Impact of COVID-19 on Employee Well-being in Apparel Industry in Sri Lanka

¹ M. G. T. Lakmali and ²D. M. M. Sandeepani

Department of Agricultural Economics & Agri Business, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka ¹thushlakmali95@gmail.com, ²madusha0906@gmail.com

Abstract: Sri Lanka is one of the most vulnerable developing countries suffering from the emergence of novel COVID-19 pandemic. Along these lines, the Sri Lankan apparel sector was mainly impacted. Examining the impact of epidemics on the well-being of employees who work in the Sri Lankan apparel industry is a notable research direction as per the empirical evidence. Thus, the present study aimed to examine the attributes of perceived pandemic concerns in terms of physical, psychological, financial, and concerns regarding social gaze while investigating the well-being of employees working in the apparel sector during COVID-19. A total of 100 apparel sector employees from 10 different companies in Sri Lanka was selected as respondents using simple random sampling technique. A Google-form based questionnaire was developed for the data collection. Data analysis was conducted applying structural equation modelling using SMART PLS software. The results revealed that employees' physical, psychological, financial, and concerns regarding social gaze, have a significant influence on their work stress during COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, work stress during pandemic significantly influences employee well-being in the Sri Lankan apparel industry. Moreover, significant indirect influences were identified between physical, psychological, and financial concerns and employee well-being via work stress. The present study provides valuable insights to the human resource officials attached to the apparel industry to mitigate possible work stress of employees to ensure higher employee well-being during pandemic situations.

Keywords: Apparel industry, COVID-19, Employee well-being, Work stress, Sri Lanka

Introduction

COVID-19 has become the worst global pandemic over the past two years that has had a devastating effect on the whole world. It was first discovered in Wuhan City in China in December 2019 and now it has been spreading all over the world affecting the global economy. Not only a single economic sector, but every single industry has also been shaken by this novel pandemic condition (Macksoud et al., 2020). The International Labor Organization (ILO) prophesied that around 24.7 million jobs will be lost due to COVID-19 (McKeever, 2020). Among the most affected economic sectors, the apparel industry has taken priority. Mainly it was due to the shutdown of most of the factories in China from January 2020. As it was the main destination of the apparel industry, it has led to the disruption of the supply chain and thus affected the biggest apparel producers such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and Cambodia (Bain, 2020) due to the postponed of raw material importation as a flexibly unpleasant side effect of the pandemic flare-up (Roshana et al., 2020).

Brandix, Hirdaramani, and MAS Holdings lead the Sri Lankan garment industry, each having over a dozen factories while tens of thousands of employees are producing garment products for global brand names such as Victoria's Secret, Gap, Ralph Lauren, Marks and Spencer, Levi's and so on. The manufacturers, as well as their brand customers, are multibillion-dollar businesses (Cleanclothes.org, 2021). Accordingly, the apparel industry has had an enormous impact on the Sri Lankan economy as it has contributed Rs.686.113 million in Gross Domestic Product in 2018 (Central Bank, 2020). The apparel industry is one of the most vulnerably affected sectors in Sri Lanka as most of the garment factories were shut down with the countrywide curfew announcement on 18th March 2020 that lasted until 4th May 2020 due to the stanch transmission of the coronavirus. Also, at the end of the year, district-level curfews were restored regularly thus causing factories temporarily some to close (ColomboPage, 2020). Therefore, the Covid-19 pandemic has traumatized about 300,000 Sri Lankan garment workers, most of whom are women who have migrated from rural areas to the country's garment factories. It is due to the nonpayment of salaries and bonuses, the effect on the members of the trade unions, and other impacts on the employee's well-being, health as well as employee rights. An average wage of an experienced operator of a sewing machine or fabric cutter is around Rs.23, 500 (less than 120 USD), which is substantially below a living wage. Many workers were not even given these meager salaries during the pandemic period leading them to many difficulties (Cleanclothes.org, 2021).

Also, massive Covid-19 outbreaks have resulted in several new infection waves whereas the covid positive case found in Brandix clothing manufacturers in October 2020 has taken priority. Over 1,000 of the factory's 1,400 employees were infected while putting Brandix in the spotlight (Aneez, 2020). The Brandix case exhibits how the industry has been vulnerable to the pandemic spread due to the large groups of employees who were involved in the proximity of the garment manufacturing process thus making it unmanageable to keep safe distances between each other. Moreover, it shows how garment workers feel powerless to speak up for their safety or to avoid hazardous working situations, which can have disastrous repercussions (AFL-CIO et al., 2020).

Although various studies examined the impact of COVID-19 on the well-being of employees in different sectors (Yu et al., 2021; Agarwal, 2021), no study has yet examined the wellbeing of apparel employees caused by epidemics. Therefore, it is crucial to determine the influence of COVID-19 on employee wellbeing in Sri Lanka's apparel industry as it is the most significant and dynamic contributor to Sri Lankan economy.

