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**WORKFORCE PERCEPTION OF THE IMPACT
OF COVID-19 (NOVEL CORONAVIRUS) ON JOB
SECURITY OF TOURISM INDUSTRY IN
SRI LANKA**

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Abstract

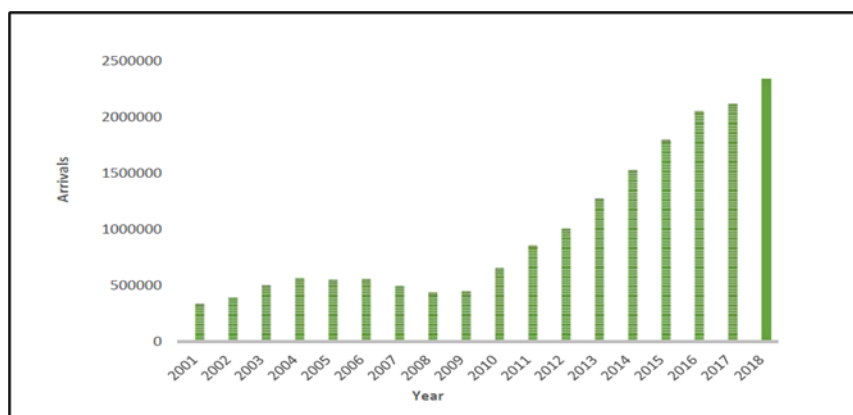
A substantial number of studies have shown that COVID-19 has affected the world economy and the tourism industry since it limits travelling. Consequently, it brings significant challenges to the workforce of the tourism industry such as job insecurity and salary deductions. Based on that, this study aimed to identify the workforce perceptions on job security in the tourism industry in Sri Lanka, where employees heavily rely on their plans, with clarifying the current state, underlying issues, and alternatives for the financial crisis. Results show that COVID-19 has directly affected the industries after the pandemic. Furthermore, it is also indicated that significant employees consider moving for more secure jobs like teaching and self-owned businesses. The involvement of the government and private sector to retain the well-experienced employees seems imperative to build a good destination and offer a respectable service after the pandemic.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Pandemic, Tourism industry's workforce, Sri Lanka*

Introduction

Tourism has become a fast-growing industry in the world. Sri Lanka is an attractive destination in the South Asian region recently. The development of the tourism industry in Sri Lanka was first articulated in the Tourism Management Plan in 1967¹⁾ which focused almost exclusively on the mass international ‘sea, sun and sand’ (3S) market (Buultjens, Ratnayake, & Gnanapala, 2014). However, Sri Lanka had a significant hindrance to the tourism industry during the thirty years of continued civil war and a devastating Tsunami in 2004 (Fernando, Bandara, & Smith, 2013), (Wickramasinghe & Takano, 2007). The end of the civil war in 2009 was a turning point of the Sri Lankan tourism industry and rapid development has been started since then. (Buultjens, Ratnayake, & Gnanapala, 2016). When the civil war ended in 2009, Sri Lanka received only 0.45 million international tourists and earned US\$ 349.3 million foreign exchange earnings (SLTDA, 2010). With the attention came to Sri Lanka from different regions of the world, Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) has started to do many promotional campaigns to attract more tourists around the world by giving an enormous competition to the competitive destinations. “A land like no other”, “Refreshingly Sri Lanka-Wonder of Asia”, “So Sri Lanka” and “Visit Sri Lanka” were the different promotional themes used to attract tourists gradually along with the world-class hospitality (Laksiri, 2009), (Ministry of Economic Development, 2011). As a result of having a good promotion, 2.33 million international tourists visited Sri Lanka in 2018 as headcount and generated US\$ 4380.6 million foreign exchange income as the third-largest foreign exchange earner in the island (SLTDA, 2018). Lonely Planet which is a well-known travel magazine has designated Sri Lanka as the top destination to visit in 2019 (Guruge, 2019). Tourism has affected the economic, social and environmental sectors as generally known (Dissanayaka, K.J. & Bandusena, P.,2020). Besides, the country became one of the best wildlife tourism destinations in the world at the beginning of 2020. Based on many reasons jobs related to the tourism industry in Sri Lanka have been popular among the citizens and in which they want to join the industry directly or indirectly.

