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## **Confronting Patriarchy: Women Drivers’ Vulnerabilities and Coping Strategies in Ride-Hailing Industry**

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### **A B S T R A C T**

Women entering the driving profession is a significant shift in the modern world of work. In Sri Lanka also, it seems that women are increasingly occupying themselves in the ride-hailing industry. This research aims to unveil how the patriarchal ideology is deeply rooted in the Sri Lankan ride-hailing industry; and how women ride-hailing drivers cope with the male-dominant nature and the practices in the Sri Lankan ride-hailing industry. The study adopts a qualitative approach and deploys a multiple case study strategy to explore the phenomenon in context by selecting three ride-hailing organisations. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with both male and female ride-hailing drivers who were selected based on the purposive sampling technique. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. This study reveals that the patriarchal ideology deeply rooted in Sri Lankan socio-cultural context, creates barriers for women ride-hailing drivers both domestically and industrially. Coping strategies, such as disguising feminine attributes through appearance and adapting to masculine traits, self-defense methods and serving only familiar clients without serving strangers are used by women ride-hailing drivers to cope with the male dominant nature and the practices in the industry.

**Keywords:** Coping strategies, Gender discrimination, Patriarchy, Ride-hailing industry

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## 1. Introduction

Sri Lankan taxi services include metered taxi three-wheelers and automobiles. Because of the poor quality of public transport and less parking facilities in major cities in Sri Lanka, people tend to shift to taxis which provide comfortable and less cost services (Thilakarathne & Jayaratne, 2019). Therefore, taxi service in Sri Lanka is now one of the most affordable and popular transportation methods, especially for middle-income and high-income people. In the traditional taxi industry, there are issues, such as passengers being unable to find the taxis easily, being overcharged and taxi drivers' unawareness about the best routes (Thilakarathne & Jayaratne, 2019). Novel ride-hailing apps entirely brought a drastic change to the taxi industry. The traditional taxi industry took on a new look as the ride-hailing industry, with the introduction of mobile apps and phone-based platforms. Mobile app-based ride-hailing operators connect passengers and drivers through mobile phones in a real-time location. Additionally, value-added services, such as multiple payment methods are available through mobile app-based ride-hailing services, as opposed to the traditional cash payment method in Sri Lanka (Thilakarathne & Jayaratne, 2019). Passengers can use the mobile app or call to place a ride and choose the pick-up location and destination, as well as the vehicle type. The existing Sri Lankan app-based ride-hailing market is a competitive one with few companies. Further, some ride-hailing drivers are connecting their customers with mobile phones, but without using mobile apps.

To empower women economically, one of the leading ride-hailing platforms launched free vehicle registration for Sri Lankan women in 2018 by giving chance to step into the ride-hailing industry ("Ladies to drive you", 2018). Initially, women's ride-hailing initiation did not succeed due to women's safety concerns and the danger of the occupation (International Finance Corporation, 2020). A survey conducted by the International Finance Corporation indicated that the major impediments to women's enrollment in the ride-hailing industry were safety and security issues (International Finance Corporation, 2020). However, as time elapse, the ride-hailing industry which is traditionally male-dominated drastically changed and succeeded with emerging women-only ride-hailing initiatives which are providing services only for women (Rathnayake, 2019). Two main mobile app-based ride-hailing services in Sri Lanka initiated women ride-hailing services as open customers model which serve both male and female passengers during the women's day celebrations during the 2018-2020 period. Also, some women taxi drivers conduct school services as self-employed passenger services. In brief, the Sri Lankan ride-hailing industry consists of women ride-hailing drivers who only drive for women as well as those who drive for women and men as open customer models.

International Labour Organisation (2016) reports that the insecure nature of the public transportation system is one of the main reasons for women's unemployment in Sri Lanka. 90 percent of Sri Lankan women endured sexual harassment on public transportation in 2015 (UNFPA, 2017). 85 percent of women who would like to take up work in the future have expressed they need safe and convenient transport to and from the workplace (International Labour Organisation, 2016). In this context, women's ride-hailing services would be a good solution to secure women from sexual harassment experienced in public transportation. However, Sri Lankan women are treated as subordinates in both private and public spheres, have a lack of education and other gender discrimination as well as set them aside from having access to resources and power because of the patriarchal ideology in Sri Lanka (Vithanage, 2015). Thus, the prevailing patriarchal ideologies often create challenges for women ride-hailing drivers because working as a women ride-hailing driver is a risky attempt in a traditionally male-dominated sector as male drivers' dominance leads to harassment and discrimination against female drivers (Rathnayake, 2019). Therefore, clear identification of

gender discrimination and other barriers in the ride-hailing industry will be useful for empowering women to enter the industry as well as when developing strategies to reduce harassment and discrimination in the transportation system. Women ride-hailing drivers can be one of the best strategies to reduce women's unemployment by creating safe and convenient transportation facilities for women.