Thus, the study was primarily concerned with examining the attributes of perceived pandemic concerns in terms of physical, psychological, financial, and social gaze concerns. The second goal of this research is to investigate the wellbeing of employees working in the apparel industry during COVID-19. Accordingly, the current study benefits the apparel industry by allowing it to design practices and processes employee well-being improve bv that understanding the influencing factors. It can be said that this is a much-needed study at present when the new epidemic continues. The findings are important for policy makers by offering guidance for managing apparel employees effectively during tough times, particularly in situations characterized by high levels of threat and lack of control (pandemics, wars, and natural disasters etc.).

Literature Review

Apparel industry in Sri Lanka

The apparel industry is considered the most important industrial sub-sector in Sri Lanka, accounting for 67% of total export earnings. The textile and apparel industry began with 19 firms in 1973 and had grown to 830 firms by 2001. (Weeraratne, 2004). When total industrial production is considered, 10% contributed in 1977 (Weeraratne, 2004), while it increased to 59.4% in 2019. In 2018, the apparel and textiles industry contributed Rs.686,113 million to GDP, while 310,713 job opportunities were available in 2019. With a gross export earnings of Rs.998,411 million in 2019, the industry exported Rs. 1,000,713 million in value products to the following major export destinations: the United States (44.9 percent), Germany (6.0 percent), the United Kingdom (14.4 percent), France (1.3 percent), the Netherlands (3.4 The apparel industry is considered the most important industrial subsector in Sri Lanka, accounting for 67% of total export earnings. The textile and apparel industry began with 19 firms in 1973 and had grown to 830 firms by 2001 (Weeraratne, 2004). When total industrial production is contributed in 1977 considered, 10% (Weeraratne, 2004), while it increased to 59.4% in 2019. In 2018, the apparel and textiles industry contributed Rs.686,113 million to GDP, while 310,713 job opportunities were available in 2019. With a gross export earnings of Rs.998,411 million in 2019, the industry exported Rs. 1,000,713 million in value products to the following major export destinations: the United States (44.9 percent), Germany (6.0 percent), the United Kingdom (14.4 percent), France (1.3 percent), the Netherlands (3.4 percent), Canada (2.6 percent), and Italy (8.0 percent) (Central Bank, 2020).

One of the industries that has suffered the most from the COVID-19 pandemic is the apparel industry (Roshana et al., 2020). While supplies are gradually being restored, fare goals have become a pipe dream for the worst-affected countries, causing production and shipments to be canceled. With nearly USD 5 billion in export revenue, apparel and textile is most likely the largest contributor to national fares. The Sri Lanka Apparel Exporters Association (SLAEA) estimates that income losses will total USD 1.5 billion in the second quarter of 2020. Nonetheless, several business sectors have been shattered because of the lockdowns and social segregation (Economy next, 2020).

Brandix, MAS Holdings, and Hirdaramani are Sri Lankan multinational conglomerates with garment manufacturing operations in Asia, Europe, and North America (AFL-CIO et al., 2020). As a result of the pandemic, many stores must be screened, and thousands of employees have been laid off. Global exporters have chastised Sri Lankan garment manufacturers for unfulfilled orders due to a faulty supply chain, even though most raw materials used in the Sri Lankan apparel industry come from China (Roshana et al., 2020).

Well-being

Managing employee well-being is essential when handling a few people, leading a large group, or administrating an entire organization (Rath & Harter, 2010). Well-being within the working environment is generally conceptualized through life-related measures, such as depression, the link between personal life and job satisfaction, workplace friendship, work motivation, and the life cycle (Saijo et al., 2015).

Although welfare, mental health, happiness, social life, vitality, material possession, selfactualization, or quality of life are all measured, psychological well-being (PWB) and subjective well-being (SWB) are more comprehensive. Psychological well-being (PWB) is a broad concept that encompasses psychological functions such as the perception of participation in life challenges such as pursuing meaningful goals, growing and evolving as a person, developing relationships with others, and so on (Keyes et al., 2002). Ryff and Keyes (1995) developed a multidimensional model of psychological well-being that included six psychological dimensions: self-acceptance, environmental mastery, life purpose, positive relationships, personal growth, and autonomy. Subjective well-being (SWB) is defined as having a positive mood and not having a negative mood (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Within an organization, psychological well-being is used to predict variances in employee performance (Wright and Cropanzano, 2004), whereas subjective well-being is useful for reducing employee absenteeism and increasing intrinsic motivation (Ramsey et al., 2008). (Van De Voorde et al., 2012).

