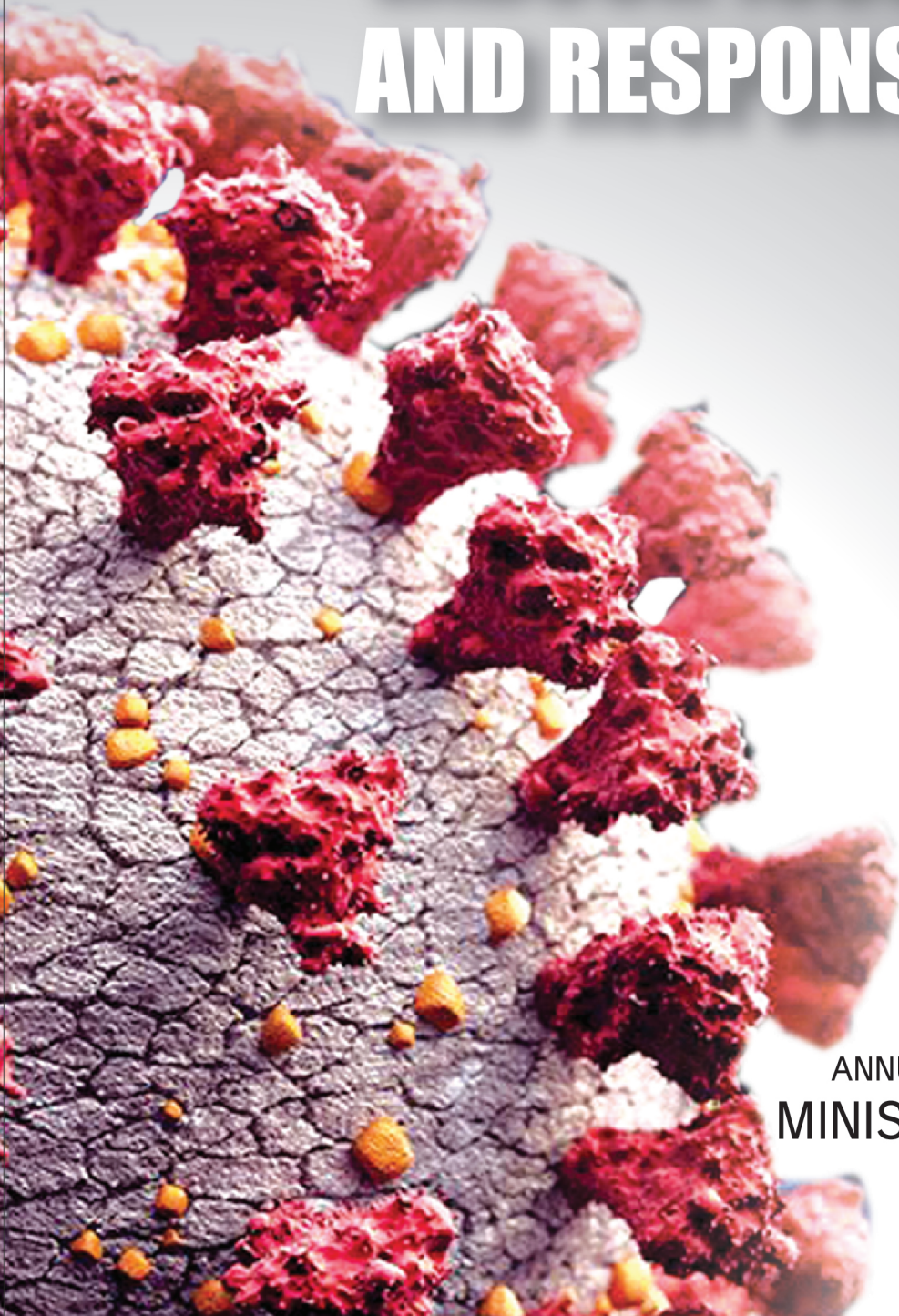




COVID-19: **LABOUR ISSUES AND RESPONSES**



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COVID-19 : LABOUR ISSUES AND RESPONSES

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Ministry of Labour
Colombo
Sri Lanka

COVID-19 : LABOUR ISSUES AND RESPONSES 2020

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Foreword

Formulation of policies and implementing relevant laws to protect workers' rights, social security and build up better environment for smooth functioning of private sector and semi government sector with the target of socio-economic upliftment of the country is the major function of the Ministry of Labour. Protecting rights of 8.3 million workers that is 43.4 percent of total labour force of the country has direct effect on increase in feeling of protectiveness and satisfaction of workers will reflect in GNP. Amending out dated labour laws so as to comply with the current situation is another major activity that Ministry has been completing.

However, the direction of the pathway of the Ministry has deviated from its expected way with the onset of COVID- 19 pandemic in this year. It has turned the world of work upside down .It is having a dramatic effect on the jobs ,livelihood and well-being of workers and their families and on enterprises across the globe, particularly the small and medium size. Simultaneously it has opened doors to new ways of doing work and service delivery. Certain sectors and industries have moved online, pointing the way towards exciting innovations in the world of work. Number of workers lost their job, but the number is relatively less in Sri Lanka due to the active involvement of the Ministry. The Ministry has taken best possible effort to mitigate the adverse effect of pandemic on working community. Decision has been taken by the task force established as a subcommittee of the National Labour Advisory Council, to make employers to pay the percentage of salary, at least to employees those who cannot report to the work or there is no sufficient work to be assigned.

Now the entire world has come to a juncture of uncertainty of maintaining economic activities and uplifting economic state and living standard of people. The fragilities and fault lines exposed by the crisis need to be tackled. The world of work will not and should not look the same after this crisis. In this circumstances, actual facts and figures about field of labour is highly important to policy makers to shape up new policies need to proceed forward amidst this kind of disturbances. Therefore the Ministry decided to devote the labour journal this year, for research papers on "labour practice during COVID epidemic ".

Our sincere gratitude goes to a Hon. Minister of Labour, Nimal Siripala de Silva for providing leadership, guidance and advice in this regard. Further to Mr. M P D U K Mapa Pathirana, Secretary to the Ministry and staff of the Ministry for courageous support in making this effort a success. Finally our special thanks go to researchers who submitted research papers and reviewers for their invaluable contribution.

Planning, Research and Development Division
Ministry of Labour

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Covid - 19 Pandemic and Termination of Employment: An Appraisal of the Legal Responses Available in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

The economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic induce many types of terminations of employment including closure, retrenchment, lay-off, termination for inefficiency, termination by transfer to another Company, disciplinary termination for disobedience of orders, constructive termination, vacation of post and termination in accordance with contractual terms. The legal framework relating to termination of employment has responses for the different types of termination of employment induced by the effects of the COVID – 19 pandemic. The Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provisions) Act mandates consent of the workman or approval of the Commissioner for non – disciplinary terminations of employment such as closure, retrenchment and temporary non-employment. The Act does not have any specific provision with regard to the period for temporary non-employment and payment of compensation for termination by temporary non-employment. The provisions of the Act apply to the termination of employment for the reason of workman's inefficiency and incompetency. Transfer of workmen to another Company or another associate Company without the consent of the workmen is also termination of employment in terms of the Termination Act. Refusal to obey the reasonable orders given by an employer may justify termination of employment. An employer who creates intolerable conditions to a workman to force the workman to leave from employment constructively terminates the employment. A vacation of post notice cannot be given to a workman who does not have the intention to abandon his employment. An employer cannot unjustly terminate the employment of a workman depending on contractual terms.

Keywords: *Compensation, COVID - 19, Employment, Termination.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID - 19 pandemic in Sri Lanka and other countries has caused many labour issues hitherto not experienced or expected in Sri Lanka. Among them, the most important labour issue is termination of employment. Because of the effects of COVID -19, terminations of employment take place in many forms including closure, retrenchment, lay-off, termination for inefficiency and incompetency in use of technology in 'New Normal' conditions, termination by transfer to another Company without the consent of the workmen, disciplinary termination for disobedience of safety orders, constructive termination by creating intolerable conditions, vacation of post even though the intention to desert employment does not exist, termination in accordance with contractual terms, forced resignation and termination of probationary employment for redundancy.

2. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this paper are to identify the different types of terminations of employment in the light of the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to assess the legal responses available to the types of terminations in the light of balancing the interests of employers, workmen and the State. The paper also aims to analyze the provisions of the relevant legislation to assess the effectiveness of the responses to the types of terminations and make suggestions for law reform, if any.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research method has been adopted for the research to write this paper. The research was carried out based on the primary sources of law such as international Conventions, legislation and cases decided by the Superior Courts. As the Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provisions) Act of 1971 (as amended) is the legislation which has been enacted to provide the procedure for non-disciplinary terminations of employment, the provisions of the legislation have been critically analyzed and related to the different types of terminations. The provisions of the Industrial Disputes Act of 1950 (as amended) also have been analyzed to explore the extent to which the provisions of the legislation could be related to settle the disputes relating to the different types of terminations. The cases decided by the Superior Courts have developed the legal principles relating to the types of terminations that have resulted due to the effect of the pandemic. The principles developed by the Superior Courts in the cases also have been analyzed and critically related to the types of terminations to assess the effectiveness of the legal responses. The literature review and the findings have been included under relevant sub-headings.

3.1 ILO Convention

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has adopted the Termination of Employment Convention¹ and the Termination of Employment Recommendation² which provide principles relating to termination of employment. Employers terminate the employment of the workmen for economic or structural reasons to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on business undertakings. The Termination of Employment Recommendation requires the parties to “avert or minimize as far as possible termination of employment for reasons of economic, technical, structural or similar nature, without prejudice to the efficient operation of the undertaking...”³

The Termination of Employment Convention provides for the protection of employment in the absence for valid reasons for termination of employment.⁴ According to the Convention, when the employment of a workman is terminated, the workman is entitled to severance allowance or other benefits for the loss of earnings.⁵ Although Sri Lanka has not ratified the Convention, provisions of the Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provisions) Act,⁶ the Industrial Disputes Act⁷ and the principles developed in decided cases promote the principles of the Convention and the Recommendation.

¹ Termination of Employment Convention, No.158 (1982).

² Termination of Employment Recommendation, No. 166 (1982).

³ Termination of Employment Recommendation, Principle 19.

⁴ Termination of Employment Convention, Article 4.

⁵ Termination of Employment Convention, Article 12.

⁶ Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provisions) Act, No.45 of 1971 as amended.

⁷ Industrial Disputes Act, No.43 of 1950 as amended.

3.2 Non-Disciplinary Termination

The Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provisions) Act (hereinafter referred to as the 'Termination Act') provides the procedure for non-disciplinary terminations by non-employment due to closure, permanent non-employment and temporary non-employment. Permanent non-employment means retrenchment, which is termination of employment of workmen who are excess in the workplace. Temporary non-employment means lay-off for a temporary period. According to the provisions of the Act, an employer who intends to terminate the employment of a workman for non-disciplinary reasons shall obtain the prior written consent of the workman⁸ or prior written approval of the Commissioner.⁹ The procedure laid down by the Act applies to non-disciplinary terminations resulted in due to the COVID - 19 pandemic as well.

The Act empowers the Commissioner with discretion to decide to grant or refuse the approval for termination of employment. The Commissioner could consider the relevant factors, including the impact on the business, protection of employment, social security of workmen in the light of 'New Normal' work conditions, and make the decision.

The Act provides that "...Commissioner may, in his absolute discretion, decide the terms and conditions subject to which his approval should be granted, including any particular terms and conditions relating to the payment by such employer to the workman of a gratuity or compensation for the termination of such employment..."¹⁰ It could be argued based on the wordings in the provision that it is not a mandatory requirement to the Commissioner to order payment of compensation when he grants his approval for termination of employment.

In many workplaces, the employments have been terminated by temporary non-employment because of non-availability work. The question arises as to the application of the provisions of the Termination Act for termination by temporary non-employment. Although Section 2(4)(a) of the Act provides for temporary non-employment, the provision in the Act has not been hitherto very much activated or judicially interpreted. The period for temporary non-employment has not been defined in the Act. Although the Commissioner could grant his approval for termination by temporary non-employment subject to the terms and conditions of employment which he decides, the Act does not have any specific provision with regard to payment of compensation for such termination.

It is suggested, therefore, that the Commissioner can make use of the combined effect of the provisions¹¹ of the Termination Act with regard to his approval for termination by temporary non-employment, and grant approval subject to payment of reduced remuneration according to a formula for the period of termination by temporary non-employment.

The employers who wish to terminate the employment of workmen in terms of the Termination Act for redundancy have the discretion to devise a suitable method of selection of workmen for termination of employment. In India, in the selection of workmen for termination of employment of redundant workmen, the "last in first out" (LIFO) method is followed.

⁸ Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provisions) Act, Section 2(1)(a)

⁹ Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provisions) Act, Section 2(1)(b).

¹⁰ Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provisions) Act, Section 2(2)(e).

¹¹ Sections 2(2) and 2(4)(a) of the Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provisions) Act.

In *Kumara Fernando v. Commissioner of Labour*,¹² while delivering the judgment of the Court of Appeal, Imam, J. referred to the 'LIFO' and stated that there is no compulsion to follow the 'LIFO' method in Sri Lanka, and 'the employer has a discretion to decide the method of selection'¹³ In many workplaces, the COVID – 19 pandemic has changed the forms of employment, and the employers have introduced technology driven forms of employments in 'New Normal' conditions. The employers have the freedom to devise a method without following the 'LIFO' method to terminate the employment of the workmen who are not familiar with technology driven forms of employments.

3.3 Inefficiency and Termination

The COVID – 19 pandemic has contributed to the emergence of many new forms of technology driven employments in 'New Normal' conditions. Employers terminate the employment of the workmen who are unable to work in technology driven employments for the reason of their inefficiency and incompetency. As termination of employment for inefficiency or incompetency cannot be construed as a disciplinary termination, the termination of employment for inefficiency or incompetency becomes a non-disciplinary termination, and it is covered by the Termination Act. In *St. Anthony's Hardware Stores Ltd v. Ranjit Kumar*¹⁴ the Court of Appeal held that an employer who intends to terminate the employment of a workman for inefficiency or incompetency has to follow the procedure of the Termination Act as such termination is not a disciplinary termination.¹⁵

3.4 Transfer and Termination

Some employers whose business has been affected by the COVID – 19 pandemic transfer their workmen to another Company or another associate Company without the consent of the workmen. Superior Courts have decided that such transfers amount to termination of employment in terms of the provisions of the Termination Act.

In *Hassan v. Fairline Garments International Ltd*,¹⁶ it was observed that "an employer has no right to transfer an employee from one Company to another whether it is an associate Company or a subsidiary Company merely because the directors were the same. ...if the employer relying upon a terms of contract which permit transfer of employees from one section or from one department to another, make use of such a course of action to move employees from one legal entity to another, it would offend the provisions of the Termination of Workmen Act."

In *Sascon Knitting Company (Pvt) Ltd v. Commissioner General of Labour*,¹⁷ a Company which incurred a loss in its business transferred the workmen to another associate Company in which the Directors and the General Manager were one and the same. The transfers were contrary to the letters of appointment, and without the consent of the workmen. The Commissioner decided that the transfer was a termination of employment in terms of the Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provisions) Act, and ordered compensation. The Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court also agreed with the decision of the Commissioner.¹⁸

¹² (2007) 1 Sri LR 124.

¹³ Ibid., at p. 149

¹⁴ (1978-79) 2 Sri LR 06.

¹⁵ See *Janatha Garment Manufacturers (Pvt) Ltd v. Commissioner General of Labour*, C.A No. 158/2012.

¹⁶ (1989) 2 Sri LR 137.

¹⁷ SC Appeal 52/2014.

¹⁸ See *P.M.K. Garments (Pvt) Ltd v. Commissioner General of Labour*, C.A (Writ) No. 02/2012. *Fascination Exports (Pvt) Ltd v. Commissioner General of Labour*, C.A (Writ) No. 209/2015.

3.5 Disciplinary Termination

Labour legislation of Sri Lanka does not provide statutory obligations to the employers to take measures to protect their workmen from biological hazards. However, the Regulation No.94 gazetted under the Quarantine and Prevention of Diseases Ordinance¹⁹ imposes an obligation on the employers to take measures including wearing masks within workplaces, social distancing, measurement of body temperature, provision of hand washing facilities, maintenance of records of visitors to protect the workmen and others. In addition, the employers have an obligation under the Common Law to provide a safe workplace to the workmen. Therefore, the employers issue various orders to the workmen to comply with the safety measures to protect the workmen and others from COVID – 19.