In order to explore the male-dominant nature of the Sri Lankan ride-hailing industry and women ride-hailing drivers' experience of their everyday reality, the research questions of the study were articulated as given in Section 2—Research Problem. The rest of this paper is organised as follows. After the research questions, the paper presents a brief review of the extant literature about the study which is then followed by the methodology adopted. Next, the findings of the study are presented in the data analysis and discussion sections. The final section concludes the paper along with implications of the study and directions for future research.

### **1.1. Research problem**

Despite the existence of patriarchy in its most primitive manner in South Asia in today's context as well (Nainar, 2013), little attention has been given to its consequences in many South Asian countries including Sri Lanka (Vithanage, 2015; De Alwis, 2002). Even the limited number of previous studies available also mainly focus on aspects, such as empowerment of women based on beliefs and practices of patriarchy (Rawat, 2014), gender disparity in the wage gap and occupational segregation in labour market (Niimi, 2009), and patriarchy and gender imbalance in Indian culture (Sivakumar & Manimekalai, 2021). As per our knowledge, how much patriarchal ideology is deeply rooted in male-dominant industries, how female workers cope with the male-dominated nature and the practices in such industries and how those create challenges and lead to discriminatory practices have scarcely been studied in the existing literature (Berry, 1998; Dunckel-Graglia & Brook, 2017). Ride-hailing industry is one such industry where female drivers are increasingly entering and even new trends of women-only ride-hailing services —amidst the mainstream ride-hailing industry—are emerging but less scholarly attention is paid (Baruah, 2017; Dunckel-Graglia & Brook, 2017; Tamilselvi, 2020). Though the experiences of female ride-hailing drivers and women-only taxi services have been researched in the Indian context in a limited manner (Baruah, 2017; Dunckel-Graglia & Brook, 2017; Tamilselvi, 2020), no studies on the experiences of women ride-hailing drivers and on emerging trends, such as women-only ride-hailing services, are available in Sri Lankan context. Thus, the study contributes to existing empirical knowledge by inquiring about the experiences of Sri Lankan female ride-hailing drivers who are working in a male-dominant industry where the patriarchal ideology is deeply rooted. Based on the background explained above, this study intends to explore the below-mentioned research questions using qualitative methodology.

**RQ1:** How is the patriarchal ideology deeply rooted in the Sri Lankan ride-hailing industry?

**RQ2:** How do women ride-hailing drivers cope with the male-dominated nature and the practices in the Sri Lankan ride-hailing industry?

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Patriarchy**

When women and men interact with each other for economic and technological developments men yield the decision-making authority and access to the resources within which patriarchy

arises (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Patriarchy is a strong and traditional cultural concept that limits women's ability to earn for living. Patriarchy is a pattern that can be found in most countries around the world with a long history. Patriarchy is inevitable because of the way gender is rooted in society and the way gender is reproduced from our childhood to the end of our lives (Macionis, 2012). From birth as a newborn, gender shapes the feelings, emotions, thoughts, actions, education paths, career paths, etc. until death (Macionis, 2012). However, patriarchy is not constant, and it is dynamic based on ethnicity, religion and socio-cultural practice (Ray, 2008).

Walby (1990) introduced there are degrees and forms of patriarchy. The degree of patriarchy means the intensity of oppression on specific dimensions like the wage gap and job position. According to Walby, Private and Public patriarchy is one of the categorisations of patriarchy (1990). Private patriarchy occurs when a man dominates and oppresses women in the household sphere. Man in the position of husband or father, is the individual and direct oppressor to create subordination of women. Private patriarchy was reasoned to exclude women from social life. In contrast, public patriarchy is the collective oppression of women by men mostly in the working world than in the household sphere (Walby, 1990). For example, even though women are allowed to undertake roles in the public sphere, they are continually oppressed by gender inequalities in paid work, education, economic situation and positions of authority held in society (Walby, 1990).

## **2.2. Gender discrimination as a key challenge towards women in male-dominated occupations**

When women are entering the workforce by exceeding domestic limits to gain power, they try to either enter into the men's world or by creating a society for themselves (Rosaldo, 1974). With the feminist movements about gender equality, women are drastically entering into non-traditional occupations. (Heliman & Haynes, 2005). One of the ways that women can earn more wages than men is by entering into non-traditional work which is defined as jobs that consist of 75% of male employees (Lemkau, 1983). When women are doing non-traditional jobs, sex segregation and discriminatory practices, sexual harassment, job discrimination practices and role conflicts can be caused for women (Kissman, 1990). Through the experience of women in a few male-dominated occupations, Martin & Barnard (2013) identified organisational practices that maintain discrimination and biasedness, such as traditional gender roles and stereotypes of women in society existed in workplaces, physical and health-related difficulties women experienced, negative work-identity perceptions such as lack of self-confidence, work-life balance with their domestic responsibilities as challenges women face in those occupations.