Well-being is an important concept to study in business because it predicts a variety of organizational outcomes such as creativity, productivity, workplace cooperation, and increased social capital (De Neve et al., 2013). According to Sirgy and Lee (2016), enhancing employee well-being improves job satisfaction, mental health, work-life balance, and organizational commitment. Furthermore, persuading employees to adopt positive attitudes and behaviors is closely related to employee well-being (Kooji et al., 2013). Thus, within an organization, productive outcomes such as quality services and productivity improvements can be seen; conversely, a decrease in employee well-being leads to poor

decision-making ability as well as a decrease in productivity and work quality (Edgar et al., 2017). Investing in employees' well-being thus reveals numerous societal benefits and would be a critical step toward the advancement of the garment industry (Pick, 2015).

Work Stress

Work stress is a negative physical or emotional reaction that occurs when there is a mismatch between job requirements and employee needs, competencies, and resources, and it frequently has a negative impact on work efficiency (Tongchaiprasit & Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016). Whitt and Wilson (2007) define work stress as a psychological condition that occurs when job demands exceed an individual's ability to mobilize personal and social resources.

Belal (2009) discovered that frequent job changes, unmanageable workloads, higher job expectations, new technologies, increased job insecurity and uncertainty, and ongoing organizational downsizing efforts can all contribute to increased workplace stress. Employee work stress can result in negative outcomes such as job-related tension, poor employee performance (Akgunduz, 2015) and organizational commitment (Kim et al., 2015), lower job satisfaction, and higher quitting intention, among others (Tongchaiprasit & Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016). Furthermore, longterm work stress has a direct impact on employees' health as well as the organization's efficiency and effectiveness (Magdinceva-Sopova et al., 2021). As a result, work stress can harm employees' physical and mental health, as well as reduce company performance (Akgunduz, 2015). As a result of these negative effects, it is critical to create a stress-free work environment within a company to maintain a competitive advantage in the industry (Sharma & Devi, 2011).

The novel COVID-19 virus pandemic has completely changed the employees' living pattern and working environment, resulting in new working conditions that result in certain stressful situations for the workers (Magdinceva-Sopova et al., 2021). Work stress because of the epidemic is widespread and unmanageable in comparison to the stress that people face daily (Main et al., 2011). According to Hon et al. (2013), stress caused by the emergence of previously unknown viruses and pathogens can be extremely dangerous. As a result, it can have a wide range of negative consequences on an individual, business, management, national, and international levels.

Conceptual Framework

The emergence of a new pandemic is a crisis beyond the control of individuals, and it can cause fear and stress among people in the country or organization (Yu et al., 2021). According to Khalid et al., the severity of stress in healthcare sector employees working in highrisk MERS areas revealed an exacerbated fear of the pandemic situation and high levels of concern about the safety of people, colleagues, and families (2016). According to Agarwal (2021), the complexity and changes in work caused by COVID-19 caused stress for hotel workers. Furthermore, hotel employees were stressed and concerned during the epidemic period due to a lack of financial resources. Individuals experience depression, stress, and loneliness because of the psychological effects of COVID-19 (World Health Organization, 2020). As a result of the SARS-CoV (severe acute respiratory syndrome) outbreak, hospital staff experienced extremely high levels of psychological distress (Maunder, 2004). During the COVID-19 period, some employees were living away from their families, resulting in a failure to meet their psychological need of maintaining family relationships, which caused stress and anxiety (Agarwal, 2021). During the 2015 MERS outbreak, nurses working in hospitals were extremely concerned about becoming infected with the disease, according to Oh et al. (2017).

Based on the previous empirical evidence, following hypotheses were developed.

- H₁: Physical concerns have a significant impact on work stress.
- H₂: Psychological concerns have a significant impact on work stress.
- H₃: Financial concerns have a significant impact on work stress.
- H₄: Concern regarding social gaze have a significant impact on work stress.

Workplace stress has grown to be a major and serious issue in today's workplace. It can harm employees' health and well-being, resulting in physical, psychological, emotional, and even spiritual issues (Villanueva & Djurkovich, 2009). According to Ghubach et al. (2010), individuals' depression or stress reduce life satisfaction, including employee well-being. According to Fein et al. (2017), employee wellbeing is negatively impacted by workplace stressors. Furthermore, Yu et al. (2021) established that work stress has a significant impact on employee well-being. Employees in the hotel industry are vulnerable because of the stressful nature of their jobs, so organizations must promote employee well-being (Ariza-Montes et al., 2019). Karatepe et al. (2018) empirically demonstrated that the stress of the hotel employees negatively affects employee involvement, extra-role performance, and turnover intention.

Henceforth, the following hypothesis was suggested.

H₅: Work stress have a significant impact on employee well-being.

Figure 01 outlines the conceptual framework of the present study.



