the WHHs status are related to death, divorce or forced disappearance of their husbands. They also have become heads of the households within the context of war, which has affected them directly and indirectly. They have become responsible for providing for their families, and hence altered the traditional expectations related to married women, and unlike male breadwinners, they are also forced to prioritise their family responsibilities over employment. They have achieved the present levels of success and wellbeing for them and their families with many challenges. By doing so, taking on this herculean task, with all odds stacked against them, these women directly support an already stretched state social security apparatus. Their narratives show their agency and empowerment.

Further above research finding have also shown that co-support women offer each other, mostly in the form of formal or informal organisation to help neighbours, relatives, friends and other community women plays crucial role in their survival. Whether it be COVID-19 relief efforts, caring for family members, improving access to vulnerable women and communities, protecting or preventing sexual and gender based violence in their communities, the women have involved, participated and led. Within the home structure particularly, we see these WHH putting themselves last in caring for dependents, at the cost of their health, livelihood opportunities and their future as individuals, contributing to income and safety. The WHH particularly, have been seen to prioritise education of their children and their economic and care contributions support the development of the next generation of citizens. Within the home, in their local communities, within their districts and outside at national and international levels the impact and contribution of these WHH has been felt and also not been recognised as it has within the patriarchal system.

12 Discussion and Reflection

As pointed out in Chapter one, WHHs are growing globally due to changes taking place in the traditional family structures and changing economic, political, social and cultural phenomena. Most of the literature pertaining to WHHs are represented as poor, marginalized, vulnerable, oppressed and powerless, influenced by the socio economic and cultural environments. The researchers have also further questioned the concepts of households and headships by challenging the existing concepts in order to reflect on how the women are recognised and identified and this was only made possible by having the women themselves as part of the team to frame this research. All such discussions have opened discourse that WHHs are a diverse and evolving category. Hence, understanding who WHHs are, the roots leading to their recognition and evolution, what problems they face and what contributions they have made are important questions to explore. Their stories of striving, surviving and their contribution at household, community, national and international levels are not adequately captured.

In the context of Sri Lanka, a country in transition from war to a post-war environment, who constitute WHHs, through an organically defined way is important. It has bearings on post-war development and gender planning. We argue that the concept of WHH can reflect the household heterogeneity and could lead to move away from the conventional, patriarchal conception of who should head a household and what constitutes this household. With the onset of the JVP revolution, opening up of the economy, the civil war, rapidly changing processes of globalization and the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the masculine and feminine identities of Sri Lankan men and women have undergone changes challenging the traditional identities and norms related to household headship to a certain extent in different geographical and in some social groups, though such changes are not equally distributed. Within certain geographical (rural) and socio-cultural contexts, the patriarchal structures continue to oppress women (Vithanage 2015).

Our research aimed to establish an organic definition of WHHs that is thus far absent in Sri Lanka and that could also directly contribute to and influence Viluthu, Amara Forum and Samasam networks through an extensive consultation process with different stakeholders in the concerned demography. In doing so, we tried to contribute to the capacity building processes of WHHs, women, youth volunteers and youth lead researchers through participatory dialogue and research that result in policy development. Even though the journey of building capacities started with this dimension, the journey and its results have demonstrated that participatory or inclusive processes within the research provided for capacity benefits for all stakeholders of the EPF. Within the context of Sri Lanka, and more particularly in the war and conflict affected North and East, it should be accepted that WHHs identities are marked by the context of war, conflict, tsunami and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic, apart from the other socio, economic, political, environmental and cultural changes taking place, which are triggered by the processes related to globalization as well.

12.1 A Note on Our Methodology

The methodology of the research was heavily benefitted through a series of participatory approaches that we include under the EPF as explained in Chapter Three. We started with introductory consultation sessions with women and youth. We used a detailed questionnaire survey, FGDs, KI -s, telephone interviews, reflection meetings and follow up interviews with youth leaders, youth volunteers (EPF stakeholders) and contextual analysis questionnaire respondents as important tools to collect data and information. This sharing of information and peer learning strengthened the power-sharing model within the EPF. Triangulation was used to cross check the data collected through questionnaires. The mixed method approach provided a number of benefits in terms of data verification. The research had to be conducted under strict COVID-19, health guidelines. Limited mobility, poor networks, transport, lack of devices and sudden lockdowns were challenges to the data collection activities. The limitations were overcome using mobile phones, Kobo data collection methods and Zoom meetings. Even though the limitations were seen as major challenges at the time, it also proved that participatory methods can be adopted even during such crisis periods which benefited the process and its result. The research covered the districts of Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Batticaloa and Trincomalee. We have included WHHs from all ethnicities as informants.

We used the EPF to explore the organic definition of WHHs that provided the space for multiple stakeholders to interact in the construction of organic definitions. We created an inclusive platform to find organic definitions of WHHs. The EPF is considered as a holistic approach to ensure equal participation. The EPF works as an evolving framework that embeds all stakeholder inputs. This is while being open to new submissions from the target groups to conceptualize the project's approach to meet its objectives. Viluthu, Amara Forum and Samasam, will hold the responsibility of the EPF to ensure a continuous documentation of WHHs in policy, advocacy and programmes, as the WHHs are an evolving and dynamic category.

During the initial workshops and reflection meetings related to the preparation of questionnaire, challenging the conventional definitions of household headship, our participants discovered that household headship is associated with power, decision making, household responsibilities, financial and other resource management, social acceptance, and the role of economic provider. The participants did not limit their definitions of WHHs to the narrow, conventional and patriarchal conceptualizations. The contribution of Amara Forum and Samasam to our research should be underlined, as their contributions were highly beneficial to the project. Their active involvement was seen during workshops, reflection meetings, identification of potential participants, key informants and helping us with follow up telephone interviews.

12.2 Establishing the Definition of WHHs

In establishing an organic definition of WHHs, we had to seek to understand women's perspectives on headship and of WHH. We also had to capture the changing understanding of headship and household. During the discussions we noticed that there was a need to break down the words and terminologies to resonate with what women are connected with, a need to explore their socio-economic backgrounds, access to services, social networks, their vulnerabilities, precarities that shape their identities. The whole discussion on formulating an organic definition of WHHs in our study was placed in the war and the post-war context. This formed the foundation to understand their heterogeneity, evolving nature and the dynamic categories of women themselves that require specific focus and attention based on context or intervention. All of this cannot be done without capturing the essence of WHH contributions. Their contributions were connected with care work within their families and in other families, their volunteerism to support other vulnerable women, children and communities through the small or larger social service initiatives they undertook individually and collectively or the political movements that they are leading and protecting in this changing political landscape post-war.

12.3 WHHs: What Does It Mean To Us?

In exploring the conceptual clarifications, our literature review confirmed that researching the gender of household headship has created a lot of arguments in academia, policy and in development practice. The gendered terminology associated with household headship has changed over the time. Female Headed Households (FHHs), Female Heads of the Households (FHHs), Women Headed Households (WHHs), Women Heads of the Households (WHHs), Widow Headed Households (WHHs), Widow Heads of Households (WHHs) and Women Responsible Households (WRHHs) are some dominant terminologies appearing in the literature. Our research goes with the concept of WHHs to reflect Women Heads of Households (WHHs) as this particular terminology was used by different stakeholders and including the WHHs themselves. They did not make distinction between Female Heads of the Households (FHHs) and Women Heads of the Households (WHHs) due to the way they are interchangeably used in their mother tongue as explained at the beginning of the report. Also, the relatability and understanding they have of the concept and terminology is very important and cannot be side-lined or considered negligible. Further, the term WHHs as it is used in this research was to consciously provide space for the inclusion of transgender women as well when further evolution of this in-depth search on identity and categorisation is continued and if transgender women also continue to identify as such.

12.4 Heterogeneity of WHHs

Our research documents several main WHHs categories that includes widows, women whose husbands are missing, women whose husbands are imprisoned, women who are separated from their spouses, divorced women, women whose husband has left, women who are married, re-married women, unmarried women, women in open relationships, girl children. In total our research identified 11 main categories of WHHs along with 58 sub-categories and several other overlapping categories. We document the vulnerable situations of the GHHs, who are left out on their own, in the absence of the traditional support systems. We also noticed transgender women have also become the heads of the households though they are not high in number. We claim that the potential list of WHHs would continue to include evolving categories. The new categories entering the list are closely connected to vulnerabilities and precarities created by changing contexts underpinned by social, cultural, economic, political and natural forces and transforming gender concepts. By listing out organic understanding of WHHs, we call for an all-encompassing definition of headship, and recognition for women's own identification and connection rather than imposing structured definitions on them. This is done with the frame of the possibility or eventual evolution of the same from time to time, based on the above described contexts which may even include terminologies. In this, we call for informed discussions that educate and empower women and all stakeholders to be informed and understand and acknowledge the diversity. It is imperative to recognise the multiple categories in order to better reach, address issues pertaining to respective categories and enable meaningful inclusion. Where focused attention is needed, we emphasise the importance of acknowledging the diversity, whilst choosing the relevant categories based on the context for the intervention at hand. The need to choose target groups/categories within WHH should not deny other categories of WHH of their place within the group arbitrarily. Hence, it also forms a flexible approach, wherein without exclusion of any relevant categories, target or focused attention is also possible based on context.

Although the research team approached transgender women, not all of them were willing to participate in the research. Transgender people in Sri Lanka face multiple discrimination in their everyday life, from seeking employment to accessing services. Society fails to recognize and accept the gender identity of transgender people. Sri Lanka has ratified the international human rights declarations that calls for the protection of the rights of individuals against violence, discrimination and abuses. However, the legal frame to recognize transgender people is still weak. They are not yet recognized as men or women or as a third gender. The research team acknowledges and recognizes that transgender women who identify as WHH need to be included in the WHHs category rather than as a third gender that maybe contrary to what they identify as. At the same time we recognise that within the category of transgender women, sub categories or connected categories may want to be identified differently. There will be space for such adaptation provided that the principles of heterogeneity, evolution and own-representation are practiced.

12.5 Socio-Economic Background and Recognition

The socio-economic background of our informants reflected diversity in terms of age, ethnicity, education, employment, vocational training, resettlement status, income and expenditure. Majority of our respondents belong to middle and old age groups. Most of them have direct experience of war, and experience the continuing legacy of war. Low level of education, irregular employment opportunities, lack of relevant job training, lower income and higher expenditures are faced by many WHHs. While the majority of the WHHs are caught up in this dilemma, that did not negate WHHs to, regardless of the huge challenges they continue to face, demonstrate immense skill, courage, perseverance, commitment and selfless acts of care as mothers, entrepreneurs, community workers, social workers or politicians.

After becoming the heads of the households, these women continuously contributed to their family income to ensure the wellbeing of the dependent family members. Although the community has not fully accepted their new roles as WHHs, it has not prevented them from making progress.

12.6 Access to Services

Many WHHs accept that they have basic access to services such as education, health,[34] finance, banking, security and legal. They also have access to basic necessities such as clean water and electricity. It was noted and considering the fact that all these women belong to former conflict areas and tsunami affected areas, adequate attention has not been given to psychosocial issues of the WHHs. This could be related to identification and definition issues as well. Reconstruction programmes tend to focus heavily on physical infrastructure, undermining the importance of psychosocial aspects. The WHHs mentioned the barriers to access social services where transport, distance, language and disability were listed as important factors. In addition, the WHHs have to play multiple roles at home, their workplace and in their communities, which consumes most of their time available for work and to spend with their families or for their own self-development or well-being. Forms of sexual and gender based violence such as sexual harassment, sexual bribery, domestic violence, stigma and social exclusion (caused due to victim blaming) were also found to be barriers.

12.7 Vulnerabilities and Precarities

Being WHHs, women face multiple vulnerabilities and precarities. GHHs and/or WHHs had to face the problem of underage and early marriages due to the economic hardships of their parents and war. Even after a decade of war, child/underage marriages were reported among the respondents. Majority of the underage marriages are taking place with the consent of the children under 18, though that is not legally accepted. In some cases while some children below 18 refuse to adhere to the request or coercion of their parents to get married at an early age, in other situations. It is pertinent to reflect on the circumstances/precarities of poverty, hopelessness, 'need' for protection from sexual and gender based violence and lack of proper care surrounding them that determines/influences their communication on this subject.

Poverty and indebtedness form an important aspect of vulnerabilities experienced by the WHHs. They often face income deficiencies and overcome the situation through diverse ways, which pushes them to the brink

[34] Further study requires to be done on particular access to gender specific health care.

of poverty and vulnerability. Majority of them have taken loans to cover household expenditures and manage children's educational expenses. They have also taken loans in the past to construct houses and repay loans. They hardly take loans for productive investments. The future loan aspirations of the WHHs show that most respondents want to get loans to educate their children. All of this demonstrated that WHHs included within the study were not meeting adequate income for essential expenses. The need for loans or financial assistance was good, however, their credit worthiness for many of these loans is questionable in the present scheme/system given their other social vulnerabilities related directly and indirectly to the war and conflict that pushes WHHs to seek financial assistance from micro finance companies or unlicensed institutions through which they may face further economic hardship and even sexual abuse. It is also important to note that some old inherited vulnerabilities such as class and caste continue to affect the lives of many. One of the reasons identified for not marrying is closely connected with caste identity. Continued gender discriminatory livelihood efforts, whether direct support or capacity building, narrows WHH opportunities further. Access to important assets such as land, where, even when ownership is found, there are barriers to utilising the benefits. Hurdles that affects all parts of their lives and that challenge, like others, is passed onto the next generation that is also left with facing deteriorating social safeguard measures including the recent prevalence of drug, alcohol and illicit liquor consumption and related abuses.

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic posed many challenges to women and the WHHs are one of the worst hit groups. The pandemic could be also identified as one of the root causes of the formulation of new types of WHHs. When men lost their employment due to lockdowns and closure of companies, women undertook new roles to financially support their families. In addition, natural disasters, human made disasters and radicalization of males in communities have all played their parts at various strengths and levels affecting different categories of WHHs differently. Considering the present trends of these processes, they could create more burden to the WHHs. Our research shows that the pandemic situation and its repercussions have exacerbated the existing inequalities for women and girls in all spaces, from health and economy to security and social protection. Similarly, the research found irregular rain and drought causing a heavy strain on WHHs. Like the pandemic, the fast emerging impacts of climate change are also felt by WHHs, particularly when it comes to access to resources such as water and ability to earn sufficient incomes in their traditional livelihoods.

Our research documents many women who have successfully contributed to the household and local economies, by engaging in income earning activities. Especially the multiple industries or opportunities WHHs avail themselves because of insufficient income and the continued survival mode in search of livelihood opportunities, even if inadequate for their expenses. Illicit liquor production is undertaken by groups of women in many instances. WHHs have joined such groups and engage in the production of illicit liquor which leave most of their dependent children vulnerable. Given the rise in illicit liquor production, it is feared that the school dropout rate might have increased during the pandemic. Amara Forum and Samasam women expressed the actions taken by them to curtail such activities, with the help of the GN/GS. Such actions include lobbying, awareness programmes and dialogue. It is pertinent to note that unless and otherwise, WHHs involved in illegal activities to generate income are provided sustainable alternatives and safe spaces, addressing these issues will only be in the superficial or there is danger of the issue rising again. Many WHHs have faced sexual harassment in their work place, homes and in public places. Repeated experiences of violence, whether it be sexual harassment, sexual abuse, domestic abuse, sexual bribery all demonstrate the extreme vulnerabilities of WHHs and the higher possibility of them and their children facing further such experiences.