A workman who refuses or neglects to obey a reasonable order given by his employer for the safety of the workmen and others commits misconduct. Refusal to obey a reasonable order given by an employer justifies termination of services of a workman who has disobeyed the order. In *Samarakoon Bandav. Board of Directors, Co-operative Wholesale Establishment*²⁰ Amerasinghe.J stated that “Willful, deliberate and intentional disobedience of orders ...could, in certain circumstances, justify the dismissal of a workman. Each case must depend upon circumstances of equity and its substantial merits.” If a workman repeatedly violates an order given by an employer for the safety of the workmen and others, the disobedience of the workman justifies termination of his services.

3.6 Constructive Termination

In constructive termination, an employer creates an intolerable condition to a workman which forces the workman to leave the workplace.²¹ In *Murrayv. Minister of Defence*,²² it was held that for a successful claim based on constructive dismissal, the employer must be culpably responsible for intolerable conditions.

In some workplaces, employers create intolerable conditions to the workmen to force the workmen to leave from employment as a tactic to reduce the workmen in the workplaces. It is also alleged that in some workplaces, the employers have reduced the workmen and given the tasks of those workmen to the workmen who remain in the workplaces as additional tasks and find fault with them for not fulfilling their tasks. These situations could be considered as constructive terminations if the employers have created intolerable conditions to the workmen.

3.7 Vacation of Post

In vacation of post, a workman does not report to work with the intention of abandoning his employment. In *Nelson De Silva v. Sri Lanka State Engineering Corporation*,²³ Jayasuriya.J stated: “The concept of vacation of post involves two aspects; one is the mental element, that is intention to desert and abandon the employment and the more familiar element of the concept of vacation of post, which is the failure to

¹⁹ The Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, No.2197/25 – Thursday, October 15, 2020.

²⁰ (1991) 1 Sri LR 386 at p. 389.

²¹ See Lord Denning in *Western Excavating (E.C.C) Ltd v. Sharp*, 1978 Q.B 761 at p.769.

²² (2009) 3 SA 130 at p. 138.

²³ (1996) 2 Sri LR 342.

report at the workplace of the employee...”²⁴ In *Sri Lanka Ports Authority v. Jayaratnam*,²⁵ the Court of Appeal stated that there must be clear and cogent evidence deducible from the conduct of the employee that he has abandoned the employment.

A notice of vacation of post issued to a workman who could not attend to work due to travel restrictions to control the COVID – 19 pandemic becomes an unjustified termination. In some cases, the employers have terminated the employment of workmen in the pretext of vacation of post to reduce the workmen in the workplaces. A letter of vacation of post could be issued to a workman when both the physical act of not reporting to work and the mental element of abandoning or deserting the employment co-exist only.

3.8 Contractual Terms and Termination

Generally, an employment contract has a clause providing that either party could terminate the contract by giving a notice or payment in lieu of the notice. An Industrial Arbitrator, Industrial Court and a Labour Tribunal have the power to make just and equitable decisions²⁶ without being fettered by an unreasonable clause in a contract of employment.²⁷ Therefore, the employers cannot give such notices or make such payments to terminate the employment of permanent workmen in order to reduce the workmen. Such clauses cannot be used to force the workmen to resign from their employment as well.

3.9 Probationary Employment and Termination

A probationer who satisfactorily completes the probationary period has a legitimate expectation to be confirmed in his employment, and his employer cannot terminate his employment for reasons motivated by *mala fide* or victimization.²⁸ Sometimes, the employers who intend to reduce the workmen by circumventing the provisions of the Termination Act, select the probationers and terminate their employment.

In *Brown and Company Ltd v. Commissioner of Labour*²⁹ the Court of Appeal cited the principles as to probationary employment and stated that the employer had a right to terminate the services of the probationer who was incompetent, and the probationer was not entitled to relief in terms of the Termination Act.³⁰

The Termination Act applies subject to the conditions, *inter alia*, the workman has worked for a period of one hundred and eight days.³¹ If the termination of employment of a probationer is for unsatisfactory performance, the termination would not come under the Termination Act even though the probationer has been employed for one hundred and eighty days. It is submitted that if the probationer has completed one hundred and eighty days of work and the termination of his employment is for the reason of redundancy, the termination would come under the Termination Act³².

²⁴ *Ibid.*, at p. 343.

²⁵ C.A No 103/1987.

²⁶ Sections 17(1),24(1) and 31C(1) of the Industrial Disputes Act.

²⁷ Section 31B(4) of the Industrial Disputes Act.

See also Tambiah, J. in *State Bank of India v. Edirisinghe*, (1991) I Sri LR 397at 411.

²⁸ *Jayasiri Lankage v. University of Kelaniya*, BALJR (1997) Vol VII Part1 p.7 at p.10.

State Distilleries Corporation v. Rupasinghe (1994) 2 Sri LR 395 at p. 404.

²⁹ 2002 [B.L.R] 16.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, at p. 17.

³¹ Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provisions) Act, Section 3(1)(b).

³² See *J.L.Morison Son & Jones (Ceylon) PLC v. Tennakoon*, C.A (Writ) No. 107/2014.

3.10 Settlement of Industrial Disputes

The Industrial Disputes Act provides the mechanisms for settlement of industrial disputes. The mechanisms include settlement by conciliation, arbitration, Industrial Court and Labour Tribunal. The terminations of employment that result because of the effects of COVID – 19 could be settled by making use of these mechanisms.

In *Next Manufacturing (Pvt) Ltd v. Jayasundara*,³³ the employee entered into a settlement by conciliation in terms Section 12(1) of the Industrial Disputes Act relating to termination of employment. The termination was to reduce the staff, which was necessitated by the global economic recession in the apparel industry. The Supreme Court held that the settlement had ousted the jurisdiction of the Labour Tribunal to hear the application relating to the termination.

The Act empowers an industrial arbitrator,³⁴ Industrial Court³⁵ and a Labour Tribunal³⁶ to make just and equitable decisions. When they make just and equitable decisions as to the termination of employment, they can make the decisions which balance the interests of employers, workmen and the State.

3.11 Social Dialogue

The Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation,³⁷ emphasizes the importance of social dialogue between employers' organizations and workers' organizations for crisis responses in crisis situations.³⁸ Collective bargaining is a form of social dialogue, and the parties can negotiate the terms and conditions of employment or settlement of disputes in collective bargaining. If collective bargaining succeeds, it will result in an agreement called collective agreement which legally binds the parties.³⁹ A collective agreement cannot be entered into between the parties to oust the statutory powers of the Commissioner to make his decision in terms of the Termination Act. However, based on an agreement reached between an employer and a trade union, an individual workman could give his/her consent for termination of employment in terms of the Termination Act.

4. CONCLUSION

The economic impact caused by the COVID – 19 pandemic has induced the different types of termination of employment. The legal framework of Sri Lanka has responses to the types of terminations. However, the legal framework could be further strengthened by the legislative intervention. Therefore, it is suggested to amend the Termination Act to apply it not for 'termination by temporary non-employment', but for 'temporary non-employment' by not including the word 'termination' for temporary non-employment. The temporary non-employment in the Act shall be defined for a period not exceeding the prescribed months. A legislative provision also should be included to pay a reduced payment of remuneration according to a formula during the period of temporary non-employment and to make statutory contributions for Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) and Employees' Trust Fund (ETF) according to the payment of remuneration during the period. It would protect the employment of the workmen, and balance the interests of the employers, workmen and the State.

³³ SC Appeal No.139/2017.

³⁴ Industrial Disputes Act, Section 17(1).

³⁵ Industrial Disputes Act, Section 24(1).

³⁶ Industrial Disputes Act, Section 31C(1).

³⁷ Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, No. 205 (2017).

³⁸ Principles 7(k), 24 and 25 of the Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation.

³⁹ Sections 8(1) and 40(1) of the Industrial Disputes Act.

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Exploring how Covid-19 Impinge upon Construction Labour

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ABSTRACT

Many countries after a remarkable spike in COVID 19 cases, opted to lockdown and quarantine curfew that restricted the movement of people. Construction is one of the main sectors experiencing a clear impact due to Covid 19. As a significant growth driver of the economy, the domestic construction industry employs nearly one million of the population directly in various trades. Unfortunately, almost every project has been severely hampered. It is, therefore, prudent to address the impact of the pandemic on construction labour at the outset and end of the crisis to prepare for any future challenges or opportunities that it may undergo. This study aims to investigate the effect of COVID 19 on the construction industry's survival and possible measures to be taken in both the short and the long run. This paper summarizes using a narrative analysis of the key takeaways of 15 webinar discussions on the COVID-19 impact and outlook of the construction sector in Sri Lanka. The impacts and fallouts have been addressed by key industry personnel. The study found the most prominent impacts of COVID 19 are the suspension of projects, labour impact, and job loss, time overrun, cost overrun, and delay in payments. The findings of this study shed light on the consequences of the sudden occurrence of a pandemic and raise awareness of the most critical impacts which cannot be overlooked. The findings also help project stakeholders prepare for any future worst-case scenarios.