Figure 01: Conceptual model of the study

Source: Authors (2023)

Research Methodology

The current study was designed to determine the effect of COVID 19 on employee well-being in Sri Lanka's apparel industry. Following contact with the Human Resource Managers of Sri Lanka's ten largest (by size) apparel companies, ten operational level employees were chosen at random from each company, for a total of 100 participants. Employees were also selected based on their function, such as production, quality management, finance, information technology, sustainability, stores, and human resources, to ensure functional diversity, as the pandemic may have affected employees with different functions differently.

Measurement tool of the present study was a Google form-based structured questionnaire. Spiggle (1994) developed a qualitative approach that classified 20 attributes into four categories: physical, psychological, financial, and social gaze concerns. The initial section of the questionnaire included a brief explanation of the study's purpose as well as a confidentiality statement. Furthermore, it was divided into three sections (questions related demographic characteristics of the participants, attributes of perceived pandemic concerns and questions associated with employee wellbeing). Questionnaire items were measured using 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). The questionnaire was created using previous literature and was modified to fit the needs of this study. Reliability of the scales was tested using Cronbach's Alpha values (Table 02). For gathering data, an online survey was conducted. Through the respective Human Resource Managers, an online questionnaire was distributed to the 100 apparel sector employees. The survey lasted seven days, from December 20, 2021, to December 27, 2021. Using Partial Least Squares, the relationship between the major constructs was examined (PLS). With 500 samples, path significance was determined using SMART PLS 3.0 and the bootstrap resampling method. SMART PLS is proven advantageous in minimal requirements in data size, measurement scales, and complexity of the model (Hair et al., 2013). Furthermore, SMART PLS is the best-fitted technique for data analysis when the researcher is fundamentally concerned with the prediction of the dependent variable (Acedo and Jones, 2007).

Analysis & Results

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample. The sample consisted of 73% female employees and 27% male employees. It is obvious that many employees in the Sri Lankan apparel sector are females. Furthermore, in terms of age, 68% of most employees (68%) belonged to the 21-30 years category. 53% and 31% of the employees have been educated up to ordinary level and advanced level examinations respectively.

Characteristic	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	73
	Female	27
Age (Years)	Below 20	0
	21-30	68
	31-40	26
	41-50	6
	51-60	0
	Above 60	0
Education	Up to O/L	53
	Up to A/L	31
	Diploma	6
	Graduate	10
	Postgraduate	0
Designation	Machine operator	67
	Quality checker	14
	Production executive	3
	Human resources executive	6
	Human resources assistant	2
	Manager	5
	Other	3

Table 0	1:	Demograph	ic d	characteristics	of	the sam	ple
I HOIC U		Demograph		chui acter istics	UL.	une sum	p_{1}

Itom	SEL	0	CP	AVE
Physical concerns (Source: Spiggle, 1994)	31.173	0.918	0.938	0.752
A Josef concerns (Source, Spiggie, 1777)		0.710	0.750	0.702
Cleaning and disinfecting shared equipment or articles on a regular basis is physically tiring	0.908			
Wearing a mask or other safety equipment to work is	0.879			
Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, washing hands	0.828			
more frequently and paying more attention to				
Increased physical fatigue is caused by an increase in	0.863			
supervisor complaints because of limited services Because there are only a few employees working	0.857			
physical fatigue increases	0.057			
Psychological concerns (Source: Spiggle, 1994)		0.795	0.835	0.516
I'm worried that my coworkers will infect me as well	0.406			
If the coworker I'm dealing with is infected, I become concerned	0.685			
I am concerned about the possibility that my family	-0.084			
being exposed to and infected by the epidemic				
I'm concerned that I'll become infected with COVID- 19 and spread it to my coworkers	0.08			
I am concerned that I will become infected and that	0.358			
the factory will be forced to close as a result of my presence				
When I attend to coworkers/customers, I provide	0.916			
passive care in order to minimize face-to-face contact due to the possibility of infection				
I am concerned that worker satisfaction and factory	0.752			
evaluations will suffer as a result of passive care				
Financial concerns (Source: Spiggle, 1994)		0.765	0.855	0.671
Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I believe I may lose my job	0.351			
Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I believe I may	-0.536			
exhaust my vacation days				
My income may be reduced because of mandatory unpaid leave	0.818			
I believe the factory will fall short of its goals due to	0.58			
the COVID-19 pandemic				
Concerns regarding social gaze (Source: Spiggle, 1994)		0.574	0.75	0.511
I believe I may be having issues with my	-0.244			
interpersonal relationships because I avoid or am				
family gatherings, weddings, and gatherings with				
friends)	0.272			
a m concerned about social isolation as a result of discrimination	0.3/3			
I am embarrassed to tell others that I work in the	0.794			
apparel industry				

If I become infected with COVID-19, I may feel selfconscious about my illness and as if I have done something wrong