In addition to the above, some categories of WHH do not fall under traditional construct of family or household. This may include GHH, having dependents that are not immediate family, residing in a friend or

relative's house while heading their own 'household', having multiple children with different partners whilst not married and such a list can be expounded further based on the many subcategories. Also, social stigma, exclusion, discrimination and non-recognition of these WHH add to their precarities.

12.8 Social Networks and Support Systems

Social networks and traditional sources of support that existed in the communities from families and friends are decreasing. However, the informants have access to such support systems in their communities. Our research confirms that in the absence of active social networks, WHHs feel insecure, helpless and worried. They have become members of women's organizations, self-help groups and savings and credit groups. However, only a handful of WHHs are in executive positions in such organizations. We also noticed that among our respondents, only 14.8% of the informants said that they knew about Amara Forum and Samasam. Many WHHs have joined women's and other organizations to get financial and social benefits whilst seeking networking and skills development. Amara Forum and Samasam are not engaged in giving financial aid. Their main areas of work concentrate on advocacy and capacity building. Their involvement in the community brings in a sense of collective identity to women including WHHs that has also been valued by WHHs determining their seeking of membership. This project will expand Amara Forum and Samasam's future scope. Therefore definitions for Amara Forum and Samasam are important second to definitions for WHHs.

The traditional practises and patriarchal dominance also challenge WHHs and increase dependency on the state and non-state actors' support. The WHHs are taking the responsibilities for child rearing and care of elders and sick family members, as well as subjected to violence, forced to tolerate sexual harassment and assaults. In addition, they face significant gender discrimination and challenges related to poverty, hunger, malnutrition, overwork, domestic violence and sexual violence. The challenges encountered by WHHs are deliberately ignored and their voices silenced during conflicts or in the aftermath. The research highlighted the immense significance of peer support that WHHs provide to each other in different forms whether it be an ear to listen to their troubles or to actually directly help in the issues and responsibilities of fellow WHHs. However, the need for systemic and focused attention on mental and emotional wellbeing of WHH and lack of measures for its improvement remain. The failure to address WHHs mental and health problems in a post conflict system would have undesirable social and economic consequences on them. Due to these experiences, they undergo extensive trauma, other mental health-related challenges or become compelled to undertake duties that are traditionally or culturally not part of their life. Some of our respondents are also ex-combatants. They live a life of double edged sword. While they are marginalized and excluded from their own communities, they are under surveillance even after their rehabilitation that extremely limits their opportunities and causes further harm.

Our research attempted to frame organic definitions for WHHs and analyse the challenges faced by them. The findings of our research have wider policy implications and re-emphasize the need to go for an organic definition of WHHs while acknowledging its dynamic nature. If heterogeneity of WHHs is not acknowledged, and recognized in an inclusive manner and understanding the complexity and its dynamic evolving nature, many WHHs may be left out from direct projects, programmes and overall policies that could benefit women and WHHs. This could directly contribute the socio, political, cultural and economic progress. It is also important to consider WHHs perspectives in identifying their needs and priorities, through a bottom up approach.

13 Policy Recommendations

13.1 General Recommendations

1. The research calls for the recognition of WHHs as a distinct social group. WHHs is very much a distinct group of women as found in the research. Their socio-economic backgrounds, influence and issues affecting them are nuanced and specific. In addition, the state census depicts over 25.8% of households are WHHs, without having an inclusive form of a definition for WHHs at that time, and given that this research has found main categories and multiple subcategories of WHHs, it can be assumed that the population of WHHs in Sri Lanka is significant and over 25.8% of the total household data and is growing. This further strengthens the reasoning to have WHHs as a distinct group.

2. The research has documented evolving categories and heterogeneity of WHHs influenced by various contexts and events. It is essential to recognize the fact that WHHs is an evolving category and the categorization can vary according to different socio, economic, cultural, political and historical contexts within the changing local and global contexts. We recommend that all definitions accept this frame of heterogeneity and dynamic nature. This research has demonstrated that WHHs, women and transgender women want to play a critical role in defining their identities and should be included in the process in a meaningful way.

3. The research has recognised WHHs contributions in various levels-family, society, national and international levels to be recognized and valued. Their contributions have been vital for the survival of the society and therefore, recognition for them should not be limited to identifying them as only developmental beneficiaries but also as partners of development, considering their capabilities and contributions.

13.2 Recommendations to Government, International Organisations and Civil Society

4. We recommend focused/targeted interventions by the state for WHHs given their distinct status and significant population. These targeted interventions have to acknowledge and accept the inclusive form of the definition of WHHs and based on the context such interventions can focus on specific groups of WHHs as required, through needs and concerns identified. In addition, we also recommend, given the significant population of WHHs and their impact on society, that all interventions take WHHs into consideration (ex: WHH Impact Assessment) and or prioritise them.

5. The research observed that the social stigma, social exclusion and cultural discrimination of WHHs formed huge barriers to them effectively participating in social, political, economic and cultural activities. Therefore, we strongly recommend to the state that this awareness and acceptance of WHHs in its dynamic and evolving form requires to be done at multiple levels including incorporating these changing norms and building acceptance within the educational curricula in schools, conduct social awareness programmes, set exemplary measures recognizing and valuing WHHs contributions and provide for affirmative measures to increase their socio-political participation (ex: schools to provide for enrolment quota for WHH children, afterschool programmes, quota in government service for WHH, political candidate quota for WHH etc.)

6. The research observed the absence of state discourse on the inclusion of transgender women through a participatory and representative form. We recommend that there is an urgent need to create dialogue to find out from transgender women and other gender identity groups of what new policy and mechanisms they require and where their concerns and needs can be incorporated into existing or new policies (recognizing their fluidity and heterogeneity).

7. The research found that WHHs had mostly or almost at all times, precarious nature of employment (ex: temporary, seasonal, daily), inability to participate in long term or permanent employment positions influencing their job selection, burden of caregiving, the need for external support and were provided with opportunities in the form of trainings and work offered restricted in the traditional or gender stereotyped sectors. Owing to this, there is a need to have a holistic and long-term approach that values informed consultations with WHHs that expands on opportunities made available to them. It is not just sufficient to hold a consultation with WHHs categories, as the climate and experience around WHH has continued for so long to be limiting. Informative and expansive explorations may provide for inclusive ways to reflect on gender stereotypical training and job opportunities and change the trends and norms set in. Provision of formal sector employment opportunities should include child care services, maternal and paternal leave and options for flexible work arrangements.

8. Clear review and reflection is needed for each such initiative which on its own needs to be coordinated among the different actors (government, UN, INGO, NGO, CSO, CBO). Structural strengthening needs to take place, recognizing that from the onset, given their socio-economic backgrounds many categories of WHHs within this research have low education levels or have issues of poverty and inherited poverty and the direct and indirect impact of war and conflict. Education opportunities for these WHHs, accommodating them in programmes will support in structural longstanding development that can help women access other opportunities that they were discriminated from.

9. The crisis of microfinance loans and economic exploitation of WHHs demonstrates that there is a need to combine employment targeted interventions with financial literacy, access to services from banks/financial institutions that are licensed and develop loans or financial schemes that accommodate WHHs. There is a need for proactive steps to regulate at central and local levels and protect WHHs from exploitation and even though NGOs/CSOs plays a critical role in raising awareness, the onus falls on the state who have thus far deprived adequate safety measures. There is multiplied harmful impact due to sexual bribery and abuse connected to the microfinance institutions. The research also found interim protective measures taken by local officers and community WHH which can be shared as best practices and further developed.

10. The criticism of the blanket approach in trying to enable most WHHs self-employed is an artificial measure that may have serious sustainability challenges when addressing WHHs economic concerns and therefore needs to be carefully reviewed. Also the government can introduce apprenticeship programmes under successful or prominent WHHs. It is also recommended to take necessary actions to enhance collective farming, collective enterprise, and collective educational models.

11. The research has demonstrated the numerous challenges faced by ex-combatants primarily with them being seen as ‘evidence of war’ resulting in social exclusion. Continuous high surveillance also prevents them from participating in normal life. Therefore, it is recommended that the state promotes social inclusion through a multi-agency approach towards integration. This should include accountable measures protecting and increasing safety of ex-combatants. The contradictory aims of the social security apparatus and the security apparatus impedes progress towards social integration and therefore measures to address this stand

at the heart of any resolve. Affirmative actions for inclusion require efforts such as targeted socio-economic service and resource provision prioritizing ex-combatants (the subcategories of WHH relating to ex-combatants), post-war/post-rehabilitation psychosocial support and integration of ex-combatants in state sectors (non-security sectors) strengthening social acceptance of them.

12. Efforts in government coordination regarding social integration, livelihood and other sectors should include CSO/CBO participation. The efforts of government agencies and actors enabling this need to be incentivized to promote and value these efforts.

13. Given that WHHs have demonstrated as front-liners in peace actions, there is a need for legal reform to strengthen protection of civil and political rights. Detention of any WHH may have (in addition to any challenges to democratic processes if any) a higher socio-economic cost given the nature and role played by WHHs in their families and communities. There is a need for the social security apparatus of the state and socio-economic programmes by state and non-state to prioritize addressing concerns and needs of such women and their families during and after the detention/imprisoned period.

14. The government should recognize that WHHs are vulnerable to corruption, sexual exploitations and various forms of violence and harassment in different places. Overall addressing of corruption needs vast improvement and political will of the leadership. We recommend to further the discourse on legal reform and legal processes reform (that expressly recognises criminality and facilitate access to legal services and response mechanisms) to address sexual bribery and sexual harassment effectively. Effective and accountable complaint mechanisms and prompt administrative measures in response to complaints and measures to prevent sexual bribery/sexual harassment and provide protection against retaliation must be taken by state, police, armed forces, private institutions (ex: microfinance) and non-state agencies (ex: NGOs). The redress measures developed should take into account the different barriers/challenges faced by WHHs in accessing services including legal services in its design and implementation. Given the significant numbers found in the results of this study we strongly recommend immediate steps on increasing legal aid services and awareness among WHH for sexual bribery, harassment, exploitation, corruption and sexual violence. We also recommend awareness to listed categories of alleged perpetrators on these subjects so that there is greater awareness, sensitivity and response.

15. We recommend all measures and services of the state to be accessible to WHHs in their language of choice (both official languages). Even though it was found that WHHs had basic access to multiple essential services, not receiving services in the preferred language has directly affected WHHs and questions have arisen to the extent of accessing any said service.

16. It is imperative to understand various needs of WHHs. The government should take measures to address and prioritise the psychosocial needs of WHHs who are differently affected by the war. This would allow the WHHs to cope with the psychosocial problems they are silently undergoing. Such service providers should be professional counsellors. These actors must have adequate and relevant skills and knowledge to deal on these issues in a gender and conflict sensitive manner. It is strongly recommended that other state actors directly in contact with WHHs such as WDO, GN/GS, DS, DO, CRPO also have such capacity building. NGOs/CSOs can play a key role in supporting this direct service provision or capacity building of the various actors in addition to the state. It is also recommended to establish local forums to air grievances as part of a psychosocial support network, identify emerging issues which CBOs/CSOs can support and participate in.

17. We strongly recommend the development of a national policy for WHH that integrates multi-agency participation and strategies, wherein, like this research, the participation of WHHs is fundamental from inception and requires to continue throughout implementation. This is relevant for sustainability and ownership by WHH and all relevant stakeholders. However, state and non-state actors (UN/INGO/NGO/CSO) involved would require to develop and sustain measures to be accountable to WHHs.

18. We recommend that WHH and GHH concerns and needs would be one of the top priorities in achieving Sustainable Development Goal No.5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls. We recommend the government should commit fully and partner with local and international organisations for creating opportunities and space for equitable participation of WHHs and GHHs.

29. Different entities dealing with WHHs directly and indirectly (UN/State/INGO/NGO/CSOs) can collaborate with Amara Forum and Samasam for continuous interventions related to WHHs. The institutions working with the WHHs/GHHs can revise aid and welfare programmes for WHHs participation/implementation and increase capacity building and livelihood development. This can be done with networking and collaboration with different institutions. Capacity building and advocacy programmes can be introduced to the youth to ensure project sustainability.

20. We recommend that the state initiate measures to formally recognize unpaid care work and acknowledge its positive impact and consciously make efforts to redistribute it to reduce the double burden faced by WHHs. In addition, given that WHHs are also involved in paid care work, to introduce adequate legal and policy reform and initiate dialogue to build in measures that advance the dignity of care work and provide for economic bargaining positioning for WHHs to reduce economic exploitation of this sub category of WHHs. Non-state actors can promote and support these mechanisms and dialogue.

21. Given that care work, economic concerns and travel are some of the major barriers for WHH to accessing many forms of services, the State must support and provide child care services, mobile socio-economic services and develop public transport (that is harassment free) and proper road access to remote areas. This should be considered as critical and must be prioritized in the developmental plans. Particularly for WHHs living with disabilities, mobile services were recommended as a bridging measure of the immense gap in access they face at present (this does not negate the structural measures for inclusion needed to be introduced and/or strengthened for WHH living with disabilities).

22. For GHHs particularly, address root causes for GHH and work closely with CSOs and international organisations to minimise formation. In addition, the state should provide accommodation to support GHH continuing their education, provide specific support for GHH with children and ensure their rights as children. The Child Protection Authority needs to be equipped with adequate physical, financial and human resources to combat violence and address issues related to GHHs.

23. Climate change, natural and manmade disasters and the recent pandemic has had a severe impact on WHH, exposing their vulnerabilities such as inadequate food security and threat to livelihoods and state and non-state actors must develop long-term plans to address these issues. Supporting and strengthening women's resilience building, taking measures to reduce climate change are crucial steps that continue to remain ignored in which state and non-state actors can contribute.

24. One of the key gaps identified in identification of issues and addressing the same was inadequate budgetary allocations made by the state. It is imperative that the state demonstrates clear political will to address issues relating to WHHs and promote inclusion and appoint suitable representatives to lead and implement these measures in the relevant state agencies.

25. Overall legal reform of all laws and its application contrary to the wellbeing and rights of WHH/GHH including all personal laws must be made without undue delay.

26. The responsible state agencies including Census and Statics Department should work closely with CSOs and other state institutions to document the evolving categories of WHHs and definitions of disabilities (understanding contextual differences) that does not marginalize war affected communities. This should be done in partnership with CSOs and CBOs with advanced technology employed in documentation. These institutions should also revise the way they define WHHs accordingly.

27. The government should provide for proactive regulatory mechanisms to prevent early/child marriage and the legal age for marriage must be applied to all regardless of their religious, caste and poverty backgrounds. Legal reform, response services and access, awareness raising, provision of opportunities for girls and women, countering SGBV all underpin processes to address this.