Keywords: Covid 19, Construction labour, Informal economy labour, Labour crisis, Pandemic, Livelihood, Unemployment

1. INTRODUCTION

During the Covid 19 pandemic, the situation drastically deteriorated first by the shortage of construction material supply. Following the spread of the virus, many countries started implementing several measures to reduce the movement of people, and that has mainly affected the progress of construction work because it requires on-site work. Job losses are a major disaster during the escalating situation of the pandemic. Globally, millions of employees lost their jobs. In the construction industry, almost every tradesman lost their jobs and most of the small enterprises are not able to pay salaries during lockdowns. The literature about the pandemic is still scarce, especially in the construction industry sector. Hence, it is crucial to investigate the impact of the pandemic in the construction industry with reference to the impact on labour. Hence, this research depends largely on the opinions expressed by the key industry personnel via webinar discussions recently taken place in electronic media.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

COVID-19 has been spreading drastically all over the world and is considered by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a pandemic (WHO, 2020). It has had far-reaching severe consequences. All the business activities have been shut down except for a few vital projects which are necessary to support the health system and safety of the people. Relatively, it has limited the business operations and companies have shifted to Work-From-Home (WFH) concept. However, in the construction industry, all the workers inevitably need to nearly work on-site either to perform activities or to monitor whether the work is done correctly (Financial Times, 2020). This is basically how the construction industry is different from other industries. Hence, it is crucial to appreciate how the construction industry addresses this unforeseen situation.

Several studies have attempted to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and industrial sectors. A study by Fernandes, (2020) addressed the economic impact of the pandemic outbreak on the economy of 30 countries and found that the gross domestic product (GDP) is likely to be hit by 3-6% or might fall by 15% in some countries.

The study revealed that the service-oriented economy is negatively impacted, and jobs are at risk and the countries that depend on foreign trade are likely to be affected the most in their GDP. Another study by Ayttey et al. (2020) shows that commerce, tourism, and trade are the most impacted sectors.

Nicola et al. (2020) reported that the restrictions implied by the authorities had reduced mobility causing many industries to shut down the business operations. Ivanov, (2020) studied the effect of the outbreak on the supply chain and found that almost every economic sector has been impacted negatively and it may take a longer time to recover. Harari (2020) also expressed that the COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest crisis of the generation and it may take years to recover and action must be taken decisively to subsidize and plan new strategies to avoid the travail of humankind. Venkatachalam, (2020) found that the Indian real estate sector has been severely affected and declination has been considerably recorded. Helm, (2020) also pointed out that the total lockdown caused by COVID-19 has severely curtailed economic activities. The construction industry with no exception has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the supply chains have been disrupted, it has been difficult to complete on time and there is a potential for cost overrun (Bailey, 2020) and (Robertson, 2020). Due to the recent travel restrictions and uncertainty around travel locally and globally, managing the workforce is a challenging task. Increased health, safety, and environmental issues lead to higher expenses for the contractor (Turrini, 2020). Labour shortages, governmental restrictions including a ban on gatherings, and the contractor's personnel or suppliers being ill or in quarantine, are the situations causing critical delay and inability to meet the project deadlines (Shorter, 2020); Osha, 2020). Delays in the completion of projects are partly due to the interruptions in the supply chain as voluminous raw materials are manufactured in China. Negative cash-flows, delays in the supply chain, and low investor confidence create a more problematic situation within the industry (William 2020; European International Contractors 2020).

As European International Contractors, stated, the uptake of cross-border projects will require a higher-administrative burden as quarantine periods across the world vary in length. Covid-19 affects key cost components of construction projects (material and labour), and these challenges to on-going project delivery, companies' liquidity, and whole business models (Jayalath, 2020). Further, sub-contractors are unable to

perform. Equipment rental companies are starting to face problems with equipment left on inoperative sites. The bankruptcy of smaller companies, contractors, subcontractors, and design professionals are frequent (European International Contractors, 2020). Disputes with main-contractors and sub-contractors, back-to-back force majeure claims under concession agreements to avoid liquidated damages are some of the complexities that arise (European International Contractors, 2020). As mentioned, force majeure clauses often list specific events such as earthquakes, earth slips, Tsunami, etc. Many such clauses will include in the list under Acts of God, which would not, however, seem to describe or encompass a global pandemic such as COVID 19 (Jayalath, 2020). Meanwhile, the liquidity crisis of companies with a high level of debt and low cash reserves, insolvency issues will linger the stakeholders to more disappointment (Deloitte, 2020). A significant increase in claims for delays or increased costs is because of the COVID-19 outbreak (Jayalath, 2020).

The Sri Lankan experience is not that far from global observations. The lockdown and curfews have restricted the distribution and retail of cement and dry mortar goods across the island (Economynext, 2020). The handover dates were postponed. Hence, suppliers were in a dilemma as the operating costs are increasing through, increases in, raw material costs, logistics, and expenditure related to special hygienic facilities (Economynext, 2020). The guidelines of Epidemiology Unit - Ministry of Health - Sri Lanka, stated that contractors need to supply all the hand hygiene facilities, facial masks, and other relevant personal protective equipment (PPEs) at the workplace, which may cause an additional cost. In Sri Lanka, several high-rise building projects have slowed down owing to the delay in the procurement of materials from China and the curfew. Lockdowns in China also adversely affected the industry as Chinese contractors undertake many construction projects in Sri Lanka (PWC, 2020). Thus, large-scale public sector construction activities may be suspended temporarily (Colombo Page, 2020). As such, the Sri Lankan construction supply chain was massively impacted due to the lockdown of China.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Search engines are the only option available for researchers who have been almost in a situation of 'house-arrest' and 'socially distant' by the current circumstances. A literature review was carried out using research papers and technical articles that appeared in open free access sources on the internet since January 2020 where the spread of COVID 19 became evident and declared a pandemic by the WHO. A thorough review of webinar outcomes that are in the public domain was undertaken to identify various issues at the contracting firm level. Webinars are a frequent online qualitative research approach.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Webinar	Experience/Impact	Alternative/Recommendation
01	The labour crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic has increased global unemployment by almost 25 million.	Retaining of employment, with deducted salaries for those who have been made to stay at home instead of terminating them.
02	The impact is profoundly severe in the case of seasonal labour such as in domestic construction	Due to the nature of the industry, most of the value additions are done on-site. It would be ideal to shift to a phased-out approach to implementation that allows the necessary time (in the initial phases) to gather first-hand information about project characteristics, personnel, and cultural nuances so that the delivered solution can be tailored appropriately.

03	Most informal economy workers have suffered massive damage to their capacity to gainfully engage in some form of income earning.	Companies require a stimulus package as a short-term measure to ensure wages to employees for months experiencing no work.
04	Working from home is not possible unless computer facilities, software, essential hard copies, soft files, etc. are provided to the employees.	Arrangements must be made by the authorities to provide computer facilities, an uninterrupted network, and other essential facilities.
05	The biggest risk seems to be the continuation of work and accommodation in line with social distancing measures.	Working arrangements that reduce onsite labour congestion is the only option.
06	Delays are stemming from a shortage of craftspeople due to shelter-in-place restrictions and delays occasioned by shortages of government workers available to perform inspections, issue permits, etc	Online approval methods may be feasible in some cases
07	In certain jurisdictions, the hardship may allow parties to seek relief based on an exceptional and unpredictable change of circumstances that affects the businesses.	Under many laws, parties must continue to exhaust all reasonably available means to continue performing their obligations, notwithstanding the existence of a force majeure event.
08	Employment protection has been threatened and the loss of income and businesses has threatened the business continuity.	Both the EPF and ETF contributions to be continued during this time – guaranteeing continued social security. Establishments must be allowed to prorate payments according to the number of hours worked by each employee.
09	Computer servers, electronic items, manufacturing tools, testing equipment, and documents idle in offices, sites, and workshops would be damaged or destroyed due to non-maintenance. Also, there can be damages to important data due to overheating, rats, and termite attacks.	Allowing, with some control, at least a technician and the owner must be present to minimize losses. It is better to implement a work schedule on a roaster basis to ensure no damages due to non-maintenance/operation of tools and equipment
10	The construction supply chain is highly impacted, generating project slippage and/or extra costs. Enhanced focus on worker safety and increased cost pressure could accelerate the move to offsite construction methods. The efficiency and controlled environment of factory production can help in leveraging labor costs and in optimizing project schedules.	It is important to increase competitiveness among the engineering and construction companies in terms of improving the balance between site work, office engineering and factory assembly, etc. Meanwhile taking mitigatory actions is inevitable. Apps can help keep a track of workers' locations while on the job, in full compliance with privacy regulations, so management can quickly identify potential exposure to the virus.