Work stress (Source: Marcatto et al., 2021)		0.938	0.955	0.843
I consider my work as stressful	0.886			
I get tense when I think about my job	0.939			
I am under pressure at work	0.913			
My job has a negative impact on my health	0.933			
Well-being (Source: Kim et al., 2015)		0.952	0.965	0.873
In general, I am satisfied with my life	0.927			
Overall, I was relieved when I got home from work	0.944			
I felt better both physically and psychologically	0.929			
Despite my ups and downs, I am fairly satisfied with	0.938			
my life				

Note: All significant at 0.05 level. α , Cronbach's alpha; CR, construct reliability; SFLs, standardized factor loadings; AVE, average variance extracted

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was used to assess construct level discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2009; Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020). According to Table 4, all items are loaded higher on the construct being measured than on any other construct in the model. The second discriminant validity criterion was thus met. According to the findings, the measurement model's results provided adequate empirical support for the reliability, convergent, and discriminant validity of reflective constructs and subsequent analysis.

TADIE V.J. FUTHER-LATURET UTHETION ANALYSIS UT REV UDISUTULIS	Table	03: Fo	ornell-I	arcker	criterion	analysis	of kev	constructs
---	-------	--------	----------	--------	-----------	----------	--------	------------

	Concerns regarding social gaze	Employee well-being	Financial concern	Physical concern	Psychological concern	Work stress
Concerns regarding social gaze	0.715					
Employee well-being	-0.239	0.934				
Financial concern	0.107	-0.072	0.819			
Physical concern	0.119	-0.025	0.205	0.867		
Psychological concern	0.528	-0.235	0.161	-0.03	0.718	
Work stress	-0.365	0.464	0.198	0.284	-0.482	0.918

It should be noted that the diagonals represent the square root of AVE, while the off-diagonals represent the correlation.

Structural Model Analysis

Figure 2 outlines the structural model of the variables derived through the SMART PLS.



Figure 2. Structural model derived through SMART PLS

A tabular representation of the hypotheses testing of the data analysis is presented in Table 5.

Table 04: Hypotheses testing results

HP	PR	В	SE	T-V	Р	DE
H_1	Physical concern ->					
	Work stress	0.248	0.07	3.542	0.000	Supported
H_2	Psychological					
	concern -> Work					
	stress	-0.403	0.078	5.193	0.000	Supported
H_3	Financial concern ->					
	Work stress	0.234	0.089	2.625	0.009	Supported
H_4	Concerns regarding					
	social gaze -> Work					
	stress	-0.207	0.093	2.222	0.027	Supported
H_5	Work stress ->					
	Employee well-being	-0.464	0.091	5.103	0.000	Supported

Note: HP ¹/₄ hypotheses, PR ¹/₄ Path Relation, b ¹/₄ Path Coefficient, SE ¹/₄ Standard Error, DE ¹/₄ Decision. p < 0.05, **1.96 (significance level ¹/₄ 5% (p < 0.05).

Out of the five paths examined, all the paths have proven significant (Table). All the hypotheses are supported. The results revealed that the physical concerns have a positive influence on work stress of apparel sector workers (b $\frac{1}{4} = 0.248$; SE = 0.070; t $\frac{1}{4} = 3.542$). Furthermore, psychological concerns (b $\frac{1}{4} = -$ 0.403; SE = 0.078; t $\frac{1}{4}$ = 5.193) have a significant impact on the work stress of apparel industry employees. Moreover, employees' financial concerns have a significant impact on work stress of the employees (b $\frac{1}{4}$ = 0.234; SE = 0.089; t $\frac{1}{4}$ = 2.625). And the concerns regarding social gaze have a significant

influence on the work stress of the employees in the apparel sector during the COVID-19 pandemic (b $\frac{1}{4}$ = -0.207; SE = 0.093; t $\frac{1}{4}$ = 2.222). Most importantly, employees' work stress has a significant influence on employees'

well-being (b $\frac{1}{4}$ = 0.464; SE = 0.091; t $\frac{1}{4}$ = 5.103) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the apparel industry, in Sri Lanka. Therefore, H₁, H₂, H₃, H₄, and H₅ are supported in the proposed model in the present study.

	5	0.5		2	DE
PR	В	SE	T-V	Р	DE
Financial concern ->					
Work stress ->					
Employee well-being	0.109	0.047	2.307	0.021	Supported
Physical concern ->					
Work stress ->					
Employee well-being	0.115	0.039	2.954	0.003	Supported
Concerns regarding					
social gaze -> Work					
stress -> Employee					Not
well-being	-0.096	0.052	1.834	0.067	supported
Psychological					
concern -> Work					
stress -> Employee					
well-being	-0.187	0.052	3.598	0.000	Supported

Note: HP ¼ hypotheses, PR ¼ Path Relation, b ¼ Path Coefficient, SE ¼ Standard Error, DE ¼ Decision. p < 0.05, **1.96 (significance level ¹/₄ 5% (p < 0.05).