Figure 1. International Tourist Arrivals – 2001-2018

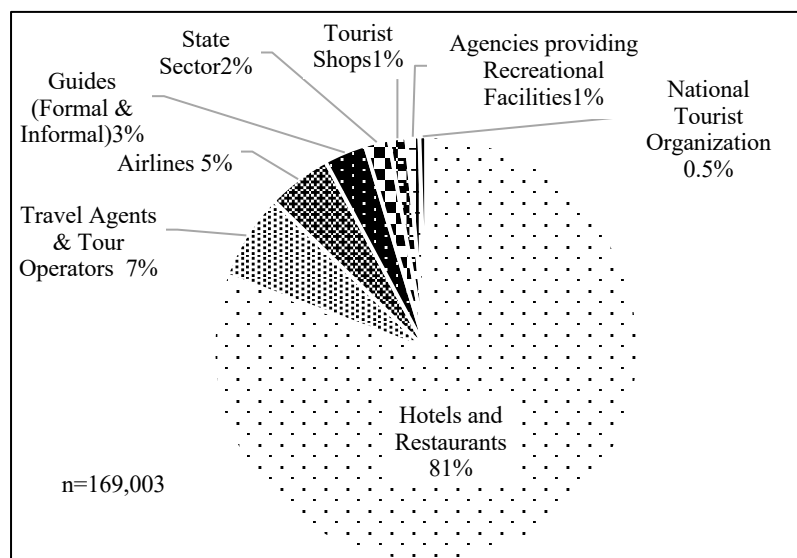


Source: (SLTDA, 2018)

Employment-related to the tourism industry in Sri Lanka

Tourism is a service industry that has higher potentials to generate many jobs in the island. There is a sharp increment of the direct and indirect job enrolment in the industry with post-civil war (Kaldeen, 2020). 52,071 direct employees registered in the tourism industry in 2009 (SLTDA, 2010) and it had rapid development of up to 169,003 registered direct employments in 2018 (SLTDA, 2018). There were 219,484 indirect employees also registered in SLTDA and total employees were 388,487 in the tourism-related employment in Sri Lanka in 2018. According to the literature reviews, these employees have been worked in different sub-industries such as accommodations and catering establishments, travel and transport agencies, recreational clubs, tourist shops, airlines, and national tourist organizations (SLTDA, 2018) As per the figure 2, the total tourism-based direct employment in 2018 belongs to 80.93% were employed in Hotels and Restaurants. Travel Agents & Tour Operators accounted for 6.66% of the total, Airlines 4.89%, Guides 3.21%, State Sector 1.84%, Tourist Shops 1.32%, the Agencies providing Recreational Facilities 0.64% and the National Tourist Organization 0.65%. On account of having good demand for the tourism industry related jobs, both public and private sector's educational institutes have been started educational programs to fill the employment gap in the industry. For instance, Sri Lanka Institute of Tourism & Hotel Management (SLITHM), University of Colombo, University of Sabaragamuwa, Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka, NSBM Green University, and University Colleges. Furthermore, SLITHM is bringing out close to 4,000 trained personnel per annum. While the University of Sabaragamuwa, Uva Wellassa produces 50-150 tourism graduates per annum. (Ranasingh, 2019).

Figure 2. Distribution of direct employment in the tourism industry (Percentage) -2018



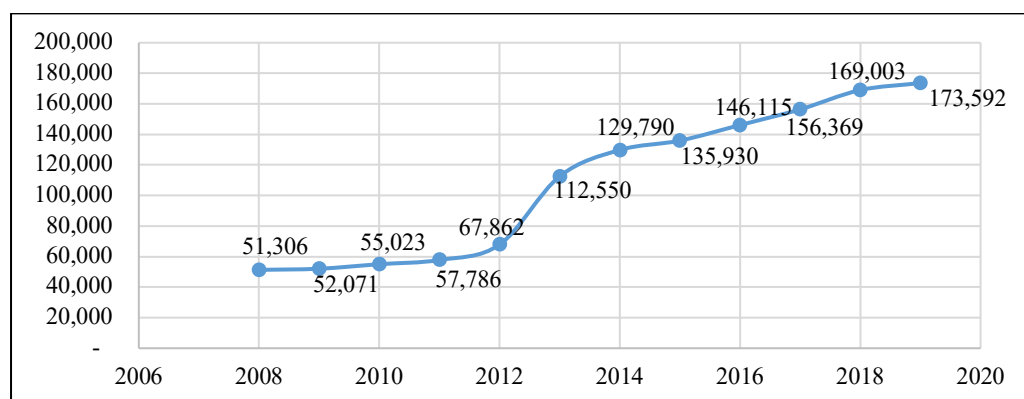
Source: (SLTDA, 2018)