11	The epidemic and the predictions of environmental changes are bound to reset the status quo.	The industry may need to be more flexible and ready to effect structural changes: We need to commence a dialogue and identify weaknesses and recommend adjustments and/or re-orientation.
12	The unprecedented loss of productivity among workers because of distancing requirements, new safety protective gear requirements, and safety procedures—all in addition to the sick and quarantined workers who are absent.	In the short term, it's going to be phased out working arrangements while focusing on other key areas like improvement of business processes, eliminating non-value adding activities, reducing wastage, and driving workforce with KPIs and training and development.
13	Site congestion is inevitable in building projects than road and infrastructure projects	It is always important to adhere to government directives to maintain discipline at the ground level
14	Informal traders are particularly impacted by social distancing rules and have less access to clean water and sanitation. Additionally, with 60% of women across Sri Lanka employed in the informal sector, COVID-19 threatens their economic self-sufficiency from plying their trade and contributing to the livelihood of their household.	Produce necessary policy measures to enhance social protection coverage and support mechanisms to protect informal workers if they lose their livelihoods while emphasizing the nature of women labour
15	First, informal workers often work in economic sectors that carry a high risk of virus infection. Among others, waste recyclers, street vendors and food servers, construction workers, transport workers, and domestic workers are particularly at risk to contract with COVID-19.	In response, many low- and middle-income countries have started implementing measures for those in the informal sector and self-employed workers. Policy responses include cash transfers as well as the deferral or reduction of loans, rents, or utility bills for low-income people for the duration of the pandemic.

Table 1. Key findings from the webinar content

Informal workers mean those who work in jobs that are not registered with local authorities or covered by formal working arrangements. They are not legally immune, either. They do not fall within the tax net, nor eligible for basic social security. A classic example is the construction sector. During the Covid-19, the informal economy workers faced a lot of issues such as the impact of lockdown and other containment measures.

They haven't permanent working arrangements or areas, and they faced a challenge to affect by covid-19 because of the non- arranged work ethic and without the occupational safe workplaces. As such, informal economy workers got an economically and socially challenged life. In Sri Lanka, two million workers are employed informally in the construction sector but there is limited research on how they have been affected due to Covid 19.

While the construction industry begins to find the new normal, the findings will help in strategizing the way forward in near future and navigate the COVID-19 downturn. In nutshell, while informal employment is universally characterized by a lack of social protection, exposure to occupational health and income risks

for subpopulations of informal workers is determined by the specific physical and social environments of their workplaces. Efforts to improve the economic status of informal workers should consider the contexts in which informal work takes place to develop tailored interventions for subpopulations of informal workers. The biggest risk seems to be the continuation of work and providing accommodation in line with social distancing measures. For example, in Singapore, most of the COVID-19 cases are from construction dormitories. However, the Construction Industry Development Authority (“CIDA”) and the Ministry of Health in Sri Lanka have given guidelines to respond to the crisis.

5. CONCLUSION

The biggest risk seems to be the site congestion and the difficulty to maintain social distancing measures due to the very nature of the industry. Hence, it is high time the professionals and industry regulators together revisit the circumstances and work out a strategy to work ‘in harmony with Covid 19’ for a less interrupted construction move throughout the island. The findings of this article are introductory to the construction industry stakeholders and policymakers. However, some of the findings can be used to understand the impact of the unforeseen and uncontrolled pandemic on construction-related other industries and other sectors in general. This will help improve the plans to cope with any encountered circumstances.

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Employee Motivation to work during Covid-19: A Comparative analysis between public and private sector employment

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ABSTRACT

The COVID –19 (C19) pandemic is a global crisis. The first wave of this crisis was influenced to lock down the entire country, whereas similar procedures were adopted by other countries as well. It was an emerging experience for the entire Sri Lankan society while all firms across the globe faced a huge problem to manage the situation. This disaster situation makes sense for public and private sector employment to re-arrange the employment relations to operate the business entities. This paper is to determine the public and private sector employee behaviors and attitudes on work motivation during this pandemic. During the pandemic situation, most of the organizations introduced and practices different methods to continue the employment process. Such methods include Work from Home (WFH), Work attendance roster, utilize minimum employees, operate essential services, while following the health guidance such as social distancing, wearing a face mask and washing hands. The demand and usefulness for the Information Technology platforms are increased. Under this situation, public and private organizations take several initiatives to enhance employee motivation report to work while keeping their employees morally ready to work. In this context, the study is concerned to address the discrepancies of employee motivation to work during the C19 pandemic in the public and private sectors.

Keywords: C19, Employee Motivation, Public sector employment, Private sector employment.

1. INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of contemporary organizations is highly dependent on employee motivation to achieve organizational goals. Therefore, employers are introducing several beneficiary packages to maintain employee motivation continuously. They networked with all other socio-economic sectors to manage the business chain effectively and efficiently. Accordingly, there are similar and different aspects of active relationships among employers and employees. Industrial society has been started to restructure the management process. The Human Resource Management process, as the key functions in organizations, faced major changes to maintain employee motivation while sustaining the business entities under C19.

When giving attention to employment sectors, employees in public and private sectors experience different working conditions and different appreciations relationships based on the organizational capacity and

statutory provisions. This was highly encouraging employees for their work motivation, work attitudes and sustainability of the employment. Therefore, it can be assumed that their attitudes towards their job and employer organizations are full or partial work distribution for their employees during the lockdown situation. Accordingly, it can be observed that for similar and different aspects of relationships among public and private sector employees and employers.

It is observed that the decision regarding cutting down the unessential workforce and benefits were an advantage for private sector employers while it is a burden for the government sector to pay the salaries and allowances under non-work or under work conditions. Meantime some of the private sector business entities introduced welfare facilities for their employees to motivate them to continue the business process. Accordingly, the employer and employee relational elements such as psychological behavior and attitudes, employee motivation, work commitment, attendance and benefits were differently applied in two different sectors. Reviewing the employee experience, engagement, and motivation to work under the C19 pandemic is an influence on labor issues and responses. In these circumstances, the aim of this paper is to investigate the disparity of the motivation to work among private and public sector employees.

According to the Census Department statistics, in the first quarter of 2020 the number of unemployed persons is estimated as 483,172. The unemployment rate for the first quarter is 5.7 percent (Dept. of Census Sri Lanka labor force survey 1st quarter – 2020). Loss of employment and salary in the private sector is the problem because in Sri Lankan context wages are insufficient for fulfilling basic needs in the family. The employee motivational factors that were made during the pandemic situation is highly to encourage private sector employees. But the majority of them are willing to attend for duties with the existing welfare facilities. Cut down the job or inability to attend duties under the lockdown situation arises a big issue. The government issue the work permit for employers to continue the business process as per the health guidelines. This opportunity was an advantage for private sector employers and employees to mitigate the issue.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

01. What are the employee motivational factors that made employees to work during the pandemic situation?
02. How do public sector employees differ from private sector employees in relation to employee motivation?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

As per the World Health Organization (WHO) C19 is an infectious disease. The C19 virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes. By this virus most people infected with the C19 will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illnesses. The best way to prevent and slow down transmission is to be well informed about the C19 virus, the disease and how it spreads. To protect from the virus infection by washing hands or using alcohol based rub frequently and not touching the face. C19, the workplace and employees' mental health

outcomes psychological distress and major depression including emotional suffering, accompanied by symptoms of depression, sadness and loss of interest, anxiety, and somatic symptoms like insomnia. This psychological distress is related to a set of psychological and behavioral symptoms that are distributed over a continuum of time. This influence for negative emotions and difficulty to cope with everyday responsibilities (Salima, 2020).