Interestingly, the study found statistically significant indirect effects of employees' financial concerns (b $\frac{1}{4} = 0.109$; SE = 0.047; t $\frac{1}{4} = 2.307$), physical concerns (b $\frac{1}{4} = 0.115$; SE = 0.039; t $\frac{1}{4} = 2.954$), and psychological concerns (b $\frac{1}{4} = -0.187$; SE = 0.052; t $\frac{1}{4} = 3.598$) on employee wellbeing via work stress. However, the indirect effect between concerns regarding social gaze and employee wellbeing via work stress found statistically insignificant (b $\frac{1}{4}$ = -0.096; SE = 0.052; t $\frac{1}{4}$ = 1.834).

Table 05: Indirect Effects

Discussion and Conclusion

Pandemics such as COVID-19 cause social problems. Employees in Sri Lanka's apparel industry contribute significantly to the national economy, and they may face extreme stress as a result of having to work continuously despite island-wide lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. This, however, has not been explicitly addressed in the existing literature. Thus, the primary goal of this study was to investigate the characteristics of perceived pandemic concerns in terms of physical, psychological, financial, and social gaze concerns. The second goal of this research is to look into the well-being of employees working in the apparel industry during COVID-19. Concerns about social gaze, financial concerns, physical concerns, and psychological concerns were found to have a significant impact on the work stress of employees in the apparel industry in Sri Lanka during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is in line with the findings of Yu et al. (2021) who similarly found the positive impact of employees' physical concerns on their well-being. Furthermore, during the pandemic, employees' work stress has a significant impact on employee well-being in the apparel sector. Moreover, the study found statistically significant indirect effects of employees' financial concerns, physical concerns, and psychological concerns on employee wellbeing via work stress. Therefore, it can be determined that combined efforts on employees' financial concerns, physical concerns, and psychological concerns along with work stress will be contribute to establish and ensure employee well-being in apparel industry during COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the current study provides valuable insights to HR officials in the apparel industry on how to work on employee concerns about social gaze, financial concerns, physical concerns, and psychological concerns to reduce the impact of these factors on employee work stress. This study suggests that human resource officials in the apparel industry reduce work stress as a means of ensuring employee well-being at work.

Many studies have focused on and investigated disease vulnerability. Thus, the current study sought to investigate the impact of employee concerns (physical, psychological, financial, and social gaze) on work stress and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees in the apparel industry, in particular, were highly exposed to the epidemic. The findings revealed that physical, psychological, and financial concerns, as well as concerns about social gaze, significantly influence the work stress of apparel sector employees, a finding that has yet to be confirmed theoretically in the apparel industry. From the standpoint of Human Resources Management, it is a significant finding to reduce the work stress of apparel sector employees at the workplace. Another important contribution is the confirmation of the significant impact of work stress on employees' well-being.

The current study adds significantly to the existing literature, but it has several limitations. To begin, the sample size can be increased to increase the generalizability of the findings. In addition, one apparel company was considered in the current study. As a result, it will be critical to consider other similar apparel companies in Sri Lanka to increase the generalizability of the findings. Because the effect of demographic characteristics of employees such as age, gender, income, education, and designation were not considered in the current study, it will be more meaningful to consider those to obtain more precise results.

References

- Acedo, F. J., & Jones, M. V. (2007). Speed of internationalization and entrepreneurial cognition: Insights and a comparison between international new ventures, exporters and domestic firms. *Journal of World Business*. 42(3), 236–252.
- AFL-CIO, Clean Clothes Campaign, Labour behind the Label, Workers United, Maquila Solidarity Network, War on Want, USAS. (2020). COVID-19 Pandemic: A Pretext to Roll Back Sri Lankan Garment Workers' Rights.
- Agarwal, P. (2021). Shattered but smiling: Human resource management and the wellbeing of hotel employees during COVID-19. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 93, 102765. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102765
- Akgunduz, Y. (2015). The influence of self-esteem and role stress on job performance in hotel businesses. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-09-2013-0421