28. The government should bring in laws and policy that recognizes the needs and concerns of WHHs living with disabilities and WHHs caring for persons with disabilities or children with disabilities. This must include the recognition of the inclusive form (including 'hidden disabilities and conflict related disabilities) of definition for disability to tailor targeted programmes for them, taking into account the heterogeneity of the group based on the disability they are living with. Much is needed yet absent in enabling and improving access and equitable participation for WHH living with disabilities. Non state actors in addition to the state can support and play a critical role in advancing access and equitable measures, recognize inclusive forms of definition for disability when identifying beneficiaries and stakeholders and contribute to focused programmes. The principle of tailor-made programmes, projects and recommendations must be applied to all the different categories of WHH.

29. Non state actors (NGO/CSO/CBO/INGO) should not always target programmes that are focusing on grants and financial assistance alone. These organizations should also take measures to involve WHHs in the areas of activism, social mobilisation and advocacy related programmes.

30. Land rights and access to land and other fixed assets should be enhanced. In this regard, legal and policy reform, demilitarization, speedy/efficient and transparent administrative processes to enable documentation establishing ownership of land and assets should be established as matters of priority. The contextual analysis showed that 50% of the total respondents had ownerships of their land while 14% held permits to use land. However, the research also found out that many people including WHHs owned land that they were not able to access due to militarization, encroachment or other legal issues pertaining to private land. WHH prioritization is needed to resolve such land matters and reinstate ownership and access to land taking into account the socio economic impacts and the presence of dependents in WHH families.

31. Meaningful dialogue needs to be built in communicating grievances, establishing accountable truth-seeking measures and removal of coercive strategies (ex: death certificate, denial of their experience, intimidation and surveillance) practiced for WHHs linked to families of the disappeared and missing. Justice measures can be recommended and built together with WHHs from these families/those WHH responsible for adult or minor dependents from these families. Whilst preserving the rights of the victims of disappearance, short term and long-term compensatory measures (both structural and institutional) should be

introduced without any further delay. Such measures should be relevant and adequate and not tokenistic/piecemeal. Guarantees demanded by the WHHs in these categories must be recognized and acknowledged.

32. Significantly increased drug and alcohol dependence and abuse in the study areas and its role in forming vulnerable WHH categories is a serious issue that needs adequate holistic measures introduced by the state to address and counter related issues. State must provide urgent priority for building suitable services (and connected social welfare) to support those affected is needed in multiple forums such as health, education and other socio-economic fronts. For example, WHHs involving in illicit liquor production in the absence of sustainable and adequate livelihood needs to be addressed through measures including providing for viable livelihood opportunities that fulfil the needs of WHHs and their families and additional measures targeting the children of these families so that they can continue their education or the safety of their wellbeing. Raising awareness amongst WHHs and communities on illicit liquor production/consumption, drugs, the resulting social stigma and taboo (when seeking support) and its harmful impact that transcends generations is necessary and needs to take place at multiple levels.

33. It is essential to engage in research activities to improve WHHs participation that contributes to improvement of their knowledge, skills, mind-set and personality. Given the benefits of the process and results achieved by WHH participation in this research, it is proposed, as a primary strategy, when conducting research that deals with or concerns WHH, to create a mechanism to engage in similar participatory research by the universities, higher educational institutions, vocational organizations, think tanks, individual experts and other interested parties. This strengthens knowledge transfer to all involved and builds on ownership, sustainability and accountability for these processes. These mechanisms should include a local mechanism for monitoring and implementation to evaluate any relevant policy at regular intervals.

34. Developmental interventions should be based on thorough studies conducted by researchers and research organizations and/or CBOs to understand what programmes should be designed for which target groups to avoid their failure during implementation. In addition, research organizations can utilise project stakeholders such as youth researchers to increase field presence, advocacy and mobilisation of WHHs.

35. A provincial level special unit for the WHHs and GHH should be established by the Provincial Councils/Provincial governing body. The relevant ministry in the Provincial Councils/relevant institution should take action to establish a special unit to concentrate on women affairs and to ensure that actions are taken to develop knowledge, skills and attitude of women and girls. Apart from such measures, this unit should work closely with grassroots level organisations and CBOs to monitor impending threats and challenges to WHHs and GHHs and ensure local level interventions are facilitated to reduce the impact of such threats. Special measures must be taken to enable access of GHH and WHH to this unit and its services and include them in consultations that frame the unit and in its functioning.

13.3 Recommendations to Viluthu

36. A comprehensive strategy should be devised to promote Amara Forum and Samasam among the WHHs and other vulnerable women. This should be immediately addressed by Viluthu with the support of the field workers (including EPF stakeholders) and the district offices as the number of WHHs are increasing and new sub categories emerge from time to time. Such promotion and intervention campaigns should be spread across geographic regions and amongst all communities. It is also recommended that people to people links for WHHs at local, regional, provincial and national levels could be enhanced with the intervention of Amara Forum and Samasam.

37. Viluthu should create platforms both online and physical, for youth research leads and volunteers to meet with Amara Forum and Samasam to share their experience and learn from each other. The EPF apparatus introduced in this research study can be further strengthened to expand advocacy work of Viluthu, Amara Forum and Samasam. Such exercises should also have capacity building measures built in to them.

13.4 Recommendations to WHHs

38. The research identifies and acknowledge the positive contributions WHHs make to their communities by sharing care work, offering shelter and protection to SGBV victims and providing basic psychosocial support to WHHs and vulnerable women. It is recommended that to further strengthen the impact of such valuable contributions, WHHs along with local, national, regional, international organisations and movements could cooperate to better organise any informal support structures that are already in place. Such structures could also utilise networking between political parties, across geographical locations, ethnicities, religion and class while using CBOs such as Amara Forum and Samasam as a platform for networking and capacity building.

39. The direct use of WHHs to identify other WHHs, emerging categories and reasons for WHH formation is also recommended. The identification and inclusion of most vulnerable or marginalized women within groups, networks and organisations through personal level networking will expedite the provision of support while also encouraging vulnerable WHHs to engage with support networks provided through personal recommendations. This could also alleviate any hesitance shown by women to partner with organisations that exist beyond their communities and initial support systems.

13.5 Recommendations to the Media

40. Relevant institutions (state/UN/NGO/CSO/private sector) can increase awareness of/disseminate on WHH issues, contributions and advocacy amongst the general public, especially men and youth through mainstream media, social media campaigns, and community outreach etc.

41. Inclusion measures can include media organisations, forums and networks to take proactive measures for the inclusion of WHHs in their staff, membership and leadership.

13.6 Post Publication Recommendations *(Addendum)*

The following set of recommendations were identified as results of the extensive deliberations held between the research team and the participants at the research findings seminars. Apart from the EPF stakeholders, the audience of such seminars included government officers, senior academics, activists, members of the civil society, Amara Forum and Samasam delegates and WHHs, who while welcoming the findings of the report, gave further inputs on recommendations.

1. Given the significant challenges that WHHs face in the society and the lack of awareness on the issues faced by them by the general public, and given the absence of due recognition for WHH contributions to our society at various levels as elaborated in the research findings, it was proposed to integrate WHH related studies to the national education curriculum commencing from school level. One of the primary objectives of this proposed action is to recognise and value the different WHHs identified within the research with the understanding that it is an evolving category. In addition, it was suggested that such a curriculum could be placed within the civic education curriculum so that school children also have greater awareness and sensitivity to the issues that WHHs face both privately and publicly. Given the significance of the WHH population, the children of such families attend schools while facing similar stigma due to the household they come from. Many are subjected to verbal abuse and bullying owing to prejudiced perspectives of WHH children coming from non-traditional family structures. Increased awareness created through educating youth and children, using such target groups to educate the broader society through as messengers would aid in highlighting WHHs, their contributions, the challenges they face and the regularity in their creation and being. Such exercises could also lead to greater peer support systems that removes the stigma and isolation applied to WHHs and their families, socially. In the discussion, there was also prominent attention placed in ensuring that such a curriculum takes on board the dynamic and evolving nature of WHHs and the teaching of these chapters are also done in accordance with those principles (Ex: revising of the categories showcasing transformations from time to time depicting the heterogeneous and evolving nature within the curriculum, based on participatory research in the future. Teaching tools should also incorporate this approach).

2. In continuing awareness and sensitivity building, affirmative action was also proposed to elevate the presence of WHHs in the government sector and also to bring about greater employment. As recommended in the research, avenues for employment viability should be improved by addressing barriers to employment such as care work, multiple forms of harassment and mobility issues. The state sector could make extensive provisions to absorb WHHs into its cadre through quota systems and provide full time or part time employment at local levels.

3. Consultations also elicited recommendations that affirmative actions should also include promotion of WHHs in governance. Given the significant population of WHH and the nuanced issues and greater impact on society these issues have, it was thought to be imperative to have WHHs as part of the representatives in all government structures (local government, provincial councils and parliament). This included recommendations such as providing quota for WHH candidates in elections (both to contest and to be selected through political lists), providing incentives such as financing of political parties to WHH candidate election campaigns (ex: make it mandatory that political parties must provide a percentage of their total election campaign costs to support WHH members within their parties to contest) and introduce laws and policies that advance WHH participation in politics (ex: ceiling on campaign funds, laws and policies to take into consideration the resources available for WHHs including those affected by certain vulnerabilities, provide for mandatory quota for WHH candidates that is significant to ensure that political parties do not have an opportunity through such quotas to further exploit WHH. Thus, any quota provision requires to be above 30% of the total candidates per political party).

4. Consultation sessions, research findings and other discussions have pointed to a lack of consensus in terminology especially in the Tamil language for persons with disabilities. The consultations and research have identified that the Tamil direct translation of the terms such as person with disability may be derogatory in the given language and also notes various uses of terminology varying across the provinces included within the research study. These terms included 'differently abled', 'persons with special needs', 'those who lost an ability' and 'those who were made to lose an ability' (this was to separately denote those who became persons with disability as a result of the war). Discussions indicated that such varied use of terms, unlike in the English language where a universally accepted terminology is present, in official languages in Sri Lanka, there is a further need to deliberate on what terminologies can be accepted by persons with disabilities that provides for their disabilities to be acknowledged whilst at the same time acknowledging them and their agency. Participant contributions noted that such a consensus is necessary for future policy development, advocacy and academic work while allowing for the correct identification of target groups. This recommendation is applicable to Sinhala language as well.

5. The discussions on terminology also indicated the necessity to revisit terms used in English literature relating to the conflict and reconciliation. Discrepancies were noticed between the terminology used by Colombo based academics and organisations against terms used in Northern academic vernacular in instances such as labelling 'ex-combatants' where a significant portion of the individuals who carried out civil duties under the LTTE but did not take part in conflict were also labelled as ex-combatants. Inputs were also given in relation to the use of terms such as 'post-war' and 'post-conflict' with the need to replace such with the term 'post armed struggle' to better reflect the ongoing struggle of the minorities despite the cessation of armed conflict.

6. Inputs, especially from the academic circles indicated the need to highlight the PTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act) and the effects of the misuse of the legislation even in national level research studies. While acknowledging that the PTA has been disproportionately applied in former war areas, it has been also regularly applied post-Easter attacks in other parts of the country to wrongfully detain individuals sans a due process of law. As highlighted in our report, the PTA has had great impact on the families and lives of WHHs. The research in its recommendations had provided for all laws affecting WHHs and GHHs to be reformed but had not expressly listed the PTA in the summary policy brief. Recommendations at the consultations insisted that as the PTA has a great impact on WHHs it must be

listed distinctively to the other laws, and given the harmful effect it has had on the target populations within this study, the recommendation for its repeal and for laws dealing with preventing terrorism to safeguard human rights was also highlighted.

7. The WHH invitees within the consultations raised the concern and need for capturing of emotional pain in a more in-depth way. Examples such as families of the disappeared, women whose husbands were detained under the PTA were highlighted. They voiced that they would prefer research actions to better encapsulate and communicate the immense emotional pain they felt and continued to feel.

8. Women participants at the research presentation seminars voiced their displeasure over their public representatives whose actions are seen as inadequate to alleviate the challenges that WHHs face. The lack of understanding of who is comprised within this group, the issues related to WHHs, shifting the complete onus on WHHs to deal with their own issues and the unwillingness to engage were seen as key challenges. Participants explicitly mentioned that the politicians should make better efforts to address WHH related issues while maintaining a continuous dialogue with the targeted demography. It was also mentioned that such interactions would aid in influencing policy formulation as feedback for policy would come from WHHs themselves.

14 Conclusion

Using the EPF, this research created the space for formulating organic definitions of WHH and contested the normative discussion on WHHs in policy and practice. Our research calls for the need to acknowledge the heterogeneity of WHHs. We show that the WHHs in our study districts are articulated in different ways through different dynamics in different contexts. As cited in the literature our research confirms that WHHs need to be understood as a fluid concept and a shifting configuration, rather than a static one and accepting the fact that the WHHs are clearly a heterogeneous group (Varley 1996, Chant 2003a, 2003b, Kandanearachchi & Ratnayake 2017).

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of WHHs by engaging in a discussion on how it is understood in the development and feminist literature. Chapter 2 provides the contextual background by locating the WHH within the larger context of Sri Lanka. Chapter 3 discusses the EPF methodology adopted for the research and data collection methods and the geographical overview of the study area. The details in Chapter 4 deals with the major objective of this research which is aiming at establishing organic definitions of WHHs. This was done with extensive consultation with the concerned demography and stakeholders. The chapter highlights the evolving dynamic nature of the concept. Chapter 5 demonstrates the socio-economic backgrounds of the informants in the selected study districts. Chapter 6 discusses the household responsibilities of the WHHs. WHHs experience different types of vulnerabilities. Chapter 7 discusses the different types of vulnerabilities experienced by them. Chapter 8 focuses on WHHs access to various services. Social networks are essential for WHHs in their everyday lives as Chapter 9 focuses on the social networks from which they receive different benefits. Chapter 10 provides an account on health and wellbeing of WHHs. Chapter 11 highlights the contribution made by the WHHs at family, national and international levels. In this chapter we highlight their agency. Chapter 12 provides an account of overall discussion and reflection. Chapter 13 put forward policy recommendations based on research findings. Chapter 14 provides the conclusion. In the section to follow, we will elaborate on the findings of this research in relation to the objectives identified.

Our research aimed at mapping and establishing organic definitions of Women Heads of Households together with Viluthu, Amara Forum and Samasam networks. Through extensive consultations facilitated by the EPF, our research came up with different major and overlapping categories of WHHs in the study districts. We also found that these categories overlap, emerge, re-emerge and disappear due to various socio economic, political, cultural and environmental processes, which are very dynamic in nature. Thus, we are not aiming at providing a one-time, static definition of WHH. However, we call for greater inclusivity, depending on the context where they are studied or targeted for any programmes, projects or policies. Our research challenges the narrowly defined, grossly listed categories of WHHs which excludes, transgender women, Girl Child Headed Households, Joint Heads of Households and other categories. When WHHs are defined narrowly and incorrectly, conclusions drawn from such definitions may end up in negative results and close off the possibilities and options for greater inclusion.