COVID-19 pandemic and international tourism industry

The Coronavirus has started to spread from Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December 2019. Then, the Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) has declared for the coronavirus²⁾ by the 30th January, 2020 and the World Health Organization (WHO) officially named the disease caused by the novel coronavirus as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on the 12th February, 2020. (Zu, et al., 2020). It has been declared as a pandemic by WHO on 11th March 2020 as well (Spinelli & Pellino, 2020), (Ministry of Health- Sri Lanka, 2020). As at the 9th May 2020, 215 countries and territories have suffered tremendously and 265,861 deaths have been confirmed around the world (WHO, 2020).

Global travel restrictions and stay-at-home orders are causing the most severe disruption of the global economy (Mubarak & Nuzkiya, 2020). This global crisis in which travel, tourism, hospitality and events have been shut down in many parts of the world (Desbiolles, 2020). Additionally, social distancing, self-isolation and travel restrictions have led to a reduced workforce across all economic sectors and caused many jobs to be lost. Travel and tourism are among the most affected sectors with aeroplanes on the ground, hotels closed and travel restrictions, putting in place in virtually all countries around the world. According to the “Impact Assessment of the COVID-19 outbreak on international tourism- executive summary report” published by the UNWTO (UNWTO, 2020a), the first quarter in 2020 has a double-digit decrease (22%) of tourist arrivals and with 57% drop March. It has accountable for 67 million international arrivals loss and about USD 80 billion in receipts. With the current status, UNWTO predicted 58% to 78% decline in international tourist arrivals for the year 2020. Furthermore, these scenarios would put 100 to 120 million direct tourism jobs at risk.

Figure 3. Direct Employment in the Tourist Industry - 2008 to 2019



Source: (SLTDA, 2010), (SLTDA, 2013), (SLTDA, 2015) and (SLTDA, 2019)

Sri Lanka also an affected country from the COVID-19. The 1st case of COVID-19 was diagnosed in Sri Lanka on 27th January 2020, in a tourist from China. The 2nd case was detected nearly 6 weeks later, on 11 March, in a tour guide lecturer who probably contracted the infection from Italian tourists (Ediriweera, De Silva, Malavige, & De Silva, 2020). As of the 9th May 2020, Sri Lanka has identified 9 deaths and 835 cases including 255 recovered patients.

(Ministry of Health- Sri Lanka, 2020). Tourism is a significantly affected industry from COVID-19 in the country and other affected industries are the agriculture sector, apparel and textile, retail and consumer sector, and banking and finance sector (Roshana, Kaldeen, & Bandu, 2020). The government in Sri Lanka introduced different protocols to control the virus such as suspending all passenger arrivals from all countries at Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA) in Katunayake starting from 0400 hours 19th March 2020 (UNWTO,2020b) enforced curfews, and maintaining the social distances in public places. Especially with the suspension, the immigration made the tourism industry to zero levels as shown in table1. Moreover, it is directly affected by the Sri Lankan economy which mainly depends on foreign trade. Thus, thousands of direct and indirect employees in the tourism industry were suffered from pandemic as well. (Roshana, Kaldeen, & Bandu, 2020).

Aims of the study and significance of the study

Considerable articles have been elaborated between the tourism industry and COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, alternative tourism after the COVID-19 (Samarathunga & Gamage, 2020), COVID-19 effects on the Small and Medium Enterprises (Robinson & Kengatharan, 2020), Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic and the way forward for Tourism, Hotel and Mice Industry in Sri Lanka (Kamruzzaman, 2020), Impacts of COVID-19 outbreak on Sri Lankan Economy (Roshana, Kaldeen, & Bandu, 2020), Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic and Way Forward for Tourism, Hotel and Mice Industry in Sri Lanka (Ranasinghe, et al., 2020). However, few research has addressed the issues related to the employees in the tourism industry. Therefore, the authors seek to identify the employee's perceptions in the tourism industry in Sri Lanka after the COVID-19. As additional background, Sri Lankan tourism also faced a severely difficult time due to the Easter Sunday terror attack on 21st April 2019. Thus, this study tried to identify the employee's perception of the tourism industry after the pandemic. It is important to protect the service providers in the tourism industry for the future tourism demand of the country, as the tourism industry would face the challenge of finding the service providers in the future otherwise. Consequently, it is expected that the result of this study would help to introduce more actions to the public sector and private sector's tourism company owners to keep their employees to provide world-class service to their guests visiting soon after the pandemic.