- Aneez, S. (2020). Garment workers on front line of Sri Lanka coronavirus outbreak. [Online] Available from: https://news.trust.org/item/20201104000609-ve3w9/? [Accessed: 30th July 2021].
- Ariza-Montes, A., Hernández-Perlines, F., Han, H., & Law, R. (2019). Human dimension of the hospitality industry: Working conditions and psychological well-being among European servers. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 41, 138-147.
- Bain, M. (2020). Coronavirus threatens the livelihoods of garment workers around the world. Qz.Com. [Online] Available from: https://qz.com/1821511/coronavirus-threatens-jobs-of-garmentworkers-in-southeast-asia/ [Accessed: 30th July 2021].
- Belal, B. (2009). Religiosity and work stress coping behavior of Muslim employees. Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues, 2 (2), 123 – 137.
- Central Bank of Sri Lanka (2020). Annual Report 2020: Economic and Social Statistics of Sri Lanka. Central Bank, Colombo, Sri Lanka
- Cleanclothes.org. (2021). Sri Lankan garment workers suffer during pandemic, while brands and manufacturers continue to make profits. [Online] Available from: https://cleanclothes.org/news/2021/sri-lankan-garment-workers-suffer-during-pandemic-while-brands-and-manufacturers-continue-to-make-profits. [Accessed: 30th July 2021].
- ColomboPage. (2020). Resumption of civilian life and office work to begin from May 11. [Online] Available from: http://www.colombopage.com/archive_20A/May01_1588349980CH.php. [Accessed: 30th July 2021].
- De Neve, J.-E., Diener, E., Tay, L., & Xuereb, C. (2013). The objective benefits of subjective Wellbeing. In: Helliwell, J.F., Layard, R., Sachs, J. (Eds.), World Happiness Report 2013, 2 ed. UN Sustainable Network Development Solutions Network, New York. 54–79.
- Economy next. (2020). Amidst COVID-19, Sri Lanka apparel is fighting for its life. [Online] Available from: https://economynext.com/brand_voice/amidst-covid-19-sri-lanka-apparel-is-fighting-for-its-life/. [Accessed: 05th August 2021].
- Edgar, F., Geare, A., Saunders, D., Beacker, M., & Faanunu, L. (2017). A transformative service research agenda: A study of workers' well-being. *The Service Industries Journal*, 37(1), 84– 104. https://doi.org/10.1080/02642069.2017.1290797
- Fein, E. C., Skinner, N., & Machin, M. A. (2017). Work intensification, work-life interference, stress, and well-being in Australian workers. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 47(4), 360–371. https://doi.org/10.1080/00208825.2017.1382271
- Ghubach, R., El-Rufaie, O., Zoubeidi, T., Sabri, S., Yousif, S., & Moselhy, H. F. (2010). Subjective life satisfaction and mental disorders among older adults in UAE in general population. *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 25(5), 458–465. https://doi.org/10.1002/gps.2360
- Hair, J. F., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2013). Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling: Rigorous Applications, Better Results and Higher Acceptance. *Long Range Planning*, 46(1-2), 1-12. https://doi:10.1016/j.lrp.2013.01.001
- Hon, A. H. Y., Chan, W. W. H., & Lu, L. (2013). Overcoming work-related stress and promoting employee creativity in hotel industry: The role of task feedback from supervisor. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 33, 416–424. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2012.11.001
- Karatepe, O. M., Yavas, U., Babakus, E., & Deitz, G. D. (2018). The effects of organizational and personal resources on stress, engagement, and job outcomes. International Journal of Hospitality Management, 74, 147–161. https://10.1016/j.ijhm.2018.04.005
- Keyes, C. L., Shmotkin, D., & Ryff, C. D. (2002). Optimizing well-being: the empirical encounter of two traditions. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 82(6), 1007.