Our research highlighted the evolving nature of challenges WHHs are facing in the context of post war and post tsunami situations, Climate Change and COVID-19 pandemic. We showcase, how the WHHs are trying to navigate this multiple vulnerabilities and precarities, in a patriarchal community. The challenges they face are entangled with their social conditions such as their gendered identity as WHHs (assigned by the society and accepted or rejected by them), age, religion, ethnicity and household responsibilities. Their vulnerabilities are marked by their employment, income, education, and their access to assets and social services. The multiple impacts of war continue to unfold in their lives in various spheres. Our participants included WHHs from different ethnicities who have differently experienced the impacts of war, not only as

WHHs but also as civilian women, ex-combatants and military war widows. We try to emphasise that although we have divided the chapters of this report according to different themes, they intersect and overlap to a greater extent in the heterogeneous identity of the WHH and the challenges they face.

Throughout the research process, we followed the EPF to contribute to capacity building processes for WHHs, women and youth on research and documentation, enhancing deeper understanding of participatory dialogue and research that contributes for policy development. These interactions provided the platform for the greater involvement of WHHs in highlighting their issues. It also provided for exploration and learning for all stakeholders of the EPF on the predetermined constructs and sharing and learning among all the stakeholders. The pandemic situation, though created unexpected challenges, provided alternative ways for communication. The participants received training on new data collections methods such as (KoBo) and online Zoom sessions to collect data and information. Through reflection meetings, the research team understood the capacity building programme initiated would enhance the research and advocacy capabilities of WHHs and youth research groups by providing information, networking abilities, technical tools and stimulating intellectual growth that could sustain the future development of the project and improve necessary skills. We also noticed the informants who are not connected to Amara Forum and Samasam networks from study districts were enthusiastic about their involvement in the research. The reflection meetings, workshops, KIs and field research with the informants provided the space for an inclusive platform as a two-way communication link between WHHs and activists, academics and practitioners who seek inputs for future contributions to policy development, research, literature and the designing of welfare projects. The interactions during the Zoom meetings and reflection meetings in both Tamil and Sinhala languages would have inspired the participants in this research to make organized demands for rights and needs through grassroots organizations such as Amara Forum and Samasam. During the final reflections meeting, participants appreciated and expressed that the work of Viluthu, the research team, Amara Forum and Samasam should be extended to cover a large group.

The research process highlighted the contributions made by the Amara Forum, Samasam and WHHs to the society in order to adjust current approaches to operations and sustain ongoing work. Their active involvement in identifying the heterogeneous WHHs, their issues, and Amara Forum and Samasam networks' involvement in mobilizing, capacity building and awareness programmes were exposed widely. The research showed that some participants were not aware of Amara Forum and Samasam networks and their contribution. This was mainly revealed by the Sinhala speaking WHHs, indicating the scope for expansion of Amara Forum and Samasam activities.

During the process of this research, we were able to listen to the stories of WHHs who have made visible impacts on their families, communities, national level and international levels. To identify the contributions made by the Amara Forum, Samasam and WHHs to the society in order to adjust current approaches to operations and sustain ongoing work.

In chapter 13 we provide policy recommendations based on the research. The WHH categories have not been clearly incorporated in gender or development policies or practice in Sri Lanka. Although it is not possible to have an all-inclusive definition of WHHs, a narrow definition leaves out many hidden or potential WHHs. The policy recommendation calls strongly for acknowledging the heterogeneity of the WHHs, their diverse roles and tailor-made interventions. They also emphasise the need for acknowledgment, acceptance and social recognition of WHHs.

Our research has highlighted how problematic the narrow definitions of WHH would be. The heterogeneity of the WHHs identified in this research may or may not be applicable in all contexts. Hence, we re-

emphasise the WHH categories are continuously deconstructed and contested. Documentation that continues to question the definitions and evolving and changing contexts are important to envision new policy approaches and practice. Our research, while highlighting the evolving categories of WHHs, demonstrates the experiences, challenges and problems faced by the WHHs in the local contexts of the study districts, which are not disconnected from national and global contexts. Further, any future programmes, projects or policies targeting WHHs should pay careful attention to the existing socio-cultural frameworks where the WHHs are located and rethink what would work and what would not work. We caution that the current draft document of WHHs would not be practical, if it does not pay adequate attention to the context specific, evolving, dynamic nature of WHHs before making any policy recommendation.

We conclude this research with the hope that the rationale for research, the research methodology, detailed explanations, findings and policy recommendations are discussed, deliberated and applied to future works relating to WHHs. The potential to grow the EPF through multiple stakeholders is called for, to make visible improvements in the lives of WHHs and reduce their vulnerabilities through systemic approaches as constantly reiterated by the writings of this research.

15 References

Boyagoda, A. M. K. S. A. (2014). Heterogeneity and Female-Headed Households in Sri Lanka: *Vulnerability and Resilience in a Transitional Development Society* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Waikato).

Brown, C., & Van de Walle, D. (2020). Headship and poverty in Africa. *The World Bank Economic Review*.

Brun, C., & Lund, R. (2008). Making a home during crisis: Post-tsunami recovery in a context of war, Sri Lanka. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 29(3), 274-287.

Buvinić, M., & Gupta, G. R. (1997). Female-headed households and female-maintained families: are they worth targeting to reduce poverty in developing countries?. *Economic development and cultural change*, *45*(2), 259-280

Caldwell, B. K. (2005). Factors affecting female age at marriage in south Asia: contrasts between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. *Asian Population Studies*, 1(3), 283-301.

Census and Statistical Department. (1981). Retrieved November 9, 2021, from http://www.statistics.gov.lk/GenderStatistics/StaticalInformation/SpecialConcerns

Central Bank of Sri Lanka. (2020). Economic and Social Statistics of Sri Lanka. Colombo: Statistics Department, Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

Chakrabarti, A. (2019). Understanding female autonomy in India through their family headship status. *Journal of Population and Social Studies [JPSS],* 27(3), 266-285.

Chant, S. (2006a). Poverty begins at home? Questioning some (mis)conceptions about children, poverty and privation in female headed households. (The State of the World's Children Background Paper). UNICEF.

Chant, S. (2006b). Rethinking the 'feminization of poverty' in relation to aggregate gender indices. Journal of Human Development, 7(2), 201–220. Chant, S. (2008). The 'feminisation of poverty' and the 'feminisation' of anti-poverty programmes: Room for revision? Journal of Development Studies, 44(2), 165-197

Chant, S. (2004). Dangerous equations? How female-headed households became the poorest of the poor: Causes, consequences and cautions. *IDS bulletin*, *35*(4), 19-26.

Chant, S. (2003a). Dangerous equations? How female-headed households became the poorest of the poor: causes, consequences and cautions. Paper presented at the Gender Myths and Feminist Fables: Repositioning Gender in Development Policy and Practice, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.

Chant, S. (2003b). Female household headship and the feminisation of poverty: Facts, fictions and forward strategies. (New Working Paper Series No. 9). London: LSE Gender Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science.

Chant, S. (2001). Female household headship, privation and power: Challenging the 'feminisation of poverty' thesis. (Working Paper No. 01-09b). Princeton, NJ: Centre for Migration and Development, University of Princeton.

Colombini, M., Mayhew, S. H., Lund, R., Singh, N., Swahnberg, K., Infanti, J., ... & Wijewardene, K. (2018). Factors shaping political priorities for violence against women-mitigation policies in Sri Lanka. *BMC international health and human rights, 18*(1), 1-12.

Colombini, M., Mayhew, S. H., Lund, R., Singh, N., Swahnberg, K., Infanti, J., ... & Wijewardene, K. (2018). Factors shaping political priorities for violence against women-mitigation policies in Sri Lanka. *BMC international health and human rights*, *18*(1), 1-12.

Department of Census and Statistics. (2018). *Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2016.* Battaramulla: Department of Census and Statistics. Retrieved November 1, 2021, from http://repo.statistics.gov.lk/

Department of Census and Statistics. (2020). *Women's Wellbeing Survey - 2019.* Department of Census and Statistics.

Dwyer, D. H., & Bruce, J. (1988). *A Home Divided: Women and Income in the Third World.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Fuwa, N. (2000). The poverty and heterogeneity among female-headed households revisited: the case of Panama. *World development, 28*(8), 1515-1542.

Habib, T. Z. (2020). Becoming Female Head of a Household: By Force or by Choice?. *Open Access Library Journal*, *7*(10), 1

Hay, Iain. "Qualitative research methods in human geography." (2000).

Hewamanne, S. (2020). Surveillance by another name: The Modern Slavery Act, global factory workers, and part-time sex work in Sri Lanka. Signs: *Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 45*(3), 653-677.

Hyndman, J. (2008). Feminism, conflict and disasters in post-tsunami Sri Lanka. Gender, Technology and Development, 12(1), 101-121.

Jayasinghe, M. (2019). Dynamic trends in household poverty and inequality in Sri Lanka: do gender and ethnicity matter?. *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy*, *24*(2), 208-223.

Jayatilaka, D., & Amirthalingam, K. (2015). The impact of displacement on dowries in Sri Lanka. *Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.*

Joshi Rajkarnikar, P., & Ramnarain, S. (2020). Female headship and women's work in Nepal. *Feminist Economics, 26*(2), 126-159.

Kadirgamar, A. (2017). *The failure of post-war reconstruction in Jaffna, Sri Lanka: Indebtedness, caste exclusion and the search for alternatives.* City University of New York.

Kandanearachchi, K., & Ratnayake, R. (2017). Post-war Realities: Barriers to Female Economic Empowerment. *Exploring Women's Empowerment,* ICES, Kandy

Kaspar, H. (2006). 13 "I am the head of the household now": The Impacts of Outmigration for Labour on Gender Hierarchies in Nepal. *Sustainable Development*, 285.

Klasen, S., Lechtenfeld, T., & Povel, F. (2011). *What about the women? Female headship, poverty and vulnerability in Thailand and Vietnam* (No. 76). Discussion Papers.

Lindberg, J., & Herath, D. (2014). Land and grievances in post-conflict Sri Lanka: exploring the role of corruption complaints. *Third World Quarterly, 35*(5), 888-904.

Lindberg, J., & Orjuela, C. (2011). Corruption and conflict: connections and consequences in war-torn Sri Lanka. *Conflict, Security & Development, 11*(02), 205-233.

Martin, M. (2017). Sri Lanka's Ex-Combatant Rehabilitation Programme: Reconstructing Gendered Identities. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development, 12*(1), 79-84.

Nwosu, C. O., & Ndinda, C. (2018). Female household headship and poverty in South Africa: an employment-based analysis. *Economic Research Southern Africa*, *3*(71), 1-26.

O'Donnell, A., Razaak, M. G., Kostner, M., & Perumpillai-Essex, J. (2018). *Shadows of Conflict in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka: Socioeconomic Challenges and a Way Forward*. Washington, DC: The World Bank. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-1344-3

Peebles, P. (1990). Colonization and Ethnic Conflict in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, *49*(1), 30–55. https://doi.org/10.2307/2058432

Perera-Mubarak, K. N. 2013. "Positive Responses, Uneven Experiences: Intersections of Gender, Ethnicity, and Location in Post-Tsunami Sri Lanka." Gender, Place and Culture 20 (5): 664–685.

Pham, P., Radhakrishnan, B., Thiagarajah, J., Ratnavale, D., SAmara Forumsinghe, S., & Vinck, P. (2018). Challenges in attaining durable solutions for resettled female-headed households in Vavuniya, Sri Lanka. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development, 13*(2), 111-115.

Posel, D. R. (2001). Who are the heads of household, what do they do, and is the concept of headship useful? An analysis of headship in South Africa. Development *Southern Africa, 18(5),* 651-670.

Rogan, M. (2016). Qualitative perceptions of the meaning of "headship" and female-headed households in post-apartheid South Africa. *Social Dynamics*, *42*(1), 175-195.

Rogan, M. (2013). Alternative definitions of headship and the 'feminisation 'of income poverty in post-apartheid South Africa. *The Journal of Development Studies*, *49*(10), 1344-1357.

Ruwanpura, K. N. (2018). Militarized Capitalism? The Apparel Industry's Role in Scripting a Post-War National Identity in Sri Lanka. *Antipode, 50*(2), 425-446.

Ruwanpura, K., & Humphries, J. (2004). Mundane heroines: Conflict, ethnicity, gender, and female headship in eastern Sri Lanka. *Feminist Economics, 10(2),* 173-205.

Ruwanpura, K., & Humphries, J. (2003). *Female-headship in Eastern Sri Lanka*. International Labour Organization.

Saroor, S. A. (2020, August 4). *Disproportionate effects of Covid-19 on Sri Lankan women.* Groundviews. https://groundviews.org/2020/08/04/disproportionate-effects-of-covid-19-on-sri-lankan-women/ Accessed 16.12.20121

Sarvananthan, M., Suresh, J., & Alagarajah, A. (2017). Feminism, nationalism, and labour in post-civil war Northern Province of Sri Lanka. *Development in Practice*, 27(1), 122-128.

Subramaniam, J., Mujumder, N. M., Hatta, Z. A., & Zakaria, A. F. M. (2014). Implications of enforced disappearances on women-headed families in the northern province, Sri Lanka. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 4(4), 236-243.

Satkunanathan , A. (2021) *A broken system: Drug control, Detention and Treatment of People who use drugs in Sri Lanka.* London: Harm Reduction International.

Satkunanathan, A. (2018). The treatment of former combatants in post-war Sri Lanka: A form of arbitrary detention or rehabilitation?. *In Routledge Handbook of Human Rights in Asia* (pp. 184-196). Routledge.

Satkunanathan, A. (2012). Whose Nation? Power, Agency, Gender and Tamil Nationalism. *Power, Agency, Gender and Tamil Nationalism* (December 21, 2012). Sri Lankan Republic at, 40.

Statistics Division, District Secretariat, Batticaloa. (2021). *Statistical Handbook - 2020, Batticaloa District.* Department of Census & Statistics. Battaramulla: Department of Census & Statistics. Retrieved November 1, 2021, from http://www.statistics.gov.lk/ref/HandbookDictionary

Statistics Division, District Secretariat, Trincomalee. (2021). *Statistical Handbook - 2020, Jaffna District.* Department of Census & Statistics. Battaramulla: Department of Census & Statistics. Retrieved November 1, 2021, from http://www.statistics.gov.lk/ref/HandbookDictionary

Statistics Division, District Secretariat, Trincomalee. (2021). *Statistical Handbook - 2020, Mullaitivu District.* Department of Census & Statistics. Battaramulla: Department of Census & Statistics. Retrieved November 1, 2021, from http://www.statistics.gov.lk/ref/HandbookDictionary

Statistics Division, District Secretariat, Trincomalee. (2021). *Statistical Handbook - 2020, Trincomalee District.* Department of Census & Statistics. Battaramulla: Department of Census & Statistics. Retrieved November 1, 2021, from http://www.statistics.gov.lk/ref/HandbookDictionary

Varley, A. (1996). Women heading households: Some more equal than others?. *World Development*, *24*(3), 505-520.