The current pandemic is stressful for the whole world. The C19 crisis can be related to many trouble makers for employees' mental health, economy and social interaction during and after the lockdown situation. This is the consequence of the problem. Therefore, it is important to understand the problems in order to identify the solution which will help employees and organizations to reduce the risk in all aspects. In addition, in the organizational context, it can be seen that there are some other negative outcomes as well due to C19 such as the stigma and social exclusion, financial loss and job insecurity, perception of safety, threat and risk of contagion. In this case, individuals are afraid about their own health and the health of the member of their families (Salima, 2020). The C19 crisis badly influences for Sri Lankan economy. When face with a global issue, exports have fallen dramatically. The tourism industry has collapsed, businesses are finding it more difficult to operate due to the impact of the curfew and physical distancing measures, remittances are falling rapidly, and the Rupee has depreciated by 4 percent since early March 2020, increasing the costs of essential imports and debt held in foreign currencies. Many businesses of formal and informal economies are in danger of either closing down or cutting their workforce before the crisis. Also, Sri Lanka and the citizen were already facing challenges. With the impact of the Easter Sunday attacks highly affected the economy and the economic growth in 2019 was only 2.3 percent (IMF, 2020a). When considering the domestic economy of Sri Lanka, prior to the crisis, most families were already living on limited and insecure incomes. Therefore, the vast majority of families were not prepared to withstand an economic shock on the scale of C19 to most of those living in middle incomes labor force (IMF, 2020b). Insist, employee motivation is a challenge for both employees and employers in the crisis situation.

The 4th edition of the Oxford pocket dictionary defined employment as "regular paid work" (English, 2008). The dictionary of law defining employment as "the word connotes a business, profession, vocation or trade and includes work under contract" (Jinadasa, 2007). The account dictionary defined employment as an agreement between an individual and another entity that stipulates the responsibilities, payment terms and arrangement, rules of the workplace, and is recognized by the government (Account Dictionary, 2016). The International Labor Organization (ILO) definition is most relevant to the current situation that arises under the C19 crisis. Accordingly, employment means the act of being hired or employed by a company or employer as all those of working age who, during a short reference period, were engaged in any activity to produce goods or provide services for pay or profit. The employee persons "at work" in a job for at least one hour; and employed person "not at work" due to temporary absence from a job, or to working time arrangements such as shift work, flextime and compensatory leave for overtime. (ILO, 2020).

Motivation is defined as a thing that activates human behavior to attain certain achievements (Kumari, 2020). The success of the organization is mainly reflected by the hard works of employees. Therefore, to achieve the organizational goals employees should be motivated by external and internal factors. The top motivational factors are job satisfaction, promotions/ expectations, recognition, good pay and styles of organization/ management (Kumari, 2020). These are the basic primary factors of work motivation during a normal situation. In the crisis situation and when applied the special work schedule for

work attendance, the employee motivation is depending on the situational factors based on job security and benefits. Especially, the organizational strength and culture are most important to motivate employees because the employee's expectations are depending on the sustainability of the organization in the crisis situation. Employee motivation is the level of energy, commitment, and creativity that a company's workers bring to their jobs (Salima:2020). Whether the economy is growing or shrinking, finding ways to motivate employees is always a management obligation.

The existing literature has identified that there are different motivational antecedents among the employees in the public and private sectors. During the C19 a sudden lockdown of the economic actions and immobility created huge challenges for both employers and employees. So banning the socio-economic actions due to the C19 pandemic was a new experience and challenge for both employers and employees in the government and private sectors. In the normal conditions, the employees are looking for two fundamental experiences from work: (i) Connecting with people and being inspired by the purpose of the organization, and (ii) Contributing work as well as being to grow and be reward accordingly (Watson: 2020). These two factors are equally important for ensuring the sustainable financial performance of the organizations. Generally, less earning, less saving, and holding insecure jobs created negative living standards close to the poverty of individuals. At the same time, 64% of business leaders are considering canceling or delaying planned investment (ILO: 2020b), almost 2.7 billion workers affected around the world (Policy: 2020). Accordingly, the sustainability of the labor market depends on the stability of the national economy, together with the public and private sectors. Sri Lanka, as a developing country, there are no much strongly established economic capacity in most private sector organizations to secure their employees during a crisis situation.

When considering the world situation on employment, in April 2020, workplace and business closures have decreased from 81 to 68 percent. 81 percent of employers and 66 percent of own-account workers live and work in countries affected by recommended or required workplace closures, with severe impacts on income and jobs (ILO 3rd Edition, 2020). According to the ILO nowcasting model, global working hours declined in the first quarter of 2020 by an estimated 4.5 percent. It is equal to approximately 130 million full-time jobs assuming a 48 hours working week compared to the 4th quarter in 2019. Further, assume the global working hours in the second quarter are expected to be 10.5 percent lower than in the last pre-crisis quarter. This is equivalent to 305 million full-time jobs. This has been driven mainly by prolongation and extension of containment measures while the situation has worsened for all major regional groups, estimates indicate that the America 12.4 percent, Europe and Central Asia 11.8 percent lost the working hours (ILO, 2020).

Due to the C19 crisis young generation already facing higher rates of unemployment and underemployment are more vulnerable to falling labor demand as witnessed during the crisis. Older workers can also suffer from economic vulnerabilities. As per the ILO estimate 58.6 percent of employed women and 45.4 percent men were affected by the C19 crisis. Unprotected workers, including self-employed, casual and gig workers, are likely to be disproportionately hit by the virus as they do not have access to paid or sick leave mechanisms (ILO 1st Edition, 2020).

The study focuses on the theoretical analysis on Locke's (1997) model of the work motivation process and Mayer and Herscovitch's (2001) model of workplace commitments. Accordingly, the analysis discusses the

theoretical perspectives including the Work stress theory Social comparison theory, and social exchange theory. These theories focus on the public and private sector employees' work motivation during C19 and after. Further, the research associate job satisfaction, commitment to work in the public or private sector, and its motivation factors for the sustainability of the macroeconomy.

4. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this paper is to determine the differences work motivation among the employees in the public sector and private sector during the C19 pandemic. To achieve this purpose, the study conveniently selected a sample of 100 employees (50 employees representing each sector) and completed the responses for the structured questionnaires. Further, several interviews and observations were also carried out to identify employee behaviors under the crisis situation. The public sector respondents belong to the Divisional secretariats, Public Health Officers and employees belonging to the statutory bodies. The employee designations were the Engineers, administrative officers, Management assistants, Development officers and the primary level employees. In the private sector, employees belonging to the Managers and middle-level executives and the workers in large and medium scale local business Organizations. The interview questions mainly focused on the intention to make attendance and its patterns during the quarantine period, such form of work from home, receiving the salary, future obligation for job selection, benefits and facilities received during the quarantine period and practices of the health guidelines in the work premises. Accordingly, both the quantitative data gathered through the online survey via a google doc and the qualitative data gathered through the interviews were analyzed to achieve the intended research objectives.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study mainly focused on two research questions to study employee motivation under the C19 crisis. The first question is, what are the employee motivational factors that made employees work during the pandemic situation? This is concerning the private sector employee motivation factors. The second question is; how do public sector employees differ from private sector employees in relation to employee motivation? In this regard, the study goes to review the employee motivation based on attendance pattern, the pattern of salary and benefits received, to reviving the sectors like to work, perception for attending work under the C19 pandemic situation, satisfaction about health conditions implemented in the workplace, accommodation and other facilities provided by the employers and its impact for employee motivation. All together achieving the desirable behaviors from the public and private sector employment is the value for labor-related decisions making and human resource management process within the organization and re-think on employee reaction for policymakers.

When reviewing the private sector employment under the C19 crisis situation is different from the aforesaid motivational factors in average condition. This particular crisis situation has created new motivation patterns and actions for employees in the private sector. The employers decided to manage their workforce to face the crisis. As a result, many employees were lost their jobs while others work under health conditions and restrictions implemented by the government and employers. Therefore, they do not have the feeling of their job security. In this situation, protection of the job is more valuable than fighting for the benefits. As per the qualitative interviews conducted with the private sector employees they are frustrated about the

availability of their own job. Therefore, they are highly committed attending to work. This can be identified as a key factor for the self-motivation for private sector employees in this crisis situation to protect the job on minimum benefits receiving.