Discrimination occurs when similar people are treated in different ways or when people who are different are treated in similar ways (Kimmel, 2011). Discrimination against women can be, a distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of a gender stereotype or any other form with the purpose of impairing or nullifying women's recognition, enjoyment or exercise, without considering their marital status, equality of men and women or human rights and fundamental freedoms in any field. (Cook & Cusack, 2010)

Gender discrimination occurs with cultural beliefs about men and women as well as institutionalised policies and practices in the workplace (Ridgeway & England, 2007). In almost every culture, gender discrimination exists, and it can occur directly or slightly (Vrontis et al., 2010). Therefore, gender discrimination is one of the key challenges women face when they are doing occupations.

### **2.3. Different facets of gender discrimination**

There are various kinds of discrimination, and they have different impacts on individual and organisational results (Mays et al., 1996). Kim (2015) examined the effects of discrimination on quality of life at the organisational level based on two types of discrimination. The first type is perceived discrimination, and the second type is experienced discrimination. An individual has the perception that he or she is treated differently or unfairly based on their membership in a group, it is perceived discrimination (Foley et al., 2005; Sanchez & Brock, 1996). Most of the research focuses on perceived discrimination (Kim, 2015). The second type of experienced discrimination is the personal experience of unjust treatment. It causes improving egoistic relative deprivations (Kim, 2015). Moreover, perceived, and experienced discrimination causes an increase in job dissatisfaction and less work engagement of employees (Kim, 2015). Experienced discrimination can be controlled to some extent by increasing the work engagement of employees (Kim, 2015). For instance, the wage rate gap created based on gender can be changed by altering the company policies. But perceived discrimination cannot be controlled because it is a perception in the mind.

### **2.4. Gender discrimination in taxi industry**

The main violence in transit services is gender discrimination (Dunckel-Graglia & Brook, 2013). The number of sexual harassment and rapes that women encountered as passengers in traveling reasoned to increase the demand for women drivers. Rather than using existing safety measures such as the SOS button in the ride-hailing app or tracking the travel method, taxi aggregators in India are now having to worry about the safety of their female passengers. (Tamilselvi, 2020). Once pressed the SOS button, it sends an alert with real-time location information to the police or the mentioned party in the passengers' app (Siddique, 2019).

When it comes to the minority group of women drivers, they were not supposed to drive at night and governors imposed a specific dress code for women drivers in Halifax city. They encountered negative responses from male passengers. Most of the male taxi drivers and male passengers considered women drivers as prostitutes (Berry, 1998). Within the violence, they faced in Kenya women taxi conductors limited their service only to small distance trips (Maina & Caine, 2013). In New Delhi, India in addition to the male dominance barriers in the industry, lack of skills and knowledge, skepticism or ridicule from family and friends, deep-rooted social prejudices against women drivers, balancing domestic work and long working hours, lack of a sense of community, absence of public toilet facilities for women are barriers for women's employment and empowerment to enter to the taxi industry (Baruah, 2017). Westmarland & Anderson (2001) showed in their research findings female taxi drivers are more sexually harassed than male taxi drivers in the cities in England. Oscar Newman's defensible space theory stated that the nature of the spatial design is directly related to the level of crimes (Dunckel-Graglia & Brook, 2013). Therefore, both women drivers and passengers are afraid to travel. To cope with the passenger's fear of transit services, taxi aggregators tend to change the physical designs of transit systems. They add cameras and increase the number of lightning vehicles. But they had only a small effect or sometimes there was not any effect from those strategies (Dunckel-Graglia & Brook, 2013). Scholars concluded the feeling of fear is a result of gendered societal and power relational attitudes rather than actual crime (Bondi, 2005). In general, women taxi drivers and women passengers are experiencing gender discrimination practices such as violence and sexual harassment.

### **2.5. Women in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka achieved a high level of life expectancy and literacy with successive government investments in education, health and welfare programmes (International Labour Organisation,

2016). However, women empowerment in Sri Lanka is below the average level of other developing countries because of the women's low involvement in politics (5.8% in 2012) and low female participation in the labour force (34.7% in 2012) (International Labour Organisation, 2016). This shows those women's capabilities are underutilised in the Sri Lankan labour force and politics. Women in Sri Lanka mostly join traditionally feminine careers and earn less than men, such as in school teaching. Open economy policy changes in 1977 had structural adjustments in the country, but those policies affected different groups of women in different ways. Along with such structural changes, many women entered low-income employment (Gunawardane, 2016), such as cleaning and domestic help. However, those resulted in an underrepresentation of women in labour force and political participation in Sri Lanka (Gunawardane, 2016). To overcome those disparities mobilisation of women as equal partners in development is important, and it requires the attention of policymakers. (Gunawardane, 2016).

Myths and blind beliefs are major barriers to women's development in society. In Sri Lanka, there are some traditional folklores such as 'the brain power of women is a spoon's length long' and 'woman is ever-changing and therefore they are not trustworthy' about women in Sri Lankan culture. These show that women are undervalued and also, they are in inferior positions in the social hierarchy. Also, gender-based discriminations and exploitations are widespread because of the patriarchal system of society (Walby, 1990) and in a patriarchal society, in Sri Lanka women experience discriminatory practices.