Vithanage, D. S. (2015). Understanding the nature and scope of patriarchy in Sri Lanka: how does it operate in the institution of marriage?. Culminating Projects in Social Responsibility. 3. https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/socresp_etds/3 Accessed 15.12.2021

Withers, M., Henderson, S., & Shivakoti, R. (2021). International Migration, Remittances and COVID-19: Economic Implications and Policy Options for South Asia. *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, 1-16.

Yoosefi Lebni, J., Mohammadi Gharehghani, M. A., Soofizad, G., & Irandoost, S. F. (2020). Challenges and opportunities confronting female-headed households in Iran: a qualitative study. *BMC women's health,* 20(1), 1-11.

1. Appendix A: Equal Participatory Framework

Time	Research process	Objective	Participatory approach	Actions*	Actions taken after workshops/meetings
	Literature review	To map how the concept of women headship is understood and used in the context of Sri Lanka.	Consultative participation with the core project staff.	Literature search and share literature through Drop Box or other methods.	**Literature** Research Assistants (RAs) prepared a list of literature on FHH/WHH within the context of Sri Lanka. Consultants are in the process of collecting local and international literature. There was a suggestion to include feminist literature also. It is accepted to maintain a Drop Box to exchange literature.
*	Obtaining background information/situation analysis	To understand the contextual background, local norms (economic, social, cultural and historical) of the research communities To identify the potential stakeholders To create an awareness of initial understanding of major areas of problems, issues, opportunities To build a common understanding; Set goals, objectives and priorities To provide information to stakeholders	Consultative participation (With KIs, women's group leaders, local political leaders, etc. Discussions with: KIs, women's group leaders, local political leaders, youth researchers, WHH and other project staff)	Through social media, interactive sessions Through informal discussion, interviews; Going through consultation documents: Existing literature, reports, Amara Forum's Widows Charter	**Obtaining background information** This was communicated to Viluthu and the youth lead researchers. It is important to collect background information. For example, it is important to get the publication "*Sampath Pethikada"* or resource book which is annually published by the DS offices. In addition the background information could be obtained through other published documents as well as through KIs (informal and formal discussions)
	Preparing a QA/needs assessment	To obtain information on the definition of WHHs, their issues, priorities, challenges,	Direct and interactive participation (youth researchers, Amara Forum,	Project team prepares the QA and share it with youth researchers and	**30th August 2021 1st Workshop** After a brainstorming exercise on the project, the purpose of the research exercise was explained.

Time	Research process	Objective	Participatory approach	Actions*	Actions taken after workshops/meetings
		opinions/views, suggestions, experiences, practical and strategic gender needs. To tap their potential to improve the QA	Samasam delegates and other project staff	Amara Forum, Samasam delegates before applying in the field. Through sharing Google docs, Zoom meetings, WhatsApp groups	EPF was presented. New understandings on FHH/WHH were put forward by the participants. Discussions involved confusions related to categories which are already followed. They also highlighted hidden cases, the problems experienced by FHHs/WHHs. Inclusions of Girl child headed households. How should they be approached for interviews? The first day of the workshop fully covered the components of the EPF. However, it was noted that we need to give updates on the EPF to share their experiences in the field from time to time.
	Training interviewers	To equip them with field research methods (both quantitative and qualitative)	Sharing the questionnaire for inputs and improvements with the youth researchers and the WHH	Online sessions, sharing ideas, experiences with youth researchers and WHH	**31. August 2021, Day 2 of the workshop.** The questionnaire was introduced to the participants. We found this workshop was very interactive, where participants came up with constructive comments and suggestions on the questionnaire. Based on their inputs, new questions were added, some were removed and some were modified. Questions were also raised on the listed answers. Their suggestions on expanding the list of answers, or deleting certain answers were accommodated. Both the consultants and RAs shared their field experiences to enlighten the participants on research ethics and practices in the field.
	Identifying informants (snowball, youth researchers networks/ connections)	To identify representative participation, share experiences available in the community	WHH and Youth leaders participate; Research assistants monitor when and where necessary	Interacting with the respondents	**5th of September 2021. Day 3 of the workshop.** Remaining sections of the questionnaire were discussed. As agreed upon, the questionnaire was shared with the participants, in advance. Compared to the first 2 workshops, the 3rd one was less engaging. Participants did not ask many questions. We had to draw them to the discussion. However, the questions raised by a few participants were

Time	Research process	Objective	Participatory approach	Actions*	Actions taken after workshops/meetings
					found to be very interesting and useful. During the workshop, research consultants clearly explained the importance of using the language, which is easy to understand for the informants in the local context. Regional differences were also highlighted. How to identify the informants were also discussed as there was an issue related to inclusion. Before the 3rd workshop, the research team had a Zoom discussion and agreed to communicate the messages that the informants could be women/girls identified by Amara Forum or Samasam and an open category that are not affiliated to any of the above. Considering the limited time, it was suggested to find such women, through an informal discussion. Apart from the discussion on the questionnaire, further emphasis was given on research ethics, National COVID-19 regulations. It was repeatedly requested that the field researchers should strictly adhere to the health regulations and informed the participants too.
	Collecting data Questionnaire survey Interviews KIs Formal and informal discussions Retrieve secondary data sources	To achieve listed objectives	Direct participation/Interactive participation	One on one interviews (direct face to face or online mode) /applying questionnaire	
	Analysing	To answer specific questions or check the objectives To identify the needs and	Direct/ interactive participation. Research assistants, consultants, checking for	Manual, software, using coding system	

Time	Research process	Objective	Participatory approach	Actions*	Actions taken after workshops/meetings
		priorities of the WHH To arrive at informed conclusions	accuracy with youth researchers and WHH		
	Data visualization	To map the organic identification of WHHs To reveal their strengths and weaknesses. To jointly highlight opportunities they have for their wellbeing, by giving voice to them	Research assistants, consultants, youth researchers, WHH	Quantitative: Graphs, tables, charts, maps, diagrams, Qualitative: narratives, quotes, from interviews, patterns will be detected in interview transcripts and these recognized patterns will then be turned into meaningful categories and themes Out of all the interviews conducted a few most significant individual cases that have distinct standout significance will then be selected based on their content	
	Writing the report	To disseminate findings. Creating a sense of inclusion, enhancement and empowerment	Peer review of the report before the final report Functional participation Making space for WHHs and youth leaders to present experiences, views, suggestions.	Workshops/ webinars (After the final report submission) Using social media and printed media	

2. Appendix B: Potential WHH categories and subcategories as drawn from EPF stakeholders

WHH: Main categories	Sub categories
Widowed	Husband died in an accident
	Husband died due to a workplace accident (factories/fishing etc.)
	Husband committed suicide
	Husband died in a natural hazard
	Husband died of disease
	Husband was killed in the field of combat (as a victim)
	Husband was killed in the field of combat (as a combatant/soldier)
	Husband was killed (not related to war)
Husband Missing	Husband disappeared himself
	Enforced disappearance
	Husband was abducted
	Husband's gone after the migration (illegal migrants)
Husband Imprisoned	Political detainees
	For personal crimes
Separated	Due to her family's pressure
	By her willingness
	By her husband's willingness
	By Mutual agreement
Divorced	Receives maintenance fee
	Failed to receive maintenance fee
Husband Left	By husband's family's willingness
	Due to the wife's extramarital affairs
	Due to the husband's extra-marital affairs
Married	Husband is unemployed
	Husband is doing irregular jobs
	Husband is employed but does not contribute to the family
	Husband is not willing to do a job
	Husband is a migrant worker
	Husband is in a polygamous relationships
	Husband is a drug/alcohol addict
	Joint-headed households where husband and wife both earn.

	Husband aged
	Continuously supporting her parents financially, and in decision making process despite not living in the same household after marriage
Remarried	Remarried (with children from a previous marriage)
	Remarried to a person who has children from a prior marriage
	Husband is aged
	Husband is unemployed
	Husband is a migrant worker
	Husband is a drug/alcohol addict
Women in an Open Relationship	Have child/children
	Have no child/children
Unmarried Women	Women whose parents/siblings have died
	Have child/children
	Economically self-reliant
Girl Child (Unmarried)	Girl whose parents are present but the girl child is responsible for the household.
	Girl living alone due to being orphans
	Girl whose parents are unable to earn a living or manage the household
	Girl whose parents have died and who now lives with her grandparents and is responsible for the household.
	Girl whose parents died and lives with her younger siblings
	Girl child whose parents have separated/ remarried
	GHH in which one of the parents is working abroad
	GHH where mother got separated due to an extra-marital affair
	Girl with one parent living but under some addiction
	Girl living with both the parents who are under addiction
	Girl whose parents deserted with dependents
	Girl whose parents deserted without dependents
	Girl whose one parent or both parents have physiological disorders or disabilities
	Girl (unmarried) with child/children

Overlapping categories	
Age (Current)	under 18
	18-30
	30-40
	40-60
	60-70
	above 70
Age at Household Headship	under 18
	18-30
	30-40
	40-60
	60-70
	above 70
Language	Tamil
	Sinhala
Gender	Female
	Transgender
Settlement Type	Urban
	Rural
Living Status	Have members in family who are contributing to the household
	Living with family members
	Living with non-family members
	Living with relatives
	Living alone

Categories overlapping with each other

Combatant status		
Women's Combatant Status	Family Member's Combatant Status	Force Type
Non Combatant	Non-Combatant Family Members	
	Ex-Combatant Family Member	Military
		Paramilitary
		Other Armed Groups
	Currently Serving Family Member	Military
		Other Forces
Ex-Combatant	Non-Combatant Family Members	
	Ex-Combatant Family Member	Military
		Paramilitary
		Other Armed Groups
	Currently Serving Family Member	Military
		Other Forces
Currently Serving Member	Non-Combatant Family Members	
	Ex-Combatant	Military
		Paramilitary
		Other Armed Groups
	Currently Serving	Military
		Other Forces

Disability/ disorders/ disease status	
Physical Disability	No Disability
	Visual Impairment
	Hearing Impairment
	Vocal Disorders
	Loss Of Leg/s
	Loss Of Hand/s
	Dwarfism
	Locomotor Disabilities by Birth
	Locomotor Disabilities
	Long Term Illness
	Disability Due to Aging
Officially Unrecognized/Unclassified Disabilities	
Psychological Disorders	
Disease	No Disease
	Communicable
	Non-Communicable

Dependent status	
Have Dependents	Elder Dependents (Above 65)
	Younger Dependents (Below 15)
	Other Dependents (Aged 15- 65)
Dependents with Physical Disability	No Disability
	Visual Impairment
	Hearing Impairment
	Vocal Disorders
	Loss Of Leg/s
	Loss Of Hand/s
	Dwarfism
	Locomotor Disabilities by Birth
	Locomotor Disabilities
	Long Term Illness
	Disability Due to Aging
Dependents with Officially Unrecognized/Unclassified Disabilities	
Dependents with Psychological Disorders	
Dependents with Disease	No Disease
	Communicable
	Non-Communicable
Dependents with Drug Dependency	

3. Appendix C: District Profile

District Profile – Jaffna	
Geographic Profile [a]	Jaffna district is in the northern end of the Northern province of Sri Lanka. It consists of the peninsula and seven inhabited islands. The northern, eastern and western boundaries of the district are Indian Ocean. Towards the south is Jaffna lagoon and Kilinochchi district. Agriculture is a leading sector in Jaffna District. One third of about 54,417 families in this district solely depend on agriculture including livestock and a large share of the population is also involved in home gardening. People in Jaffna district are traditionally a farming community. There are 41,198 micro, small & medium industries functioning in the district as well (Statistics Division, District Secretariat, Jaffna, 2021). Naturally grown palmyrah trees are also of significance to the livelihoods of the locals in the Jaffna district. But after the Tsunami and the civil war, a large number of palmyrah trees were either completely or partly damaged, or lost their potential vigour. A group of the community's traditional jobs are toddy tapping and jaggery making which is seasonal work. A significant portion of women are involved with jaggery making and making handicraft items sourcing materials from naturally grown palmyrah trees. The long tradition of dedication and high priority given to education from the colonial period, has made Jaffna a district with high literacy rates in Sri Lanka. Jaffna district has an immense potential for tourism and hotel industry as the district is surrounded by the sea and the lagoon. The fisheries sector is an important sector in Jaffna district and a major economic activity. It is the source of livelihood for about 20,699 families consisting of 88,286 persons. 21,852 persons are active fishermen in the Jaffna district. Jaffna district was affected by the conflict that ended over a decade ago. But the trauma of the war still remains. Many displacements, resettlements have taken place in Jaffna district. The women who have lost their husbands due the war became the breadwinner of the families as women headed families. According to the statistics, there are 41,650 women headed families in Jaffna. Among them, 18,414 families received relief assistance while 14,322 have not received any relief assistance. In addition to that 12,074 women headed families earn an average monthly income of between Rs.1501.00 - Rs5000.00 (Statistics Division, District Secretariat, Jaffna, 2021).
Extent: 1025 km^2 Annual mean temperature: 28.8°C Annual mean rainfall: 1375.8 mm Humidity: 83 %	
Administrative Profile [b]	
Province: Northern Province Divisional Secretariats: 15 Delft Islands South Islands North Karainagar Jaffna Nallur Valikamam South West Valikamam West Valikamam South Valikamam North Valikamam East Thenmaradchi Vadamaradchi Vadamaradchi North Vadamaradchi East Grama Niladhari Divisions: 435 Villages: 1453	
Demographic Profile [a, b]	
Mid-year population: 617,000 Population Density: 664/km^2 Crude Birth Rate: 15.4 Crude Death Rate: 7.8 Composition of population By sectors: Urban: 20.1% Rural: 79.9% By age: 0 – 14: 23.3% 15 – 59: 59.0% 60 <= 17.07	
Socio Economic Profile [a, b]	
Literacy Rate: 96.3% Labour force rate: 44.9% Employment rate: 61.2% By sectors: Agriculture: 22.1% Industrial: 26.0% Service: 52.0%	
a. Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2020 b. Statistics Division, District Secretariat, Jaffna, 2021	

District Profile – Mullaitivu

Geographic Profile [a, b]

Extent: 2693.0 km^2
Annual mean temperature: 25.2-31.4^oC
Annual mean rainfall: 1428 mm
Humidity: 83.1 %

Administrative Profile [b]

Province: Northern Province
Divisional Secretariats: 06
- Maritimepattu
- Puthukkudiyiruppu
- Oddusuddan
- Thunukkai
- Manthai East
- Welioya

Grama Niladhari Divisions: 136
Villages: 632

Demographic Profile [a, b]

Mid-year population: 97,000
Population Density: 40/km^2
Crude Birth Rate: 11.4
Crude Death Rate: 3.4
Composition of population
- By sectors:
  - Urban: 0%
  - Rural: 100%
- By age:
  - 0 – 14: 30.0%
  - 15 – 59:56.8%
  - 60 <=: 13.0%

Socio Economic Profile [b]

Literacy Rate: 91.0%
Labour force rate: 42.7%
Employment rate: 43.5
- By sectors:
  - Agriculture:52.9%
  - Industrial: 17.9%
  - Service: 29.2%

a. Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2020

b. Statistics Division, District Secretariat, Mullaitivu, 2021

Mullaitivu district is one of the newer districts in Sri Lanka, created in 1979. It is surrounded by Mannar, Trincomalee and Vavuniya districts. The district occupies the eastern part of the mainland of Northern province. Mullaitivu district has Kilinochchi district on its northern border, Trincomalee district and Vavuniya district and part of Mannar district in the south, Mannar District in the West and the sea to the east. It covers a land area of approximately 2489.6 sq. km (including forest area, excluding large inland water). Mullaitivu district accounts for 3.8% of the country's total area.