Methods

This research used the google form questionnaire to collect data since most of the employees were staying at the homes and substantially increased internet usage due to maintained social distances and enforced the curfew. The population was all employees related to the tourism industry in Sri Lanka. Snowball sampling method to collect data and google form sent through the emails and social media. 101 respondents' data has collected from 28th April to 09th May 2020. The detailed process is explained below:

Table 1: Monthly Tourist Arrivals: 2019- 2020

Month	2019	2020
January	244,239	228,434
February	252,033	207,507
March	244,328	71,370
April	166,975	0
May	37,802	0
June	63,072	0
July	115,701	0

Source: SLTDA, Monthly Tourist Arrivals Reports 2020

- 1) First, a literature review was conducted by the authors to capture the baseline information related to the COVID-19 and tourism industry in Sri Lanka. In addition to various articles from international research journals, documents, books, secondary data including tourism and health related ministry's digital data were collected during the research works.
- 2) A structured questionnaire was developed to collect data from the direct and indirect employees in the tourism industry during the COVID-19 period in Sri Lanka. All questionnaire was prepared based on the result of preliminary research on literature review explained in 1). The questionnaire was designed with a simple form with mainly closed-ended and open-ended questions in the English language. English is an essential language skill in tourism industry related employees in Sri Lanka, Therefore, employees would not have difficulty to complete the questionnaires. Table 2 shows the categories of the questionnaire. The google form questionnaire sent through the e-mail address to the employees related to the tourism industry. Additionally, the link of the google form questionnaire has spread in social media as well. such as Facebook personal accounts, groups and Instagram accounts. The questionnaire mainly focused to identify the workforce perceptions on job security due to the COVID-19 Novel coronavirus. Descriptive analysis technique has used to analyse the qualitative data of the research study.

Table 2: Categories of the questionnaire

<p>Demographic questions</p> <p>Gender, Age, Highest education qualification</p>
<p>Employment related questions</p> <p>Related industry, Job status, period engaged to the tourism industry, Size of the company, Reasons for joining to the tourism industry</p>
<p>COVID-19 and job security</p> <p>Perception of industry changes after COVID-19, Reasons for change the industry, Reasons for remaining in the industry, what are the new industries willing to join, Perception about the tourism industry development after COVID-19</p>

Source: Author

Result and Discussion

1. Demographical features and employment status

According to the survey, the majority of the respondent who directly engaged with the tourism industry, were female (61.4%) as shown in figure 4, and age category was 21-30 years old (71.3%). Correspondingly, 18.8% for 31-40 age category, 7.9% for 41-50 and 2% for 51- 60-year-old category as shown in figure 5. The majority of the employees have studied tourism management since they had prior ideas to join the tourism industry (64.4%). Among the respondents, 44.6% have completed a bachelor degree and 34.7% of them are related to tourism management studies. 11% of respondents have completed a Master degree and 23.8% of them completed diplomas.

According to the respondent's choices for the closed-ended questions, the Hotel industry (54.1%) and the travel industry (36.6%) were the main industries in which respondents highly engaged. Rest of them worked in restaurants, the events industry and the education sector. Among the employees, 4% of them were owners of their businesses. 28.7% of the employees under the category of 2-4 years of working experience in the industry. 24.8% of them were in 0-2 years category as shown in figure 6. Moreover, 6-8 years and 8-10 years working employees' categories have the same percentage (9.9%). As a percentage, 29.8 of them were working in SMEs types business and 70.2% of employees were working in well-established companies. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents had an intention and enthusiasm to joined with the tourism industry. Thus, they have studied tourism management even before they joined there.