### **3. Methodology**

A qualitative research approach was adopted in order to carry out an interpretive and naturalistic exploration of experiences of female ride-hailing drivers in Sri Lanka (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Under the qualitative approach, a case study strategy was adopted due to the nature of the phenomenon in consideration (Yin, 2009). This study adopted the multiple case study methods as its research strategy and ride-hailing organisations were considered as the multiple case studies. Accordingly, ride-hailing drivers were taken as the key data source and documents, newspaper articles, and physical artifacts, photographs, newspapers, social media sites were used as secondary data sources. Research participants were selected from three key ride-hailing organisations in the Western province of Sri Lanka. Participants of the research were selected based on the purposive sampling technique as it enables the researcher to select interviewees based on their ability to contribute to a theoretical understanding of the subject (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The sample comprised of both female ride-hailing drivers who are providing services to women-only as well as female ride-hailing drivers who are providing services to any passenger (both to male and female passengers) and male ride-hailing drivers (as male ride-hailing drivers' opinions were also in interpreting the findings). To meet those criteria, we used judgments to select key data sources that are most suitable for answering the research questions. In line with that, we considered the length of tenure of the ride-hailing drivers and selected ride-hailing drivers who have worked for more than 6 months) in order to generate rich data.

Semi-structured interviews and observations were used to generate and collect data from individuals. Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with the participants as conducting face-to-face interviews was impossible during the COVID-19 period (during which the research was conducted). All the interviews were held in Sinhala medium to be meaningful and make clear sense for ride-hailing drivers. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2008). All the interview transcriptions and analysis of data were done manually. Interview data was translated into the English language and two-cycle coding method was adopted to derive themes. Codes were identified while

reading the transcripts “literally, interpretively and reflexively” (Mason, 2002). Multi-vocal convincing arguments were built up employing the themes identified from the data gathered in empirical work and the reviewed literature by using the ‘thematic analysis’ method. Those arguments were bolstered by the participants’ direct responses. The basic information of research participants is depicted in Table 1.

**Table 1: Basic Details about Research Participants**

<b>No</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Company</b>	<b>Company type</b>	<b>Employment type</b>	<b>Role of the family</b>	<b>Marital status</b>
01	Janaka	Male	Cabby	Open customer model	Part Time	Primary Breadwinner	Married
02	Janith	Male	Drive Us	Open customer model	Full Time	Primary Breadwinner	Unmarried
03	Kamal	Male	Drive Us	Open customer model	Full Time	Primary Breadwinner	Married
04	Malaka	Male	Cabby	Open customer model	Full Time	Primary Breadwinner	Married
05	Nimali	Female	Self	Women-only model	Part Time	Secondary Breadwinner	Married
06	Ruwan i	Female	Cabby	Open customer model	Full Time	Primary Breadwinner	Married
07	Kumudu	Female	Pink Ride	Women-only model	Full Time	Primary Breadwinner	Unmarried
07	Nayomi	Female	Pink Ride & Pink Taxi	Women-only model	Full Time	Primary Breadwinner	Married
09	Shamali	Female	Pink Taxi	Women-only model	Part Time	Primary Breadwinner	Widow

*Source:* Author Compilation

\* Pseudonyms are used to ensure the privacy of the research participants as well as of the selected ride-hailing organisations.

## 4. Data analysis

### 4.1. Domestic barriers on women ride-hailing drivers

#### 4.1.1. *Private patriarchy*

In the Sri Lankan context, a major barrier for women to become ride-hailing drivers arises from their spouses. Men assume that women's job is to nurture and care while men are the main breadwinners as well as the controllers of a family. For example, Kamal, a male ride-hailing driver, explained:

I am the one who committedly doing a job for my family. I don't think that my wife should do a job. She must be dedicated to household chores and care of my children who are going schools. I said to [my wife to] give priority for my children's and household maintaining works [in an authoritative tone].

Such responses show that women's work is limited to household chores by men. Nimali, a female ride-hailing driver, disappointedly mentioned that:

In Sri Lanka, there are some ladies who don't have permission even to go out for their needs and wants. They cannot be independent with their men's domination.

Most of the women in Sri Lanka experience less independency from male domination. Sometimes women are required to get permission even to go out of their homes and for primary decisions, such as what to wear, whether to participate in any entertainment activities, etc.

#### 4.1.2. *Resistance based on the social norms on the ride-hailing occupation*

The social norms prevailing in Sri Lanka regarding the ride-hailing driving job mostly create resistance and reluctance among family members toward the ride-hailing occupation. Janith, a male ride-hailing driver, described:

There is a general opinion in the society that ride-hailing guy (In Sinhala: Taxi karaya) is a disrepute person. Even I am doing this job due to financial constraints, I will never allow my wife to do this job. I do not even like any of my relatives engage with ride-hailing driving. This is not a prestigious, respectable job.