The economy of the district mainly depends on agriculture and fishing. Livestock and forestry play a supplementary role in the district's economic activities. Nearly 23,734 people of 4,210 families are engaged in agriculture and fishing activities respectively. The Agriculture sector is the main income generating source in this district. Totally 61% of families depend on these sectors. There are 20,543 families and nearly 35 Villages depending on the fishing sector. There are 23 coid based, 44 handloom based and 12 pottery based employees working in small industries functioning in Mullaitivu. Unemployment rates in Mullaitivu are some of the highest in the island with nearly 27,393 people unemployed. There are 6552 government workers and 16,796 private sector workers working in the Mullaitivu District.

Mullaitivu District was one of the severely affected districts during the civil war. After the conflict, the resettled population stands at 137,511 (Statistics Division, District Secretariat, Mullaitivu, 2020). Therefore, many housing facilities are given by the government housing authority, INGOs and NGOs. According to that, 34,349 housing facilities have been provided as permanent, semi-permanent, huts and temporary shelter. The requirement for housing and landless families is 17,885. In addition to that, there are 7201 women headed families living in the district. Disability is a major consequence of the civil war in the area. The total number disabled persons is 2646 along with 453 disabled children. The most vulnerable group in the district are the orphaned children. There are around 1981 orphaned children living in Mullaitivu District. 234 child abuse cases were reported in Mullaitivu District in 2019.

According to the central bank report, the poverty gap index was 1.2 per household in 2016. As per the district secretariat statistics about people below poverty line, there are 30,856 families still suffering to sustain their day-to-day life. (Statistics Division, District Secretariat, Mullaitivu, 2020).

District Profile – Trincomalee

Geographic Profile [a]

Extent: 2727 km^2
Annual mean temperature: 29.4°C
Annual mean rainfall: 2158.2 mm
Humidity: 89%

Administrative Profile [b]

Province: Eastern Province
Divisional Secretariats: 11
- Trincomalee Town & Gravets
- Kuchchaveli
- Padavi Sripura
- Gomarankadawala
- Morawewa
- Thampalakamam
- Kanthale
- Kinniya
- Seruvila
- Mutur
- Verugal

Grama Niladhari Divisions: 230
Villages: 657

Demographic Profile [a, b]

Mid-year population: 426,000
Population Density: 168/km^2
Crude Birth Rate: 21.3
Crude Death Rate: 4.8
Composition of population
- By sectors:
  - Urban: 22.4%
  - Rural: 77.6%
- By age:
  - 0 – 14: 31.45%
  - 15 – 59: 60.88%
  - 60 <= 7.66

Socio Economic Profile [a, b]

Literacy Rate: 80.2%
Labour force rate: 45.8%
Employment rate: 92.8%
- By sectors:
  - Agriculture: 30.9%
  - Industrial: 28.9%
  - Service: 40.2%

a. Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2020

b. Statistics Division, District Secretariat, Trincomalee, 2021

Trincomalee district is a prominent district of the Eastern Province as it has the provincial capital. The strategic location of the natural harbour of the Trincomalee district brings political and economic significance to the area. Thus, it has always attracted the interest of regional and international powers from historic times. International manufacturing companies such as Prima Ceylon and Tokyo Cement utilize the harbour and provide job opportunities to the local people. Fuji Cement, Biomass Power Plants, and the Indian Oil Company are some other international companies that have made investments in Trincomalee district.

Although a few but large industries are providing jobs in the district, the major livelihood activities are agriculture and fishing. These primary livelihoods were severely affected by the civil war that prevailed in the district for twenty-four years from 1983 to 2007, and the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004. Trincomalee district was severely affected in different phases of the war, such as the war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and Indian Peace Keeping Force, Eelam war II, Eelam war III, and the end of the Eelam war in Trincomalee.

During the conflict period and in the aftermath of the Tsunami, the relief and humanitarian support given by many international donors gave thrust and Trincomalee district became a major contributor to manufacturing output in the Eastern Province by 2005 (O'Donnell, Razaak, Kostner, & Perumpillai-Essex, 2018). Current economic and social aspects of the district still have war and post-war reflections. The demography that has already changed due to state sponsored colonization (Peebles, P. 1990) shows a drastic change in terms of its ethnic composition, sex ratio, and dependency ratio (O'Donnell, Razaak, Kostner, & Perumpillai-Essex, 2018). The present Trincomalee is a multi-ethnic district as it more or less equally combines all three major ethnic groups of the country. The loss of male youth in the war caused the loss of labour force and gender imbalance. There were approximately 24,000 female-headed households in 2016, and this resulted in an increase in the number of female labourers in the district (Department of Census and Statistics, 2018).

District Profile – Batticaloa	
Geographic Profile [a]	Batticaloa district, popularly known as "the land of singing fish", is located in the centre of Eastern province. It has three lagoons and a long coastline that enables the fishing industry which is one of the primary livelihood activities of the district. The district is predominantly populated by Tamil-speaking communities.
Extent: 2854 km^2 Annual mean temperature: 28.7°C Annual mean rainfall: 1525.9 mm Humidity: 90%	
Administrative Profile [b]	The civil war caused extensive destruction to the economic infrastructure and livelihoods. It was affected during the 2nd, 3rd, and final phases of the Eelam wars. Waves of war together with the Tsunami caused damages to all aspects of development.
Province: Eastern Province Divisional Secretariats: 14 Kattankudy Eravurpattu Eravur Town Manmunai South & EruvilPattu Manmunai North Koralaipattu West Koralaipattu Manmunai West Koralaipattu North ManmunaiPattu Manmunai South West PorativuPattu Koralaipattu South Koralaipattu Central Grama Niladhari Divisions: 345 Villages: 1036	After the war came to an end in the Eastern Province, "Reawakening of the East", a state-invested project, and several other programmes that were employed by national level and international level NGOs, focused on development.
Demographic Profile [a, b]	The Easter attack of 2019 has again fuelled ethnic tensions in the District. In addition to this, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic also restricts mobilization and the continuation of livelihoods. These situations force women, especially the Hindu and the Muslim women who are bound by typical cultural norms, to come out of their domestic sphere to join the labour market.
Mid-year population: 575,000 Population Density: 220/km^2 Crude Birth Rate: 17.9 Crude Death Rate: 5.0 Composition of population By sectors: Urban: 28.7% Rural: 71.3% By age: 0 – 14: 30.73% 15 – 59: 61.65% 60 <= 7.62%	
Socio Economic Profile [a, b]	Textiles and apparel industries are the significant employers that provide jobs for women in Batticaloa and this is not different from the greater Eastern Province and the rest of the country. 32.3% of households in Batticaloa District in the year 2016 were labelled as female-headed households (Department of Census and Statistics, 2018)[35] and this percentage could increase in the current scenario.
Literacy Rate: 80.2% Labour force rate: 45.8% Employment rate: 92.8% By sectors: Agriculture: 30.9% Industrial: 28.9% Service: 40.2%	
a. Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2020 b. Statistics Division, District Secretariat, Batticaloa, 2021	

[35] The DCS has not provided a definition for Female Headed Households

4. Appendix D: Tables

Appendix D.1

Ethnic Profile of Respondents	Districts								Total	
	Jaffna		Mullaitivu		Trincomalee		Batticaloa			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Sri Lankan Tamils	275	100.00%	282	97.90%	115	44.60%	212	81.50%	**884**	**81.80%**
Muslims	0	0.00%	1	0.30%	69	26.70%	47	18.10%	**117**	**10.80%**
Sinhalese	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	69	26.70%	0	0.00%	**69**	**6.40%**
Upcountry Tamils	0	0.00%	4	1.40%	1	0.40%	1	0.40%	**6**	**0.60%**
Burgers	0	0.00%	1	0.30%	3	1.20%	0	0.00%	**4**	**0.40%**
PNM	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	0.40%	0	0.00%	**1**	**0.10%**
Total	**275**	**100.00%**	**288**	**100.00%**	**258**	**100.00%**	**260**	**100.00%**	**1081**	**100.00%**

Appendix D.2

Religious Profile of Respondents	Districts								Total	
	Jaffna		Mullaitivu		Trincomalee		Batticaloa			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Hinduism	214	77.80%	190	66.00%	108	41.90%	187	71.90%	**699**	**64.70%**
Roman Catholic	39	14.20%	81	28.10%	15	5.80%	11	4.20%	**146**	**13.50%**
Islam	1	0.40%	1	0.30%	68	26.40%	53	20.40%	**123**	**11.40%**
Buddhism	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	62	24.00%	0	0.00%	**62**	**5.70%**
Non-Roman Catholic	21	7.60%	16	5.60%	4	1.60%	9	3.50%	**50**	**4.60%**
Atheist	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	0.40%	0	0.00%	**1**	**0.10%**
PNM	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Total	**275**	**100.00%**	**288**	**100.00%**	**258**	**100.00%**	**260**	**100.00%**	**1081**	**100.00%**

Appendix D.3

Reasons for internal migration	Districts								Total	
	Jaffna		Mullaitivu		Trincomalee		Batticaloa			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Marriage	11	45.80%	30	43.50%	21	36.80%	14	37.80%	**76**	**40.60%**
In search of job	0	0.00%	6	8.70%	6	10.50%	1	2.70%	**13**	**7.00%**
Children's education	0	0.00%	3	4.30%	2	3.50%	3	8.10%	**8**	**4.30%**
War-induced displacement	9	37.50%	15	21.70%	6	10.50%	9	24.30%	**39**	**20.90%**
Resettlement programme	2	8.30%	2	2.90%	6	10.50%	9	24.30%	**19**	**10.20%**
Other	2	8.30%	16	23.20%	11	19.30%	8	21.60%	**37**	**19.80%**

Appendix D.4

Education qualification	Districts								Total	
	Jaffna		Mullaitivu		Trincomalee		Batticaloa			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
No schooling	20	7.30%	10	3.50%	24	9.30%	17	6.50%	**71**	**6.60%**
Grade 1- 5	63	22.90%	74	25.70%	64	24.80%	63	24.20%	**264**	**24.40%**
Grade 6- 11	127	46.20%	152	52.80%	100	38.80%	116	44.60%	**495**	**45.80%**
Passed O/L	36	13.10%	29	10.10%	35	13.60%	28	10.80%	**128**	**11.80%**
Passed A/L	20	7.30%	16	5.60%	32	12.40%	25	9.60%	**93**	**8.60%**
Certificate courses	1	0.40%	1	0.30%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	**2**	**0.20%**
Diploma	2	0.70%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	2	0.80%	**4**	**0.40%**
Undergraduate	4	1.50%	3	1.00%	1	0.40%	4	1.50%	**12**	**1.10%**
Post graduate studies	2	0.70%	1	0.30%	1	0.40%	4	1.50%	**8**	**0.70%**
PNM	0	0.00%	2	0.70%	1	0.40%	1	0.40%	**4**	**0.40%**
Total	**275**	**100.00%**	**288**	**100.00%**	**258**	**100.00%**	**260**	**100.00%**	**1081**	**100.00%**

Appendix D.5

Current employment or livelihood	Districts								Total	
	Jaffna		Mullaitivu		Trincomalee		Batticaloa			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Sewing/ Garment works	17	12.50%	27	20.90%	30	23.10%	41	27.20%	**115**	**21.10%**
Food making - food, meal packets, drying fish, making dry food items such as chilli powder, snacks, mixture, vadais, roasted peanuts	55	40.40%	6	4.70%	30	23.10%	12	7.90%	**103**	**18.90%**
Handicraft - mats, coir	26	19.10%	10	7.80%	21	16.20%	42	27.80%	**99**	**18.10%**
Livestock and poultry	20	14.70%	30	23.30%	6	4.60%	26	17.20%	**82**	**15.00%**
Small business	13	9.60%	23	17.80%	20	15.40%	21	13.90%	**77**	**14.10%**
Labourer - agricultural labour, fishing labour, domestic work, labour at companies & shops, construction etc.	21	15.40%	19	14.70%	17	13.10%	10	6.60%	**67**	**12.30%**
Cultivation	9	6.60%	15	11.60%	6	4.60%	25	16.60%	**55**	**10.10%**
Government sector employment	4	2.90%	4	3.10%	11	8.50%	3	2.00%	**22**	**4.00%**
NGO/ CSO workers	3	2.20%	3	2.30%	5	3.80%	5	3.30%	**16**	**2.90%**
Preschool teacher	2	1.50%	5	3.90%	3	2.30%	1	0.70%	**11**	**2.00%**
Chit	1	0.70%	5	3.90%	1	0.80%	1	0.70%	**8**	**1.50%**
Rental Income	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	5	3.80%	2	1.30%	**7**	**1.30%**
Beautician	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	2	1.50%	1	0.70%	**3**	**0.50%**
Trainer/teacher (arts)	1	0.70%	1	0.80%	1	0.80%	0	0.00%	**3**	**0.50%**
Online business	1	0.70%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	**1**	**0.20%**
Other	4	2.90%	30	23.30%	8	6.20%	16	10.60%	**58**	**10.60%**
PNM	4	2.90%	4	3.10%	2	1.50%	0	0.00%	**10**	**1.80%**

Appendix D.6

Types of barriers experienced in employment	Districts								Total	
	Jaffna		Mullaitivu		Trincomalee		Batticaloa			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Household works	16	35.60%	31	60.80%	1	5.90%	35	52.20%	**83**	**46.1%**
Looking after children/elderly/disabled	14	31.10%	17	33.30%	3	17.60%	15	22.40%	**49**	**27.2%**
Disability	19	42.20%	27	52.90%	4	23.50%	32	47.80%	**82**	**45.6%**
Health issues	23	51.10%	16	31.40%	5	29.40%	28	41.80%	**72**	**40.0%**
Lack of transport facilities / Distance	6	13.30%	15	29.40%	2	11.80%	5	7.50%	**28**	**15.6%**
Long working hours	6	13.30%	9	17.60%	1	5.90%	15	22.40%	**31**	**17.2%**
Poor working conditions	5	11.10%	4	7.80%	0	0.00%	3	4.50%	**12**	**6.7%**
Strict administration	1	2.20%	5	9.80%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	**6**	**3.3%**
Family does not allow	2	4.40%	1	2.00%	0	0.00%	2	3.00%	**5**	**2.8%**
Society does not like women working outside	1	2.20%	3	5.90%	0	0.00%	4	6.00%	**8**	**4.4%**
Others	2	4.40%	8	15.70%	4	23.50%	8	11.90%	**22**	**12.2%**
PNM	0	0.00%	2	3.90%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	**2**	**1.1%**