Figure 4: Gender

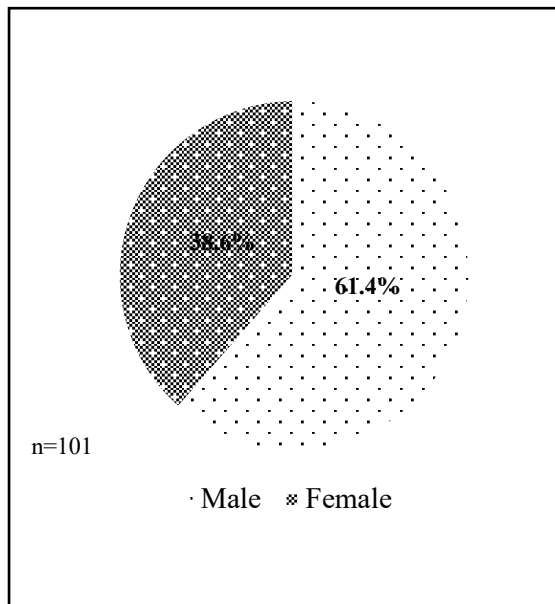
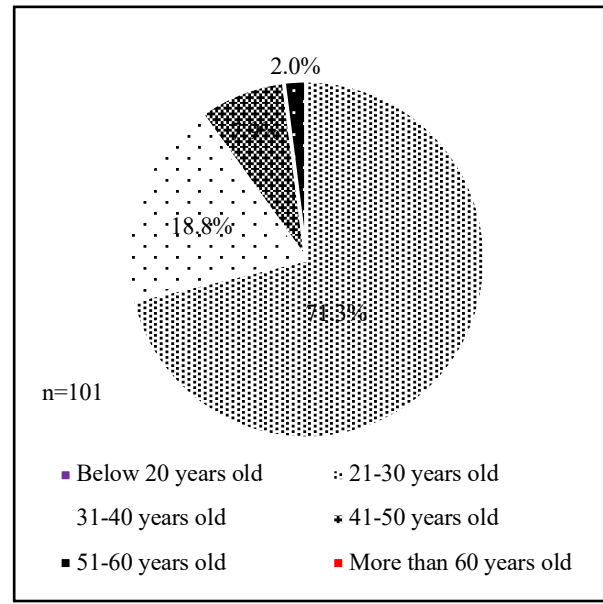
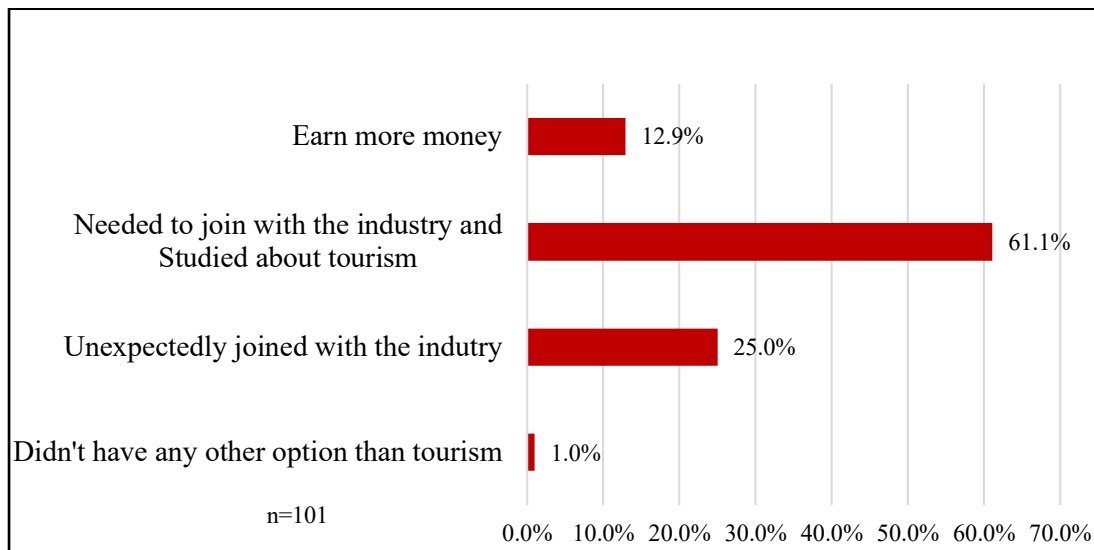