- Khalid, I., Khalid, T., & Qabajah, M. (2016). Healthcare workers emotions, perceived stressors and coping strategies during a MERS-CoV outbreak. *Clinical Medicine & Research*, 14(1), 7–14. https:// doi.org/10.3121/cmr.2016.1303
- Kim, H., Lee, S., Uysal, M., Kim, J., & Ahn, K. (2015). Nature-based tourism: Motivation and subjective well-being. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 32(sup1), S76-S96. https://doi.org/ 10.1080/10548408.2014.997958
- Kim, S. S., Im, J., & Hwang, J. (2015). The effects of mentoring on role stress, job attitude, and turnover intention in the hotel industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 48, 68–82. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2015.04.006
- Kooji, D. T. A. M., de Lange, A. H., Jansen, P. G. W., & Dikkers, J. S. E. (2013). Beyond chronological age. Examining perceived future time and subjective health as age-related mediators in relation to work-related motivations and well-being. *Work and Stress*. 27(1), 88– 105. https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2013.769328
- Macksoud, L., Schrag, S., Richards, R. E., & Alberts, S. J. (2020). Covid-19 and its impact on the global economy. [Online] Available from: Dentons. https://www.dentons.com/en/insights/alerts/2020/march/11/covid-19-and-its-impact-on-theglobal-economy. [Accessed: 30th July 2021].
- Marcatto, F., Blas, L. D., Luis, O., Festa, S., Ferrante, D. (2021). The Perceived Occupational Stress Scale. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*.
- Magdinceva-Sopova, M. Stojanovska-Stefanova, A., & Aleksoski, O. (2021). Employee Stress Management Caused by the Impact of the Covid-19 Virus: The Macedonian Case. *SocioBrains. SMART IDEAS – WISE DECISIONS, Ltd., Sofia, Bulgaria.* (80), 15-27.
- Main, A., Zhou, Q., Ma, Y., Luecken, L. J., & Liu, X. (2011). Relations of SARS-related stressors and coping to Chinese college students' psychological adjustment during the 2003 Beijing SARS epidemic. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 58(3), 410–423. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023632
- Maunder, R. (2004). The experience of the 2003 SARS outbreak as a traumatic stress among frontline healthcare workers in Toronto: Lessons learned. *Philosophical Transactions B: Biological Sciences*, 359(1447), 1117–1125. https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2004.1483
- McKeever, V. (2020). CORONAVIRUS Nearly 25 million jobs could be lost globally due to the coronavirus, UN labor organization estimates. CNBC. [Online] Available from: https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/19/nearly-25-million-jobs-could-be-lost-globally-due-to-thecoronavirus.html. [Accessed: 30th July 2021].
- Oh, N., Hong, N., Ryu, D. H., Kam, S., Kim, K. Y., & Bae, S. G. (2017). Exploring nursing intention, stress, and professionalism in response to infectious disease Emergencies: The experience of local public hospital nurses during the 2015 MERS outbreak in South Korea. Asian Nursing Research, 11 (3), 230–236. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anr.2017.08.005
- Pick, S. (2015). Workers' Wellbeing Can Create a More Sustainable Apparel Industry and Boost Profits. TRIPLEPUNDIT. [Online] Available from: https://www.triplepundit.com/story/2015/workers-wellbeing-can-create-more-sustainableapparel-industry-and-boost-profits/31261 [Accessed: 9th December 2021].
- Ramsey, J., Punnett, B. J., & Greenidge, D. (2008). A social psychological account of absenteeism in Barbados. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 18(2), 97-117.
- Rath, T., & Harter, J. (2010). The economics of wellbeing. New York: Gallup Press.
- Roshana, M.R., Kaldeen, M., & Rifna Banu A.R.F. (2020). Impact of Covid-19 Outbreak on Sri Lankan Economy. *Journal of Critical Reviews*. 7(14), 2124-2133

- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 141.
- Ryff, C. D., & Keyes, C. L. M. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 69(4), 719.
- Saijo, Y., Chiba, S., Yoshioka, E., Nakagi, Y., Ito, T., Kitaoka-Higashiguchi, K., & Yoshida, T. (2015). Synergistic interaction between job control and social support at work on depression, burnout, and insomnia among Japanese civil servants. *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*, 88(2), 143-152. Doi: 10.1007/s00420-014-0945-6
- Sharma, J., & Devi, A. (2011). Role stress among employees: An empirical study of commercial banks. *Gurukul Business Review*, 7, 53-61.
- Sirgy, M. J., & Lee, D. J. (2016). Work-life balance: A quality-of-life model. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, 11(4), 1059–1082. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-015-9419-6
- Spiggle, S. (1994). Analysis and interpretation of qualitative data in consumer research. Journal of Consumer Research, 21(3), 491–503. https://doi.org/10.1086/209413
- Tongchaiprasit, P., & Ariyabuddhiphongs, V. (2016). Creativity and turnover intention among hotel chefs: The mediating effects of job satisfaction and job stress. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 55, 33–40. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2016.02.009
- Van De Voorde, K., Paauwe, J., & Van Veldhoven, M. (2012). Employee well-being and the HRM– organizational performance relationship: a review of quantitative studies. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 14(4), 391-407.
- Villanueva, D., & Djurkovic, N. (2009). Occupational stress and intention to leave among employees in small and medium enterprises. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 16(2), 124– 137. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015710
- Weeraratne, B., (2004). Textile and Apparel Industry in Sri Lanka: An Empirical Analysis in a Globalization Setting. EWC International Graduate Student Conference, East-West Center, Honolulu.
- Whitt, S., & Wilson, R. K. (2007). Public goods in the ield: Katrina evacuees in Houston. *Southern Economic Journal*, 377-387.
- Wright, T. A., & Cropanzano, R. (2004). The role of psychological well-being in job performance: a fresh look at an age-old quest. Organizational Dynamics, 33(4), 338-351.
- World Health Organization, 2020. Physical and Mental Health Key to Resilience during COVID-19 Pandemic. Available from: https://www.euro.who.int/en/mediacentre/sections/statements/2020/statement-physical-and-mental-health-key-to-resilienceduring-covid-19-pandemic. [Accessed: 05th August 2021].
- Yu, J., Park, J., & Hyun, S. (2021). Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on employees' work stress, well-being, mental health, organizational citizenship behavior, and employee-customer identification. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing &Amp; Management*, 30(5), 529-548. https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2021.1867283