'*Taxi karaya*' is a mostly used title for ride-hailing drivers in Sri Lanka. It depicts underestimated nature of the ride-hailing occupation. Against this backdrop, social norms prevailing in the Sri Lankan context are another barrier that restrains women from entering the ride-hailing driving job.

#### 4.1.3. *Balancing work with domestic responsibilities*

Most women ride-hailing drivers are engaged in part-time hiring to have a proper balance with their household responsibilities. Nimali, a female ride-hailing driver, explained:

I get hires when I have free time after my child's work as I take care of my child alone. My husband mostly works outstation. So, I have no support for household chores from him. Also, I have no support from my parents as they do not like for this occupation.

When family members are not supportive, women mostly engage in this occupation part-time after fulfilling all the childcare and elderly care responsibilities. Thus, it is depicted that the household responsibilities create barriers for women to engage in the ride-hailing occupation. It is shown by Kumudu's response :



I know some lady drivers, who have many difficulties to do this job. With their husband and children, difficult to manage hires. Mostly they are working as part time hire takers. I see most of the women cannot continue this job for a longer time because of the family problems.

Some women drivers try to manage role conflict by working as part-time ride-hailing drivers and others try to give up the occupation when they cannot manage role conflicts.

## **4.2. Barriers from the ride-hailing industry for women ride-hailing drivers**

### *4.2.1. Male dominant nature of the industry*

During the interviews, many male ride-hailing drivers insisted that ride-hailing driving is a man's job, and it is difficult for women to pursue a man's job. They went on to describe that ride-hailing jobs are not suitable for women due to different reasons, such as women's sensitive behaviours and attitudes, gender stereotypes, etc. Moreover, male ride-hailing drivers stereotyped women as a weaker party, and thereby, attempted to prove the unsuitability of women to be ride-hailing drivers. A male ride-hailing driver, Janaka, stated as:

When a woman goes, she gets scared quickly and gets tensioned quickly. I have mostly seen women signals that they are going to turn to one direction but take the turn to another direction. They drive in a very confused manner. Whenever they see a big vehicle, they quickly get scared... when frightened of a small thing, automatically they are beating on the accelerator. They do not know what is going on after it.

Accordingly, male ride-hailing drivers stereotype women drivers as slow, fearfully driving, high consternation and driving without concentration and they are nervous, tensional, less concentrated, consternated and fearful party than men. On these grounds, male ride-hailing drivers highlighted those women passengers are safer than male drivers and thus, there is no need for women ride-hailing drivers.

### *4.2.2. Male ride haling drivers' discriminatory practices towards women ride-hailing drivers*

Female ride-hailing drivers revealed that they frequently have bad experiences due to responses of male ride-hailing drivers when female ride-hailing drivers engage in their jobs. A female ride-hailing driver, Kumudu, explained it as:

Male drivers often pissed me off. I don't like them at all. If men see a female driver, either they try to do jokes or tailgate. So, I'm tired of male drivers. I hate them. Why they do so is that merely due to the reason that they lose hires because of us.

It shows that female ride-hailing drivers in the Sri Lankan context are treated inappropriately by male drivers and most of the female drivers have experienced it. In Kumudu, Nimali and Nayomi's scenarios, they explain they are being subjected to different treatments like cut downs because they are women drivers. And women believe that they retaliate for losing their sales due to competition between the two parties. Female ride-hailing drivers went on to explain how different obscene hand gestures and filthy words, such as bitch and bloody woman are used by male ride-hailing drivers to insult and discourage female ride-hailing drivers.

#### *4.2.3. Customers' discriminatory practices towards women ride-hailing drivers*

Through this study, we have identified the violence experienced by Sri Lankan female ride-hailing drivers. It is not only from male ride-hailing drivers that female ride-hailing drivers are getting treated improperly but also from male passengers. Trying to evade the fare, physical and verbal harassment, sexual harassment and sexual invitation, are some ways in which female ride-hailing drivers get ill-treated by customers.

Kumudu, a female ride hailing driver, recalled an experience where a customer evaded taxi fare.

One day a boy, mmm I think he is nearly 30 years old, got into my taxi from Thalawathugoda and threatened me to drive the vehicle even without considering the road rules and regulations. Suddenly, the police stopped my vehicle and while I was talking to the policeman and the boy ran out of the vehicle without paying me. [In a tone of anger] I was fined and also, I lost a hire which was about seven hundred rupees.

Also, female ride-hailing drivers often experience uncooperative behaviors from customers, such as fighting and scolding. Ruwani, a female ride-hailing driver, explained:

Customers try to argue with us when problems occur in relation to wrong locations. Men try to even fight with us and scold us using filthy words. They hardly behave so with the male ride-hailing drivers.

One other common experience that many female ride-hailing drivers experience is sexual harassment. Shamali, a female ride-hailing driver, mentioned:

It's really hard to drive the vehicle when drunken customers are in. We never know what they will do next. They behave and talk in strange manner, and some even try to touch us inappropriately.