Figure 5: Age



Source: Results from the structured questionnaire

Figure 6: Reasons for joining to the tourism industry

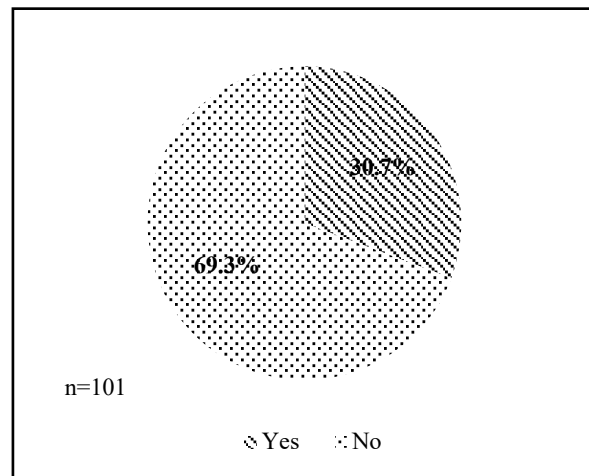


Source: Results from the structured questionnaire

2. Perception of Post-COVID-19 job remains of the employees in the tourism industry.

The results of the survey show that majority of the tourism industry-related employees did not aim to leave the tourism industry since they have a strong belief that the industry will recover soon (figure 7). 58.6% of the male employees did not want to change the industry after the pandemic. Additionally, 70% of the respondents who intended to stay in jobs were under the age category of 21.-30 and many of them were working in the hotel sector and travel sector.

Figure 7: Perception to change the industry after COVID-19
 (“Do you have an idea to change the industry after COVID-19 pandemic?”)



Source: Results from the structured questionnaire

However, significant results show that 30.7% of the respondents have an intention to change the industry after the COVID-19 outbreak. 66.7% of them were male and the majority working in the hotel industry. Among these male employees, 31.9% of them under the age category of 21-30. Similarly, 33.3% under 31-40 category and others in the 41-50 category. 28.6% of the males intended to change the industry have more than 6 years of working experience in the industry. According to the academic qualifications, it varied from ordinary level exam up to the masters level completed qualifications. Moreover, they had the interest to join with the tourism industry prior and 38.1% of them have completed different degrees in tourism management. While 14.3% intended to change the industry even before the Coronavirus, job security, the company’s support during the pandemic time and income did not tally with the expenses were the most important issues to change the industry after the pandemic. Start their own business and join with government jobs were highlighted option of many industrial leavers.

Table 3. Time period engaged in the tourism industry

Years	Frequency	Percentage
0-2 years	25	24.8%
2-4 years	29	28.7%
4-6 years	18	17.8%
6-8 years	10	9.9%
8-10 years	10	9.9%
More than 10 years	9	8.9%
Total	101	100.0%

Source: Results from the structured questionnaire

All-female employees who had an idea to change the industry after the pandemic in the age category of 21-30 and they have completed at least a diploma. However, they have less than 4 years of working experience in the industry. Major reasons they thought were their jobs are not secured and it will take a long period to get recovered the industry. 30% of them intended to join as a teacher and another 30% do not have an idea regarding the new industry in which they need to move.

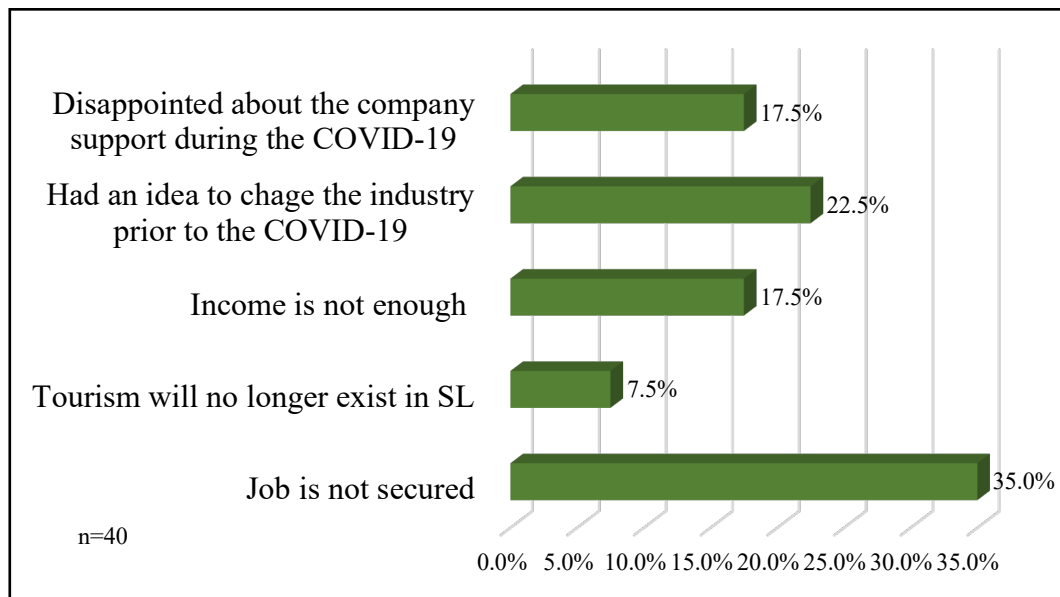
Main reasons for staying in the industry

Employees who did not have an intention to change the industry had confidence in the speedy recovery of the industry. Furthermore, they had strong confidence regarding job security on the existing jobs. Moreover, companies had provided so many facilities, benefits, and special programs to protect and care about their employees during the pandemic period.