However, the employees are highly concerned about their own and family health. So they are worried about health facilities implemented by the employers on work premises. In this situation, the available rewards were less motivated for employees to report to work. But they are highly concerned about their own and family health in attending to work physically. Accordingly, 93 percent of private sector employees are satisfied with the employees' health practices based on health guidance issued by the government. Accordingly, it can be seeming that there is a variation in employee motivational attendance be under the C19 crisis situation because the private sector employees attended for work to protect their jobs. The study identified in the lockdown situation to continue the work, the employers are introducing a variety of benefits to motivate their employees, including transportation, accommodation, meals, safety equipment, health, and sanitary facilities, further, in this situation introducing new work schedules and structures to use minimum employees to continue the work process as per the existing rules and regulations.

This is the next section to review the work motivation in the public sector differs from the private sector. As per the interviews conducted with public sector employees, they are interested in staying at home further because they have received the benefits while staying at home. But in the case of the private sector employees, there are no such privileges. Therefore, the employment responsibility and privileges are no equally receiving in the public and private sectors even under the crisis situation. Therefore, the study identified that there is employee unrest among public sector service categories in between essential services and other service sectors during the C19 pandemic situation. This is seen in the health, security, food supplying and transportation sectors. As per the study sample unessential public employees engaged with a flexible work schedule, work roster or the work from the home task as their job role. Whether employee categories belonging to the primary level were not contributed for their duties during the crisis situation because their organizational management to run the business with minimum employees. This is because the government and the health guidelines were instructed for the respective organizational management to run the business with minimum employees. This is one of the privileges for public sector employees and its impact on demand for public sector employment.

When considering the survey data of the study the C19 pandemic situation is highly linked with the employer and employee behaviors due to financial burden and benefits in both the public and private sector. As per the conveniently selected sample, public and private sector employee's work attendance as follows.

Sector	Work attendance	%	No attendance	%
Public	5	10	45	90
Private	10	20	40	80

According to the selected sample, non-attendance for work is more than 80% in both sectors. Public (5%) private (10%) sector work attendance reported as compulsory services in medical, and financial sector services. The government announced to operate businesses with minimum employees. Accordingly,

employee attendance procedures were implemented based on the rosters by several organizations. As per the selected sample, the percentage of the number of days' attendance for work as follows;

Sector	No. of Days attend for work (%)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Public	-	17%	17%	-	66%
Private	14%	36%	-	29%	21%

(Public and Private sector work attendance: As per conveniently selected sample).

As stated in the above table, 66% of public sector employees represented essential health and financial services and attend for work a minimum of five days per week while 34% were attended for work only two to three days. When referring to the private sector only 21% of employees in the private sector were attended to work the entire five days. 29% were attended four days per week, while 50% of employees in the private sector attended for work only one to two days per week.

Benefit (Salary/ wages) receiving during quarantine curfew period;

Sector	Full pay	Half pay	No pay
Public	100%	-	-
Private	28%	44%	28%

When reviewing the receiving of salary and benefits during the lockdown situation 100% of the public sector employees received their salary and benefits while only 28% of private sector employees received the total benefits. 44% of private sector employees received half pay while the other 28% not received any benefits. This is highly concerning the employee motivation and attraction for the public sector over the private sectors.

Future interest in selecting the employment field;

Sector	Self-employment	Private sector	Public
Public	16%	-	84%
Private	43%	36%	21%

Employment-based societal norms and the acceptances based identity goes to establish the private sector employees as a weaker party when compared with the public sector as per the benefits and job security under the crisis situation. As a global crisis, entire world employment faced crisis while employee motivation was highly concerned to protect their jobs other than fighting for privileges. In these circumstances, many foreign employees lost their jobs and arrived in the country and contributed to the increasing unemployment. In another aspect, the arrival of foreign employees makes competition for public and private sector employment also a burden for the existing employee when compare their experience and exposure to the world employment market. This is directly influencing demand for public and private sector executive level employment. Therefore, 84% of public sector employees are interested in working in the same sector because of the job sustainability and benefits receiving under the crisis situation, while 16% are willing to select self-employment. The study highly concerned the situation. This 16% are employing in the critical sector including the health and police sectors. They are highly discouraged due

to work conditions and challenges. When considering the private sector employees, 43% are willing to start self-employment. This is the reason for their educational qualifications. If they have an interest in public sector employment, they are not obtaining the required qualifications. 36% are further interested in working in the private sector while 21% interests for public sector employment. The situation was highly giving attention to employee motivation patterns beyond rewording.

Further interest in stay at home

Sector	Yes	No
Public	0	100%
Private	0	100%

When asked a direct question from respondent about interest or willingness to stay at home further, both sector 100% of employees expected to start their employment as soon as possible with the end of the lockdown situation. Because, private sector employees are not receiving the full salary and other benefits. So they don't wish to stay at home. Further they feel unrest in protecting the job. Therefore, there is a self-motivation in private sector employees to protect their jobs.

However, the public sector employees are receiving full salary and benefits while staying at home without contributing the service and it may influence some negative emotional feelings on work commitment and attitude on public sector employment and productivity. This is able to find a negative aspect of commitment to attend work. It could able to find many negative reactions for not to attend work as per the health guidance-based work roster implementation. Public sector employees raised many unjustifiable reasons when implement the work reporting roster. In this situation, public sector entities encountered problems to operate day to day essential services with participating even minimum employees. The public sector trade unions, opposition political parties played a key role to demand to leave on payment, safety and sanitary, welfare and benefits during the quarantine curfew period. The situation highly shows welfare attitude in the government sector employment and show the less commitment for attending work.

Satisfaction about sanitary and welfare facilities provided by the employer;

Sector	Satisfied	No satisfied
Public	67%	33%
Private	93%	7%

Successful health guidelines implementation is an attractive employee motivational factor during the pandemic situation. In the public sector, 67% are satisfied with the implementation of health, sanitary and welfare facilities, while 33% are unsatisfied about those facilities. In the private sector 93% are happy about health and welfare facilities implemented by the employers and only 7% in dissatisfied about the facilities. This is also an important motivational factor for employees to attend to work during a crisis situation.

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

As per the above findings, it can be concluded that the key factors behind the motivation to work during the pandemic are job security, benefits packages such as transportation, accommodation, meals and commitment to health and safety including, safety equipment, health and sanitary facilities. Among them the most prioritized factor was the job security for survival.

When analyzing the finding in relation to the differences in work motivation between public and private sector employees, there are several notable aspects. First, it is identified that job security in public sector is assured compared to the private sector, Second, the welfare mentality of public sector employees and less accountability on employment engagement was also revealed while such factors were not identified with the private sector. Overall, it can be concluded that employee motivation as a management function is acritical in a crisis situation and it operates in a different manner to the normal situation. The employee motivates on availability of job continuously and providing basic facilities and health security become more prioritized aspects of motivational antecedents. The situation of the job security and standing strongly behind crisis situation is depending on the strength of the business organization. It is also reported that there are some opportunistic behaviors among the public sector employees, especially in the essential services as they have started to demanding further benefits. On the other hand, non-essential public employees were happy to stay further at home while enjoying the full salary and benefits. Therefore, employee motivation is situational and defend on personal perceptions and attitudes. Even though the welfare minded employment patterns can be identified with both sectors, the private sector is more committed to work continuously for survival while the public sector employees are more interested in staying at home with the full rewards.

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The Economic Impact of Covid-19 on the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) Sector in Batticaloa District, Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play an important role in the growth and stabilization of the Sri Lankan economy. The outbreak of coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) has severely affected national and global economies. Various MSMEs are facing different issues with a certain degree of losses during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to identify the major economic impacts on MSMEs through the marketing mix concept (4Ps) method. This study was conducted with the use of primary data collection from the MSMEs, who were based in the Batticaloa District in Sri Lanka from August to September 2020. According to the outcomes of the Problem Faced Index (PFI), reduction of production (340 out of 400), price of raw materials increased (326 out of 400), impact on the market (338 out of 400), and reduction of customer communication (340 out of 400) were first ranked in production, price, place, and promotion respectively during the pandemic period. In addition to that, the study recommended, the NGOs and local government bodies should create awareness and support to the MSMEs via the arrangement of seminars and training programs on overcoming this critical situation in the country.