Nayomi, a female ride-hailing driver, shared her experience as follows.

It was a rainy day, and I was afraid to put the side curtains [of the three-wheeler] to avoid getting wet as the passenger was a male stranger. However, I was compelled to put side curtains upon the request of the passenger, but afterwards, he began to touch me. I suddenly stopped the vehicle and got off. Oh! Since then I didn't undertake hires from strangers.

Further, sexual invitations are common for women drivers. Ruwani a female ride-hailing driver, recalled an instance where a passenger offered money asking for sexual advances.

Thus, it was evident that not only male ride-hailing drivers but also male passengers' responses and behaviour towards female ride-hailing drivers—mainly due to the perception that female ride-hailing drivers are vulgar women who pursue money despite everything, they are weak, they are not supposed to enter into masculine jobs—discourage female ride-hailing drivers in continuing their jobs.

### **4.3. Women drivers coping with the male dominated nature of the industry**

#### *4.3.1. Tit for tat competition with male ride-hailing drivers*

Though female ride-hailing drivers are often subjected to discriminatory behaviours of male ride-hailing drivers, female ride-hailing drivers are still willing to pursue their profession without easily giving up. In order to cope with the male-dominated nature of the industry and the discriminatory behaviors often experienced, they adopt various strategies. One such strategy is tit for tat competition with male ride-hailing drivers. For example, when male ride-hailing drivers verbally harass or use obscene hand gestures, female ride-hailing drivers tailgate, behave aggressively and try to exhibit they are better than male ride-hailing drivers.

#### *4.3.2. Disguising feminine characteristics and exhibiting masculine characteristics*

Another strategy most often used by female ride-hailing drivers is appearing as male by adopting masculine characteristics. During the interview with Nayomi, a female ride-hailing driver, we observed that she has short hair which makes her look like a man. She described:

I wear trousers and t-shirts daily when I'm driving. With my short hair mostly, people identify me as a male driver. It's very easy for me especially when I was undertaking hires of male passengers. Though, now I do not undertake hires of male passengers, still it is good for me as male drivers do not recognize as a female. I wear skirts and blouse or frocks when I undertake hires at night as my husband usually joins with me at nights.

Many other female ride-hailing drivers adopted male appearance and male characteristics, such as aggressiveness, changing accent and voice in order to build up the required personality to survive in the industry.

#### *4.3.3. Being self-reliant*

Most of the women drivers disclosed that they try to be independent and try to avoid men's help in any situation especially breakdowns that happen on the road. Kumudu explained as:

I check everything daily. My work starts after checking oil and tires. So, I never face breakdowns. It's easy to prevent breakdowns than getting help from men.

Further, female ride-hailing drivers try to be autonomous by fixing tire punctures individually and fixing minor mechanical problems. All of them highlighted that they could manage their vehicle-related problems individually and that they have adequate knowledge for that.

#### *4.3.4. Self-defence methods for security*

Self-defense means the action of protecting a person him or herself against something bad (HarperCollins, 1987). We define the methods used by women ride-hailing drivers for their security as self-defense methods used for security. For example, many female ride-hailing drivers always carry a tool, such as a rod, removal of side curtains of three-wheelers, having a tinted separator between the passenger section and driver section of the vehicle, being silent or avoiding answering oppressive questioning, etc. to avoid any uncomfortable instance and protect themselves against all sorts of harassments.

#### *4.3.5. Serving for a unique client base*

Sexual harassment, violence and oppressive questioning are often faced by female ride-hailing drivers mainly by male passengers. To avoid or minimise those discriminatory practices female

ride-hailing drivers tend to provide their services only to specific clients who are known to them. Nayomi explained:

Honestly, I am scared to undertake hires from unknown clients. Once I undertook a hire placed by a male, but the tone of the customer was a little suspicious. I couldn't even cancel the hire as it is not good for my profile. However, I completed the hire with extreme care. But it is unforgettable because I was scared as never before. So, with that experience I decided to create my own client base and provide my service only to those clients who are known to me.

Nimali a sole service supplier and Nayomi an initiator of women-only taxi service, both are serving regular customers only because of the bad experiences they have confronted, such as incidents of attempts of sexual harassment, violence and oppressive questioning. Ruwani Stated:

We can reject two hires per day. So, mostly if I am active in evening around six, I reject hires from men. Even at daytime I am like more to go on hires with women passengers. I give priority for women passengers when there are lots of hires at same time.

Even the male ride-hailing drivers who were empathetic towards female ride-hailing drivers also suggested that it is an opportunity for male ride-hailing drivers to attract female passengers, including school services for children and office transport services for working women. On the one hand, female passengers prefer to travel with male ride-hailing drivers and on the other hand, it is safer and less risky for the male ride-hailing drivers as well.