Appendix D.7

Managing family	District								Total	
	Jaffna		Mullaitivu		Trincomalee		Batticaloa			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Draw from savings	1	0.90%	4	4.30%	10	11.40%	8	6.80%	**23**	**5.60%**
Pawning	16	14.50%	22	23.90%	6	6.80%	7	5.90%	**51**	**12.50%**
Samurdhi	83	75.50%	69	75.00%	41	46.60%	68	57.60%	**261**	**64.00%**
Public Monthly Allowance	23	20.90%	14	15.20%	2	2.30%	5	4.20%	**44**	**10.80%**
Other support from Government	8	7.30%	9	9.80%	4	4.50%	9	7.60%	**30**	**7.40%**
Help from Community based organizations	13	11.80%	8	8.70%	3	3.40%	12	10.20%	**36**	**8.80%**
Help from charity/ Religious organization	1	0.90%	2	2.20%	1	1.10%	2	1.70%	**6**	**1.50%**
Help from relatives	46	41.80%	30	32.60%	24	27.30%	66	55.90%	**166**	**40.70%**
Help from neighbours	13	11.80%	12	13.00%	4	4.50%	15	12.70%	**44**	**10.80%**
Help from friends	17	15.50%	6	6.50%	12	13.60%	8	6.80%	**43**	**10.50%**
Help from Micro finance institutions	3	2.70%	22	23.90%	1	1.10%	14	11.90%	**40**	**9.80%**
Bank loans	14	12.70%	23	25.00%	7	8.00%	6	5.10%	**50**	**12.30%**
Borrow from local money lenders	7	6.40%	8	8.70%	6	6.80%	8	6.80%	**29**	**7.10%**
Other	8	7.30%	7	7.60%	6	6.80%	5	4.20%	**26**	**6.40%**
PNM	4	3.60%	1	1.10%	6	6.80%	3	2.50%	**14**	**3.40%**

Appendix D.8

Future Loan taking intentions	District								Total	
	Jaffna		Mullaitivu		Trincomalee		Batticaloa			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
To manage daily household expenditure	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	6	14.00%	9	20.50%	**15**	**11.30%**
For a health problem of the informant/family member	1	2.90%	0	0.00%	1	2.30%	0	0.00%	**2**	**1.50%**
Education of children	7	20.00%	1	9.10%	11	25.60%	17	38.60%	**36**	**27.10%**
To repay another loan	2	5.70%	3	27.30%	4	9.30%	2	4.50%	**11**	**8.30%**
To buy a land	9	25.70%	0	0.00%	5	11.60%	1	2.30%	**15**	**11.30%**
To construct a house	8	22.90%	2	18.20%	11	25.60%	10	22.70%	**31**	**23.30%**
To buy a household item	1	2.90%	0	0.00%	2	4.70%	1	2.30%	**4**	**3.00%**
To repair house	5	14.30%	1	9.10%	11	25.60%	5	11.40%	**22**	**16.50%**
To get water supply	1	2.90%	0	0.00%	4	9.30%	3	6.80%	**8**	**6.00%**
To get electricity supply	1	2.90%	0	0.00%	2	4.70%	1	2.30%	**4**	**3.00%**
To build a toilet	1	2.90%	0	0.00%	1	2.30%	0	0.00%	**2**	**1.50%**
To build a wall	4	11.40%	0	0.00%	1	2.30%	0	0.00%	**5**	**3.80%**
To buy a vehicle	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	4	9.30%	0	0.00%	**4**	**3.00%**
To give dowry	6	17.10%	1	9.10%	3	7.00%	4	9.10%	**14**	**10.50%**
For a wedding expenditure	15	42.90%	1	9.10%	6	14.00%	3	6.80%	**25**	**18.80%**
To Start a new business	7	20.00%	4	36.40%	3	7.00%	25	56.80%	**39**	**29.30%**
To improve the current business	4	11.40%	0	0.00%	4	9.30%	11	25.00%	**19**	**14.30%**
Other reasons	1	2.90%	1	9.10%	1	2.30%	1	2.30%	**4**	**3.00%**
PNM	0	0.00%	1	9.10%	1	2.30%	0	0.00%	**2**	**1.50%**

Appendix D.9

Physical disability related to war	District								Total	
	Jaffna		Mullaitivu		Trincomalee		Batticaloa			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Pain	3	30.00 %	20	36.40%	1	33.30%	3	27.30%	**27**	**34.20%**
Loss of leg/s	1	10.00 %	5	9.10%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	**6**	**7.60%**
Loss of hearing	1	10.00 %	4	7.30%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	**5**	**6.30%**
Loss of hand/s	0	0.00%	1	1.80%	0	0.00%	2	18.20%	**3**	**3.80%**
Loss of vision	0	0.00%	1	1.80%	0	0.00%	1	9.10%	**2**	**2.50%**
Fever	0	0.00%	1	1.80%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	**1**	**1.30%**
Others	3	30.00 %	13	23.60%	1	33.30%	5	45.50%	**22**	**27.80%**
PNM	2	20.00 %	28	50.90%	1	33.30%	1	9.10%	**32**	**40.50%**

Appendix D.10

Issues facing	District								Total	
	Jaffna		Mullaitivu		Trincomalee		Batticaloa			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
To help you when you do not have enough food at home?	154	56.00%	160	55.60%	115	44.60%	152	58.50%	**581**	**53.70%**
To talk when you have problems	169	61.50%	168	58.30%	95	36.80%	155	59.60%	**587**	**54.30%**
To talk when others in the family have problems	105	38.20%	123	42.70%	91	35.30%	105	40.40%	**424**	**39.20%**
To accompany you to a government office/hospital if you want to go	103	37.50%	93	32.30%	66	25.60%	91	35.00%	**353**	**32.70%**
To share household work	94	34.20%	132	45.80%	87	33.70%	142	54.60%	**455**	**42.10%**
Take care of your family members (children, elderly, sick) when you want to go out	78	28.40%	73	25.30%	68	26.40%	66	25.40%	**285**	**26.40%**
To protect you from a violence	26	9.50%	41	14.20%	35	13.60%	16	6.20%	**118**	**10.90%**
To lobby or campaign	1	0.40%	15	5.20%	25	9.70%	2	0.80%	**43**	**4.00%**
Others	0	0.00%	16	5.60%	12	4.70%	12	4.60%	**40**	**3.70%**
PNM	41	14.90%	39	13.50%	58	22.50%	29	11.20%	**167**	**15.40%**

Appendix D.11

Reason for not consulting a doctor	District								Total	
	Jaffna		Mullaitivu		Trincomalee		Batticaloa			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Corona fear	10	22.2%	7	12.3%	5	8.1%	41	36.6%	**63**	**22.8%**
Transport problem	2	4.4%	6	10.5%	1	1.6%	44	39.3%	**53**	**19.2%**
No money	5	11.1%	2	3.5%	5	8.1%	22	19.6%	**34**	**12.3%**
Cannot compensate the income loss	0	0.0%	1	1.8%	2	3.2%	20	17.9%	**23**	**8.3%**
No time	7	15.6%	0	0.0%	2	3.2%	9	8.0%	**18**	**6.5%**
No one to accompany	1	2.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	12	10.7%	**13**	**4.7%**
No one to look after the dependents	2	4.4%	0	0.0%	1	1.6%	10	8.9%	**13**	**4.7%**
Cannot take leave	1	2.2%	0	0.0%	2	3.2%	2	1.8%	**5**	**1.8%**
Other	9	20.0%	36	63.2%	17	27.4%	21	18.8%	**83**	**30.1%**
PNM	19	42.2%	12	21.1%	29	46.8%	16	14.3%	**76**	**27.5%**

5. Appendix E: Questionnaire

Formulating Organic Definitions for Women Heads of Households

Office use	Interview Serial No	Date	Starting time	Finishing time

1	Name of the interviewer	
2	Address of the informant	
3	Province	
4	District	
5	DS and GN Divisions of the informant	

Do you think that the informant is a special case who can be considered for further in-depth study?	
Give reason for your observation.	
If you find the informant is a special case, note down her contact details (telephone no.)	

Signature of the interviewer: …….

1	Social Profile of the Respondent						
1-1	Name (optional)						
1-2	Sex	a. Female		b. Transgender		c. Prefer not to mention	
1-3	Age category	a. Under 18		b. 18 - 25			
		c. 26 - 35		d. 36 – 50			
		e. 50 – 80		f. Above 80			
1-4	Ethnicity	a. Sinhalese		b. Sri Lankan Tamil			
		c. Upcountry Tamil		d. Muslims			
		e. Burger		f. Other			

		g. Prefer not to mention[36] (PNM)			
1-5	**Religion**	a. Buddhism		b. Hinduism	
		c. Islam		d. Roman Catholics	
		e. Other Christianity		f. Atheist	
		g. Other		h. Prefer not to mention	
1-6	**Is this your native place?**	a. Yes *(skip 1-7)*		b. No	
1-7	**Reasons for you to settle at the present place of residence.**	a. Marriage		b. In search of job	
		c. Resettlement programme		d. War-induced displacement	
		e. Children's education		f. Other (specify)	
		g. Prefer not to mention			
1-8	**Highest educational qualification**	a. No schooling		b. Grade 1- 5	
		c. Grade 6- 11		d. Passed O/L	
		e. Passed A/L		f. Undergraduate	
		g. Post graduate studies		h. Diploma	
		i.. Certificate courses		J. Religious studies	
		k. Other (specify)			
1-9	**Have you obtained any skills related training?**	a. Yes		b. No *(go to 1-11)*	
1-10	**If yes, specify. (Select all that apply)**	a. Tailoring		b. Beautician course	
		c. Horticulture		d. Pottery	
		e. livestock		f. Cookery	
		g. Pre-school training		h. Cottage industry training (specify)	
		i.Mines clearing		j.CSD (Civil Service Division)	
		k. Other (specify)			
1-11	**Civil Status**	a. Unmarried *(go to 2)*		b. Married	
		c. Widowed		d. Divorced	
		e. Separated		f. Abandoned	
		g. Cohabitation		h. Open relationship	
		i. Spouse disappearance		j. Other (specify)	
		k. Prefer not to mention			
	Interviewer's note				

[36] Referred to as PNM in some questions.

1-12	**Age at marriage**	a. Below 18		b.18 or above *(go to 2)*	
1-13	**Reason of early-marriage**	a. My willingness		b. Influence of family	
		c. War		d. Economic hardship	
		e. Premarital Pregnancy		f. forced marriage	
		g. Other (specify)		h. Prefer not to mention	

2	**Household Headship & responsibilities**						
2-1	**Do you have any male members in your household?**	a. Yes		b. No (*go to 2-3*)		c. Prefer not to mention	
2-2	**Do they / does he contribute to your household income?**	a. Yes		b. No		c. Prefer not to mention	
2-3	**What do you think are the responsibilities of a household head? (Select all that apply)**	a. Contributing to the economic well-being of the household		b. Contributing to other household responsibilities			
		c. Main person in decision making		d. Other (specify)			
2-4	**Which of the following identify you better?**	a. Female member of the family who is responsible for the household		b. Female head of the household			
				c. None of the above			
2-5	**If you are the head of the household, do you think the community accepts your headship?**	a. Yes		b. No		c. Other	
2-6	**Reason/s for your answer, mentioned above**						
2-7	**Have you ever been a head of the household?**	a. Yes		b. No (skip from 2-9 to 2-13)			
2-8	**If you are responsible now, who was responsible earlier/before you took over the responsibilities?** **Or**	a. Husband		b. Father			
		c. Mother		d. Brother			
		e. Sister		f. Son			
		g. Daughter		h. Grand father			

	If you are NOT responsible now, who is responsible for your family?	i. Grandmother		j. Grandson	
		k. Granddaughter		l. Daughter in law	
		m. Son-in-law		n. Joint responsibility	
		o.Others (specify)			
2-9	**What were the circumstances that led you to take the responsibility of your household?** **The previously responsible person was ……..**	a. Aged		b. Death	
		c. Sick		d. Unemployed	
		e. Disappeared		f. Made disappeared	
		g.Temporarily migrated		h. In prison	
		i. Divorced		J. Walked-out	
		k. disabled/differently abled/permanent disability		l. In a polygamous relationship	
		m. Alcohol/drug dependency		n. Other (specify)	
2-10	**Reasons for you to leave from your responsibility.**	a. Aged		b. poor health condition	
		c. Arrival of the important male member		d. Arrival of the important female member	
		e. become unemployed		f. Other (specify)	
2-11	**How did you take the responsibility of your household?**	a. Own willingness		b. Automatically (without any external or internal force)	
		c. Voluntarily in a context/ situation		d. Forcefully/ on a request	
2-12	**How long have you been responsible for your Household?**	a. <= 5 years		b. 6 – 10 years	
		c. 11- 15 years		d. More than 15 years	
2-13	**At what age did you take over the responsibility of your household?**				

	Information about members in household												
	Relationship	Age	Education	Employment	Contribution to household income		Contribution to household responsibilities		Disabilities		Drug addicted / Alcoholic		
					Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	PNM
2-14													

3	ECONOMIC LIVELIHOOD

3-1	**Do you own any property?**	a. Yes		b. No		c. Prefer not to mention	
3-2	**If yes, asset ownership (Select all that apply)**	a. Paddy / garden land			b. House		
		c. Savings and Insurances			d. Livestock		
		e. Jewelleries			f. Heavy vehicle		
		g. Light vehicle			h. Others (specify)		
		i. Prefer not to mention					
3-3	**If you own a land, nature of ownership**	a. Self-ownership			b. joint ownership		
		c. leased			d. Permit land		
		e. Others (specify)			f. Prefer not to mention		
3-4	**If you own a land, how did you get it?**	a. Inherited from parents			b. Inherited from husband's parents		

		c. From husband		d. Purchased	
		e. Donated		f. Encroached	
		h. Government provided		i. others (specify)	
		j. Prefer not to mention			
3-5	**If you own a house, nature of ownership**	a. Self-ownership		b. joint ownership	
3-6	**If you own a house, how did you get it?**	a. Inherited from parents		b. Inherited from husband's parents	
		c. From Husband		d. Purchased	
		e. Donated		f. Provided by NGOs	
		g. Charity		h. provided by Government	
		i. others (specify)		j. Prefer not to mention	
3-7	**Are you employed?**	a. Yes *(go to 3-9)*		b. No	c. Retired
3-8	**If you are not employed, how do you get your income? (Select all that apply)** (*go to 3-13*)	a. Home garden		b. Foreign remittance	
		c. Interest from savings		d. Family members earning	
		e. Rental Income		f. Pension of a family member	
		g. Other (specify)		h. Prefer not to mention	
3-9	**If you are employed, the type of your job.**	a. Permanent		b. Temporary	
		c. Daily wage		e. Seasonal	
		f. Contract based		g. Other (specify)	
3-10	**Are you drawing your income from multiple sources?**	a. Yes	b. No*(go to 3-12)*	c. Prefer not to mention	
3-11	**If yes, from how many sources do you receive your income?**	a.2	b. 3/4	e. more than 4	
3-12	**What is/ are your current employment/livelihood activity/ activities? (Select all that apply)**	a. Labourer (agricultural labour, fishing labour, domestic work, labour at companies & shops, construction….)		b. Food making (food, meal packets, drying fish, making dry food items such as chilli powder, snacks, mixture, vadais, roasted peanuts)	
		c. Handicraft (mats, coir)		d. Sewing/ Garment works	
		e. Cultivation		f. Small business	
		g. Livestock and poultry		h. Preschool teacher	
		i. Driving three wheeler		j. Beautician	
		k. Online business		l. Chit	

		m. Government sector employment (specify)		n. NGO workers (specify)	
		o. Trainer/teacher (arts)		p. Rental Income	
		q. Other (specify)		r. Prefer not to mention	
3-13	**How much do you spend on the following monthly**	Expenditure	Amount	Expenditure	Amount
		a. Food		b. Medical needs	
		c. Education		d. Transport	
		e. Electricity		f. Water	
		g. Phone		h. TV	
		i. Repay loans		j. Rent	
		k. EMI/ Chit/ Insurance		l. Data and internet expenses	
		m. Other expenditures (specify)			
3-14	**What is your monthly income (in LKR)**	a. below 10,000		b. below 15,000	
		c. below 20,000		d. above 20,000	
		e. Prefer not to mention			
3-15	**What is your total household monthly income? In LKR**	a. below 10,000		b. below 15,000	
		c. below 20,000		d. above 20,000	
		e. Prefer not to mention			

