

# DETERMINANTS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND THE MODERATING ROLE OF FINANCIAL INCLUSION: EVIDENCE FROM NUWARA ELIYA, SRI LANKA

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## 1. Introduction

Sri Lanka ranks 75th out of 132 countries on the global gender inequality index, highlighting the need to create opportunities for women and gender minorities to exercise their rights and contribute to national development. However, there is a significant gender disparity in financial inclusion, with men having greater access to formal finance. This research aims to identify the demographic and socioeconomic factors influencing women's empowerment, as well as the moderating role of financial inclusion, focusing on the Nuwara Eliya district.

## 2. Research Methodology

This quantitative study surveyed 384 married women aged 25 to 45 in the Nuwara Eliya district. Demographic variables included family size, family type, age difference with the husband, number of children, and residence, while socioeconomic variables covered women's education, employment status, income level, wealth index, and their husband's education and employment status. The hypotheses were tested using chi-square analysis and multiple linear regression.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

The findings revealed that the age difference between the husband and place of residence significantly influences women's empowerment. Most socioeconomic factors, except women's employment status and financial inclusion, positively contribute to women's empowerment, with financial inclusion also playing a moderate role.

## 4. Conclusion and Implications

This study underscores the critical role of demographic and socioeconomic factors, alongside financial inclusion, in shaping women's empowerment in the Nuwara Eliya district. The government can use the study's findings to implement women empowerment programs, promoting greater female involvement in national development. Financial institutions can apply the insights to address women's specific financial needs, developing strategies to enhance women's access to microfinance, banking services, etc.

**Keywords:** Gender inequality, Financial inclusion, Women empowerment