## **5. Results and discussion**

The findings of this study show how the patriarchal ideology is deeply rooted in Sri Lankan ride-hailing industry. According to our derived theme, domestic barriers to women ride-hailing drivers, becoming a ride-hailing driver is challenging along with the barriers women face mainly because of the patriarchal ideology rooted in Sri Lanka. This study reveals that Sri Lankan women domestically experience expropriation of women's labour by men and subordination from men creates barriers for engaging in the public sphere identified as private patriarchy, which is one form of patriarchy.

Work-life balance with domestic responsibilities is another key barrier for women ride-hailing drivers. A married woman working in any occupation has a few different roles to play. A mother, a wife, a worker and a career is the taker of all family members. A man in a patriarchal family has only the role of the sole breadwinner of the family. Hence, women should have the ability to balance work with their domestic responsibilities. When a woman has the role of a mother and a wife, she must meet the expectations of her children and husband. On the other hand, when she has the role of an employee, she must also meet the employer's expectations. According to our findings, most female ride-hailing drivers are engaged in part-time hiring to have a proper balance with their household responsibilities. Thus, the gender roles of women created by patriarchal societies create difficulties to balance work and domestic responsibilities of women and it is a barrier to female ride-hailing drivers to continue their occupations properly. Moreover, deeply rooted social norms about the ride-hailing driving occupation created a family reluctance to work as female ride-hailing drivers.

Based on the theme barriers from the ride-hailing industry for women ride-hailing drivers we identified not only from the domestic sphere but also from the public sphere Sri

Lankan female ride-hailing drivers face obstacles to enter and engage in the ride-hailing industry. We identified that male-dominated nature of the ride-hailing industry is creating women ride-hailing drivers less acceptable in the industry. We have seen mostly men highlight women as a weaker party to prove the unsuitability of women to be ride-hailing drivers. When a person keeps socially developed predictions about others' behaviours without considering the accuracy it can be defined as stereotypes and those stereotypical ideas about different gender roles created gender stereotypes about different groups. Burgess (1999) formed descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes as two forms of gender stereotypes. Descriptive gender stereotypes are the beliefs about traits and behaviours which characterised men and women. Men's stereotyped characteristics are agentic, masterful, forceful, competitive, and domineering, whereas women's stereotyped characteristics are communal, friendly, altruistic, sensitive, and concerned with others (Eagly & Wood, 2012). When the traits which are expected from the job are incompatible with the existing traits it makes the group an inferior one. According to our study, male ride-hailing drivers—the dominant party in the ride-hailing industry—considered women as the weaker gender because based on the socially stereotyped traits of women such as slow, fearful and less strong, they decided about female ride-hailing drivers, and it creates gender inferiority towards female ride-hailing drivers.

The existing literature about the transportation industry shows that women passengers and female ride-hailing drivers both experience discriminatory practices but there is no study which specifically addresses those practices as gender discriminatory practices experienced by women transit drivers (Dunckel-Graglia & Brook, 2013). Regarding female ride-hailing drivers as prostitutes by customers and male ride-hailing drivers (Berry, 1998) and sexual violence (Maina & Caine, 2013) are the main discriminatory practices that act as barriers for female drivers in the ride-hailing industry. Through the cases we studied, we have identified almost all the women participants are experiencing various types of discriminatory practices based on their gender. Female ride-hailing drivers explained that they are being subjected to different ill-treatments by male drivers, like cut downs, because they are women drivers. When a person has a perception about someone, he or she is treated differently based on their membership in the group it is perceived discrimination (Kim, 2015). Most female ride-hailing drivers have the perception that they are treated differently because of their gender. Therefore, in the Sri Lankan ride-hailing industry women ride-hailing drivers experience perceived discrimination which Kim identified as a type of discrimination (2015).

The other type of discrimination is experienced discrimination which Kim identified as the personal experience about unjustly or unfairly treats (2015). This study reveals that experienced discrimination against female ride-hailing drivers most frequently experienced is subjecting to insulting behaviours, such as cutting downs and blame for non-errors. Making insulting comments is another discriminatory practice we have identified within this study. Most women drivers commonly hear the words like bitch and bloody women. In the Sri Lankan context those words sound unpleasant and aggressive. Bitch is identified as an informal form of addressing someone which is used in US English (Simpson & Weiner, 1989).

Women ride-hailing drivers are facing violence, such as threats from drunken customers, fare evasion and uncooperative behaviors. Moreover, sexual harassments and oppressive questioning from their passengers are also discriminations faced by women ride-hailing drivers. Sexual harassment which is a risky discrimination practice is a treatment based on gender and a barrier to equal rights of a particular gender group (Fiske & Goodwin, 2004). Doing conversations about bad sexual stories deliberately done to embarrass female ride-

hailing drivers, annoying through telephone calls by telling smutty words, inviting to unconventional relationships, considering as prostitutes are experienced by women ride-hailing drivers from customers as sexual harassments. Further women ride-hailing drivers experienced verbal as well as physical sexual invitations. Invitations like trying to build casual relationships through mobile phones, sex-related stories telling are verbal sexual harassment and sexual gestures showings such as winking eyes is non-verbal sexual harassment. In a nutshell, patriarchal ideology created barriers domestically as well as within the industry, and because of the patriarchy of women, ride-hailing drivers are experiencing discriminatory practices from ride-hailing men as well as passengers according to our findings.