Main reasons for leaving the industry

As shown in figure 8, the majority of the employees who thought to change the industry were believed that their jobs are not secured anymore. Since they believe that at least six months will be taken to recover the industry even though the pandemic finishes. Though Sri Lanka could control the pandemic up to a considerable level, still it is a challenge for the world. So, there may have a huge drop in inbound tourists for a longer time. Additionally, respondents make COVID-19 as an opportunity to change the jobs since they have a prior idea to change the industry even before the COVID-19. Income which was not matching with the expenses was another main reason to quit from the industry. Another highlighted reason to leave from the industry was company support during the COVID-19 period. This study shows that 17.5% of employees intended to leave the industry based on the disappointment of the company support during the COVID-19 period such as salary reductions and employee layoffs.

Figure 8: Reasons to change the industry



Source: Results from the structured questionnaire (Multiple answers allowed)

Their alternatives for jobs and industries future employments

There were the main three options from the respondents who were willing to change the industry post-COVID-19. Majority of the females needed to find a teaching job. For the males, they needed to be an entrepreneur by starting their own business. Additionally, another portion of respondents needed to join with the government-related jobs.

Perception about the tourism industry development after COVID-19

According to the respondent's opinions on the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, they expected that it will take six months to one-year time to recover the tourism industry in Sri Lanka after the COVID-19. Specially they thought the difficulties and riskiness the travelling overseas will have remained until the world finds a vaccine. Therefore, there is a threat to the employees who are directly and indirectly survive in the tourism sector. Respondents have thoroughly emphasised that the public and private sectors who control the tourism sector have a significant responsibility to protect the skillful and well-experienced employees to provide a good service in the future. Moreover, the main suggestions of the respondents were to introduce an insurance system and providing incentives during this problematic period.

Conclusion

With the Easter Sunday terror attack in 2019, Sri Lankan tourism faced a very hard time and it also directly influenced the tourism-related employees. Continuously in the 2020 year was also affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and dragged the industry into the ground level. The results of the study show that a significant number of respondents had confidence in the speedy recovery of the tourism industry and they believed that they could work freely and happily to earn more in the future. However, continuous instability of international tourist arrivals makes a negative impact on employees' perception to stay in the industry since a substantial portion of employees believed that tourism is not good and safe for their future careers. Not only that, but low income which is not matched to the expenses also gives a negative impact to exit the skillful well-experienced employees from the industry. On the other hand, a significant number of employees have an educational qualification in the other industry than the tourism industry. Therefore, there might be possibilities for them to join in other different industries instead of suffering in the tourism industry.

Tourism is a service industry and the quality of the service is highly dependent on the level of the experiences and the educational background of the employees. Moreover, well-experienced employees have more capacity than the fresher to provide a memorable service to their guests. Thus, the experiences and skills of human resources are the key factors to build a competitive destination and it will help to attract more guests. Therefore, it will be an enormous problem, if the skillful and well-experienced employees will not stay in the industry once the country ready to cater to the guests as usual. Thus, the central government, ministry of tourism, Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotional Bureau, and private sector who directly involved with the tourism industry have a significant responsibility to keep retained skillful and well-experienced employees in the industry while promoting Sri Lanka as a safe destination to the future tourists. Proper usage of human resources for different purposes based on the skills and experiences will be a good strategy to minimize the leavings of employees during the COVID-19 in the private sector. Further, short and long term strategies like ensuring the job and salary, introducing insurance plans, and providing loan facilities also important to empower the employees to stay in the industry after COVID-19

Notes

- 1) For the 1st time, Sri Lanka prepared a ten-year Tourism Development Master Plan commencing from 1967, with funding assistance from USAID. For this purpose, the Board commissioned the services of a Hawaii based Multi-disciplinary team of tourism experts.
- 2) World Health Organization (WHO) has declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30th January 2020 for COVID-19

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