

# 1. ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Maintaining service quality amidst urbanization and economic crisis is challenging for Sri Lanka, impacting densely populated areas like Colombo. Digital interventions can help overcome resource deficiencies. Since many public health services target women, understanding the digital divide among them is important for service coverage. This study explores the impact of the digital divide on health information accessibility and utilization among urban women in the state sector preventive health program, aiming to provide recommendations for improving urban healthcare access and usage.

**Method:** The study consisted of two phases. In the first phase, a literature review and a cross-sectional survey were conducted. Through the rapid review, a contextually relevant definition for digital divide was derived and identified its key constructs were identified. A questionnaire based on the Gender and ICT tool of the USAID, with additional questions, was used to collect data from 390 women in Colombo. The second phase involved qualitative interviews with 10 experts, and thematic analysis was performed on the interview data.

**Results:** The survey findings showed that urban women used mobile phones than computers and laptops as their primary digital devices. Reliable health information was mainly sought through non-digital means like family doctors and MOH field staff. The digital divide mainly existed at the second level, with barriers including device and service costs, language barriers, family attitudes, and safety concerns. Qualitative data highlighted potential interventions to reduce the digital divide.

**Conclusion:** A comprehensive strategic framework and a checklist to minimise the effect of digital divide among urban women were developed. The study concludes that implementing a comprehensive strategy can modify and strengthen existing social structures, empowering urban women to drive a positive paradigm shift in the provision of state sector preventive healthcare.