Female ride-hailing drivers adopt various strategies to cope with the male domination in the industry according to the theme derived as women drivers coping with the male-dominated nature of the industry. Tit for tat strategies women have used are competing with ride-hailing men, disguising feminine attributes, adapting to masculine traits as well as being self-reliant and getting family support. And also, women drivers use self-defense methods such as using sticks and tinted back screens of the vehicle to do their occupation while avoiding discriminatory practices. In addition, almost all the women drivers we interviewed favored serving women passengers over men and most of the women drivers diverged from serving all passengers and joined ride-hailing services that serve exclusively for women and kids. Women drivers faced discriminatory practices mostly from passengers than male drivers because they are directly engaging with customers. Thus, divergent from serving male passengers are mainly purposeful to avoid interactions with male customers. Women drivers who are engaging with Cabby and Drive Us companies cannot serve only women with their rules and regulations. Therefore, some women tend to serve only familiar client bases without serving strangers. It is another coping strategy women drivers are exercising to reduce their engagement with men.

This study can be extended to women passengers' travel experiences and the perceptions of public society about female ride-hailing drivers to understand the significance of women ride-hailing drivers in a country. In order to get more comprehensive findings, future studies can include women ride-hailing drivers who left female-dominant occupations such as garment occupations to find how they familiarised with the male-dominated ride-hailing industry without prior experience in a male-dominated industry. Special health problems occurring from the ride-hailing profession for women and men are also unfocused areas by existing studies. Further, we suggest that future researchers can conduct comparative studies about how cultures of different countries affect the women ride-hailing drivers and how governing institutions of those countries facilitate women ride-hailing drivers.

## **6. Conclusion**

This article discusses how the patriarchal ideology is deeply rooted in the Sri Lankan ride-hailing industry and how women ride-hailing drivers cope with the male-dominant nature and the practices in the Sri Lankan ride-hailing industry. The patriarchal ideology creates obstacles both domestically and industrially for female ride-hailing drivers within the industry by male dominance and results in perceived as well as experienced discriminatory practices. Experienced discrimination in the ride-hailing industry which creates barriers in the industry for women is insulting behaviours and receiving blame from the male drivers for non-errors. From their passengers, female ride-hailing drivers experience violence, such as fare evasion and verbally abusing, verbal and physical sexual harassment, oppressive questioning, and unexpected responses from passengers, such as rejecting hires. Male ride-hailing drivers, the major portion of the industry, believe that the ride-hailing occupation is a male occupation.

Male ride-hailing drivers believe women as the weaker sex based on socially stereotyped traits within the patriarchal culture.

To cope with the male domination and discrimination created within the patriarchy, female ride-hailing drivers try to compete with male ride-hailing drivers, disguise feminine characteristics through an appearance by adopting masculine traits, such as aggressively behaving as well as by being self-reliant, seek family support at vulnerable situations, adopt self-defense methods, such as carrying rods, removal of side curtains, tinted back screen of the vehicle, being silent or avoid too many conversations during the hire. To cope with the male domination, some female ride-hailing drivers serve only familiar client bases, without serving strangers, and there is a trend of exiting from serving male passengers and joining or initiating women-only ride-hailing services.

This study provides insights for the ride-hailing organisations/platforms to focus on improving the work- life of female ride-hailing drivers. When developing guidelines and regulations for female ride-hailing drivers, ride-hailing platforms should be conscious about what areas should be covered /addressed to attract, facilitate, and retain female ride-hailing drivers (e.g., their health and safety, flexible working house to work with domestic responsibilities, sanitary facilities, etc.). Government can facilitate office transportation services jointly with female ride-hailing services to provide security to vulnerable passengers as well as to empower female ride-hailing drivers. Also, it will ultimately impact reducing unemployment in Sri Lanka. Further, policymakers of education should focus on designing the Sri Lankan primary, secondary and tertiary education to further the practical knowledge of youth about existing technologies and also to change the attitudes of youth to value and equally recognise every occupation that contributes to the economy.

Future studies in this arena may consider the incorporation of male and female passengers as well as other vulnerable passengers' travel experiences with both male and female ride-hailing drivers to signify the necessity of female ride-hailing drivers and women-only ride-hailing services for a society in which patriarchal ideology is deeply rooted. Moreover, future researchers can emphasise female ride-hailing drivers' experiences in different cultural contexts as there are increasing concerns about seeking egalitarian societies where the gendered division of roles seems to be diluted due to changing values and beliefs regarding equality, equity, diversity, etc. and social policies of countries regarding gender equality at work. Further, since this study mainly focuses on different types of discrimination, I suggest that future research could incorporate theories on personal traits and attitudes when inquiring about the coping strategies adopted by female ride-hailing drivers.

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