3-16	**Is the income you earn from your employment adequate?**	a. Yes *(go to 3-18)*		b. No	
3-17	**If not how do you manage (Select all that apply)**	a. Help from relatives			
		b. Help from friends			
		c. Help from neighbours			
		d. Borrow from local money lenders			
		e. Draw from savings			
		f. Help from charity/ Religious organization			
		g. Help from Community based organizations			
		h. Bank loans			
		i. Help from Micro finance institutions			
		j. Public Monthly Allowance			
		k. Samurdhi			
		l. Other support from Government			
		m. Pawning			
		n. Other (specify)			
		o. Prefer not to mention			
3-18	**Do you receive any regular financial assistance?**	a. Yes		b. No *(go to 3-20)*	

3-19	**From whom?**	a .Relatives		b. Friends				
		c. Neighbours		d. Government				
		e. Community based org.		f. NGOs				
		g. Charities		h. Other (specify)				
3-20	**Have you taken any loan?**	a. Yes		b. No *(go to 3-24)*				
3-21	**How many loans have you taken, since you took over the headship?**	a. 1	b. 2	c. 3	d. 4	e. 5	f. <5	g. PNM
3-22	**How many loans do you have at present?**	a. 1	b. 2	c. 3	d. 4	e. 5	f. <5	g. PNM
3-23	**Approximate amount of loan (in total) in LKR**	a. Below 25,000	b. 25000-50,000	c. 50,000-750000	d. 75000-100,000	e. Above 100,000		g. PNM
3-24	**Do you intend to take any loans in the future**	a. Yes		b. No		c. Cannot mention now		
3-25	**If yes, from whom?**	a. Relatives		b. Friends				
		c. Neighbours		d. Government banks				
		e. Private banks		f. Private microcredit organizations				
		g. Gold pawning services		h. other(specify)				
3-26	**If you took any loan in past, for what purposes you have taken loan in the past (Select all that apply)**	a. To manage daily household expenditure						
		b. For a health problem of the informant/family member						
		c. Education of children						
		d. To repay another loan						
		e. To buy a land						
		f. To construct a house						
		g. To buy a household item						
		h. To repair house						
		i. To get water supply						
		j. To get electricity facility						
		k. To build a toilet						
		l. To build a wall						
		m. To buy a vehicle						
		n. To give dowry						
		o. For a wedding expenditure						
		p. For a funeral expenditure						

		q. For birthday celebrations	
		r. For a puberty celebration	
		s. Repay the loan of another family member	
		t. To cover Migration expenditures	
		u. To get a TV channel connection	
		v. To buy a mobile phone	
		w. To Start a new business	
		x. To improve the current business	
		y. to cover legal expenditures/ to pay for fine	
		z. Other reasons (specify)	
3-27	**For what purposes do you plan to take loans in the future (Select all that apply)**	a. To manage daily household expenditure	
		b. For a health problem of the informant/family member	
		c. Education of children	
		d. To repay another loan	
		e. To buy a land	
		f. To construct a house	
		g. To buy a household item	
		h. To repair house	
		i. To get water supply	
		j. To get electricity supply	
		k. To build a toilet	
		l. To build a wall	
		m. To buy a vehicle	
		n. To give dowry	
		o. For a wedding expenditure	
		p. For birthday celebrations	
		q. For a puberty celebration	
		r. Repay the loan of another family member	
		s. To cover Migration expenditures	
		t. To buy a TV	
		u. To buy a mobile phone	
		v. To Start a new business	
		w. To improve the current business	
		x. Other reasons (specify)	
3-28	**Do you have any barriers to participate in your current work/employment**	a. Yes | b. No | c.Prefer not to mention	
3-29	**If yes, what are those barriers (Select all that apply)**	a. Household works	
		b. Looking after children/elderly/disabled	
		c. Disability	

		d. Lack of transport facilities / Distance	
		e. Poor working conditions	
		f. Long working hours	
		g. Strict administration	
		h. Sexual harassment at workplace	
		i. Sexual harassment during transport	
		j. Sexual bribery	
		k. Community does not like women going out for work	
		l. Family does not allow	
		m. Health issues	
		n. Others (specify)	
		o. Prefer not to mention	
3-30	**If you are not employed now, why? (Select all that apply)**	a. I have health issues	
		b. No jobs available in my village that I can do	
		c. I have dependents at home who needs full time care	
		d. I do not possess any skills or qualifications	
		e. I cannot travel outside my village	
		f. Family and community pressure	
		g. No guidance/help to seek a job	
		h. prefer not to work	
		i. I was fired from my employment	
		j. Others (specify)	
		k. Prefer not to mention	
3-31	**Have you been previously employed?**	a. Yes	b. No
3-32	**If no, why were you not employed (Select all that apply)**	a. I have health issues	
		b. No jobs available in my village that I can do	
		c. I have dependents at home who needs full time care	
		d. I do not possess any skills or qualifications	
		e. I cannot travel outside my village	
		f. Family and community pressure	
		g. No guidance/help to seek a job	
		h. prefer not to work	
		i. Other (specify)	
		j. Prefer not to mention	
3-33	**If you were removed from your job, what are the reasons? (Select all that apply)**	a. I could not go to work on time	
		b. I took leave often	
		c. I became ill	
		d. Disagreements with co-workers/superiors	

		e. Gender discrimination			
		f. COVID-19 pandemic			
		g. Other (specify)			
		h. Prefer not to mention			
3-34	**If you are not employed, are you looking for a job now?**	a. Yes		b. No	
3-35	**Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your livelihood?**	a. Yes		b. No *(go to 3-37)*	
3-36	**If yes, explain how? (leave it open)** Prompt questions: Children's online education, starvation, loss of livelihood, cannot repay the loans, cannot go to hospital, income loss, excessive domestic violence or frequent quarrels with family members				
3-37	**Do you receive any financial/other types of assistance during the COVID-19?**	a. Yes		b. No	
3-38	**If yes, what is the source?** **(Select all that apply)**	a. Government		b. NGOs	
		c. Charities		d. Community Based Organizations	
		e. Individual people		f. Other(specify)	
3-39	**How do you cope with the COVID-19 pandemic situation?** ***(ask prompt questions, economically, socially, children's education…leave it open)*** ***Here the RAs should make a note of interesting cases to highlight in the qualitative study)***				
3-40	**Did you help the community during the COVID-19 pandemic?**	**a. Yes**		**b. No**	
3-41	**If yes, how did you help the community?** ***(Ask prompt questions)*** ***Here the RAs should make a note of interesting cases to highlight in the qualitative study)***				

4	Health and wellbeing				
4-1	Do you think your health is in good condition?	a. Yes,		b. No	
		c. I do not know		d. I do not want to answer	
4-2	If you wish to mention any health problem you have, please mention?	a. Communicable disease		b. Non communicable disease	
4-3	Have you consulted a doctor during the last 12months	a. Yes		b. No	
4-4	If not, why? (Select all that apply)	a. Corona fear		b. No money	
		c. Transport problem		d. No one to accompany	
		e. No one to look after the dependents (children, elderly, disabled)		f. Cannot compensate the income loss	
		g. Cannot take leave		h. No time	
		i. Others (specify)		j. Prefer not to mention	

5	Social networks and supports				
5-1	Do you know any existing social networks and supports?	a. Yes		b. No *(go to 5-6)*	
5-2	Are you a member of any organization/s?	a. Yes		b. No *(go to 5-6)*	
5-3	If yes, which organizations? (Select all that apply)	a. Religious organizations		b. credit groups	
		c. savings groups		d. women's organizations	
		e. trade organizations		f. Self-help group	
		g. others (specify)			
5-4	What is /are your role/s in those organization/s?	a. Member		b. Committee member	
		c. Treasurer		d. Secretary	
		e. representative		f. President	
		g. others (specify)			
5-5	Which organization are helping you (ask the informant to name)				
5-6	Do you know about Amara?	a. Yes		b. No	
5-6-1	If yes, are you a member?	a. Yes		b. No	
5-7	Do you know about Samasam?	a. Yes		b. No	
5-7-1	If yes, are you a member?	a. Yes		b. No	
5-8	Could you tell why you are a member in any of the above organization/s? (Select all that apply)	a. For financial benefits		b. For social benefits	
		b. To have an identity		c. To make friends	

		d. Others (specify)			
5-9	**What type of help have you got from those organizations? (Select all that apply)**	a. Finance		b. Marketing	
		c. Skills training		d. Counselling	
		e. Others (specify)			

5-10	**(i) Do you have any of the following issues?** **(ii) If yes, do you have someone to help you to manage those issues?** **(Select all that apply)**	**Issues**	**(i)**			**(ii)**	
			Yes	**No**	**PNM**	**Yes**	**No**
		a. To help you when you do not have enough food at home?					
		b. To talk when you have problems					
		c. To talk when others in the family have problems					
		d. To accompany you to a government office/hospital if you want to go					
		e. To share household work					
		f. Take care of your family members (children, elderly, sick) when you want to go out					
		g. To protect you from a violence					
		h. To lobby or campaign					
		i. Others (specify)					

5-11	**Who helps you in the above situations?** **(Select all that apply)**	a. relatives		b. neighbour	
		c. friends		d. Others (specify)	
5-12	**How do you help others, when they have problems?** ***(Here the RAs should make a note of interesting cases to highlight in the qualitative study)***				
5-13	**When you meet other women in the community, which of the following problems are discussed among your group.** **(Select all that apply)**	a. Security		b. Health problems	
		c. psychological health issues		d. Domestic violence	
		e. Drugs/liquor/illicit liquor related problems		f. Environmental problems	
		g. Teenage marriage		h. Teenage pregnancies	
		i. Problems faced by you		j. Suicides	
		k. Group violence		l. Rape	
		m. Educational problems		n. problems related to microfinance	
		o. Sexual and emotional harassment		p. Others (Specify)	

6	Access to services				
6-1	Which of the following services are accessible for you? (Select all that apply)	a. Health		b. Police	
		c. Courts		d. Banking	
		e. Counselling		f. Protection services/ safe house	
		g. Education		h. Skills training	
		i.. Clean water		k. Electricity	
		l. Others (specify)			
6-2	Do you have any barriers in accessing the above services?	a. Yes		b. No*(go to 6-4)*	
6-3	If yes, what are the barriers	a. Language		b. distance	
		c. transport		d. cannot take leave from job	
		e. Bribery		f. Sexual bribery	
		g. Sexual harassment		h. Gender discrimination	
		i. Identity based discrimination		j. any form of disability	
		k. Illiteracy		l. Others (specify)	
		m. Prefer not to mention			
6-4	Were you ever been asked to provide bribe in order to get your work done (government offices, private sector, other places)	a. Yes		b. No *(go to 6-6)*	
6-5	What type of bribes?	a. Money		b. Sexual bribe	
		c. Others (specify)		d. Prefer not to mention	
6-6	Are you aware of any institutions where you can make a complaint about bribery?	a. Yes		b. No	
6-7	Have you ever made any complaints?	a. Yes		b. No *(go to 6-10)*	
6-8	Has any action been taken?	a. Yes		b. No	
6-9	Explain your answer for the above question				
6-10	Why didn't you make a complaint?	a. Do not have anyone to accompany		b. Language barrier	
		c. Feeling no action will be taken by authorities		d. Scare to go to make a complaint	
		E .Others (specify)			

7	**Impacts of war**									
7-1	**Are you a victim of war / affected by war?**	a. Yes		b. No		c. Prefer not to mention				
7-2	**If yes explain:** **(Select all that apply)**	a. Close family member was / members were killed								
		b. Close family member injured/ members injured								
		c. Close family member/ members were-made disappeared								
		d. Close family member/ members were is in the prison								
		e. Close family member/ members were raped								
		f. Loss of house								
		g. Loss of livelihoods								
		h. Loss of relatives								
		i. Loss of friends								
		j. Loss of other properties								
		k. Displaced								
		l. Others (specify)								
		m. Prefer not to mention								
7-3	**Were you a** (i) **member of the armed forces** (ii) **police** (iii) **Civil Defence Force** (iv) **ex-combatant**	a. Yes (Specify)		b. No		c. Prefer not to mention				
7-4	**Do you experience any physical disability related to war?**	a. Yes				b. No				
7-5	**Explain your physical disability** **(Select all that apply)**	a. Loss of leg/s				b. Loss of hand/s				
		c. Loss of vision				d. Loss of hearing				
		e. Blood poisoning				f. Pain				
		g. Fever				h. Others (specify)				
7-6	**Do you feel that you are recovering from the impacts of war**	a. Yes				b. No				
7-7	**As an ex-combatant, do you face any challenges in the community?**	a. Yes		b. No		**c.** Prefer not to mention				
7-8	**If yes, could you explain?**									
7-9	**Are there any concerns about the person's or family's safety from state or community**	a. Yes		b. No		**c.** Prefer not to mention				
7-10	**Have you undergone any rehabilitation by the government**	a. Yes				b. No				
7-11	**If yes, could you explain?** **(Monetary support/ Vocational skills)**									
7-12	**Did you prefer/ find it useful to have the rehabilitation programme**	a. Yes		b. No		c. prefer not to mention				

8	Questions for all WHHs
8-1	What are the challenges you face in connection to heading your family?
8-2	What emotional challenges/problems do you face?
8-3	What is /are the most pressing issue/s you face? Please provide reasons

Sinhala speaking women: household heads from military families. We have to note that not all of them are military widows. We might get Women heads of households from the border villages too. We have to cover this under the section on impacts of war. In a previous section, we already identify the reason for becoming heads of the households

Observation of the interviewer: Additional note (rather than having a separate note book, the interviewer is expected to make notes in the provided space If necessary add extra papers. If you think the respondent should be included in the qualitative interviews, mention it with justification. Make a note of this at the top right hand corner of the questionnaire.