Keywords: *4Ps, COVID-19, Economic impact, Micro-Small-Medium Enterprises, Problem Faced Index, Sri Lanka*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 coronavirus outbreak is a human tragedy affecting millions of people in this world. The outbreak also imposed negative impacts on the global economy, industries, corporations and small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Consequently, economists predict the slowing down of economic activity momentum started from March 2020 onwards without a specific ending date (Segal and Gerstel, 2020). COVID-19 has since spread worldwide presenting one of the most serious global health crises in history, with high socio-economic costs. While the health impacts are directly through contagion, the economic impacts are largely a consequence of the preventive measures adopted by the respective governments to curtail its spread. Key measures adopted by most countries to curtail the spread include the closing of their frontiers and partial or complete lockdowns of economies which among other things, have seen the temporary closure of businesses, schools, and social services.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) provide development nerves to the fabric and corner of the economy (Kalpande, *et al.*, 2015). Micro Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) plays an important role in the socio-economic development of a country. In general, MSMEs are considered as the backbone of an economy contributing 52% to the GDP.

According to the 2013/14 Economic Census of the Department of Statistics and Censuses (DCS), the number of establishments in the SME sector is 1,017 million, which provides sustenance for almost 2,255 million people in the non-agricultural sector. (Gunawardana, 2020). The distribution of MSMEs in the country concerning the four categories Micro with 935,736 (91.8%), Small, 71,126 (7.0%) Medium 1%, and Large 0.2%. The total MSMEs sector represents 99.8% of the total establishments in the country (Gunawardana, 2020). As per the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Sri Lanka, 2020), the contribution of the MSME sector in Sri Lanka is a driver of change for inclusive economic growth, regional development, employment generation, and poverty reduction in the country. With the globalization trend, the SME sector is not merely seen as a sector for “protection and promotion” but, more importantly as a driving force for “growth and development” (National Policy Framework Report, 2019). Understanding the significance of the sector, the government of Sri Lanka continuously resources and regulates the growth of the MSME sectors fostering Micro Small and Medium Enterprises to grow into Medium and Large enterprises and large enterprises to grow into the global arena in competitive advantage (Wijayasiri, 2016). The daily wage earners (persons engaged on a casual basis) (CBSL, 2020), were identified as the most affected category within the MSME sector, where the government offered several relief measures for their sustainability through the pandemic. With the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka, few districts were not affected whose economical activities begun with the lift of curfew where the agriculture sector was able to continue without much difficulty affecting positively the overall country’s condition. Main subsectors which got affected by the pandemic in terms of MSME’s are the Tourism industry, Apparel sector, Footwear and leather sector, processed food industry, handloom, and handicraft industry and other industries such as rubber and plastics, wood-based industry, and ceramic manufacturing (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Sri Lanka, 2020).

The marketing mix is considered to be one of the most important aspects of the marketing process. It plays a significant role in creating value and satisfaction for the customer. In particular, the marketing mix or 4Ps (product, price, promotion, and place) operates as the main forces when it comes to meeting the demands of the customer and creating a long, profitable relationships with them. The traditional theoretical framework about the implementation of marketing-management process activities is based on the concept of the marketing mix (Festa, Cuomo, Metallo, and Festa, 2016). The importance of this study is based on the significant role of the marketing mix (product, price, place, and promotion) in achieving a competitive advantage for the SME sector. Hence, it is vital to understand the real-time impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the MSME sector of Sri Lanka and to be gathering knowledge on the relief measures and governmental plans to mitigate negative circumstances while improving the effects of advantages arising from the concurrent opportunities.

2. OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the study is to identify the major economic impacts on MSMEs through the marketing mix concept and to understand the relief measures offered by the government and new opportunities in the sector.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Working, shopping or getting around - the COVID-19 crisis has fundamentally changed many things. COVID-19 has rapidly affected our day-to-day life, businesses, disrupted the world trade and movements. Identification of the disease at an early stage is vital to control the spread of the virus because it very rapidly spreads from person to person. The COVID-19 global pandemic which started as a health crisis, has become an economic and a 'human crisis,'. As governments across the globe closed international borders, abandoned transport systems, and took steps to lockdown their population to contain the pandemic, economic activities have faltered, global and regional value chains have been disrupted, millions of people have lost their jobs, with many of them facing hunger and falling into extreme poverty. Moreover, the socio-economic impact is much more severe given the vast proportion of population in these countries living at the margins, fragmented coverage of social protection, pervasive informality in economic activities and employment, and wide gaps in public health infrastructure. Millions of workers have been rendered jobless, inequalities have been accentuated and the crisis is likely to reverse years, if not decades, of gains in poverty reduction, undermining the progress made by the subregion towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (ESCAP UN, 2020).

Haleem *et al.*, 2020, this article highlighted that most of the countries have slowed down their manufacturing of the products. Due to this pandemic, there are many economic impacts on MSMEs such as slowing of the manufacturing of essential goods; disrupt the supply chain of products; losses in national and international business; poor cash flow in the market and significant slowing down in the revenue growth. Furthermore, there are many social impacts on MSMEs such as service sector is not being able to provide their proper service; undue stress among the population; social distancing with our peers and family members; and closure of the hotels, restaurants and religious places.

Vaikunthavasan *et al.*, 2019 discussed the product-based problems such as SMEs have limited resources, they have adopted traditional based and mostly manual productions with very few innovated technological equipment. Further SMEs have not applied any innovative or creative production methods. In addition, most of the SMEs are micro enterprises, they haven't any research and development on customers, product advancement and product innovations. Furthermore, explained the pricing problems like high cost of labor, raw material and other cost of production. Due to this SMEs impose low margin and have high price, consequently decrease in demands for products. Floating exchange rate leads risk in foreign export income of SMEs. In case of problems in promotion such as SMEs have been using few media to disseminate information, because of high cost of advertising and promotion and poor support of media to convey the message about product or services of SMEs. So, there is low awareness about the product or services of SMEs. Further most of the SMEs are technology back in disseminating information, they fail to create web site and use social networking.

Gunawardan, 2020 the study underlined the main issue faced by the Micro and Small enterprises is the breakdown of their supply chain due to lockdowns and curfew. Also, the majority of them face working capital the problem as they do not receive payments for goods supplied and other income sources also have declined. Price escalation of raw material due to limited availability also has affected their operations. The curfew and lockdowns also have imposed constraints on disposable income affecting the economic cycle.

Kirushanthy, 2015 carried out to understand the main causes of the business failure of SMEs in Batticaloa district that mentioned above mentioned challenges. The challenges for the development of MSMEs are financial capital, infrastructure, employment opportunity, greater utilization of machinery, equipment and raw materials and intellectual and skill employees, sub-contracting with formal and informal sectors.

Kapurubandara, 2006. this study mainly focused that the SMEs in developing countries fall behind with adoption due to barriers, both internal and external, prominent and inherent in a developing country as cultural, infrastructure, political, social, and legal and regulatory Barriers. Interpretation of preliminary internal barriers: such as the lack of skills required and the lack of awareness of any return on investment.

Garage, 2003. The main problems that small and medium enterprises encounter, especially during the start-up phase, deal with the lack of financial resources and also with administrative barriers in terms of bureaucracy.

Thus, there are many bottleneck of continuing the MSMEs in many places before and during the COVID-19. Even through vulnerable entrepreneurs involve to produce the good and services. This study is going to focus the major issues which are identified from the entrepreneurs and analysis with the marketing mix or 4Ps (product, price, promotion, and place) to investigate the major challenges among other issues.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Study Area and Sampling

The Batticaloa District is one of the most attractive places on the island such as a beautiful lagoon, longest beach, flora wildlife, and historical sites, and agricultural-related production. those are gifted with several environmental asserts highly potential to involving these MSMEs. Moreover, in the last three decades, many women households lost their lives and assets. As a result, those women households are encouraging to make revenue and assert to reduce the poverty and generate family income. Many NGOs and government organizations are working in this area. This study was carried out with the use of primary data collected from the MSMEs sector in the Batticaloa District. The polite survey conducted with entrepreneurs and other related filed officers to define the 4ps issues and using a questionnaire survey randomly selected 350 respondents (The following formula was used to determine the samples size (n); $n = N * X / (X + N - 1)$, where, $X = Z_{\alpha/2} * p * (1-p) / MOE^2$, and $Z_{\alpha/2}$ is the critical value of the Normal distribution at $\alpha/2$ (e.g. for a confidence level of 95%, α is 0.05 and the critical value is 1.96), MOE is the margin of error, p is the sample proportion, and N is the population size (Daniel, 1999) from August to September 2020. The questionnaire had already been tested for its reliability and validity and verified by interviewing the 10 respondents in the region (who are not part of the sample studied). The data were collected in the respondents' questionnaires in their local language.

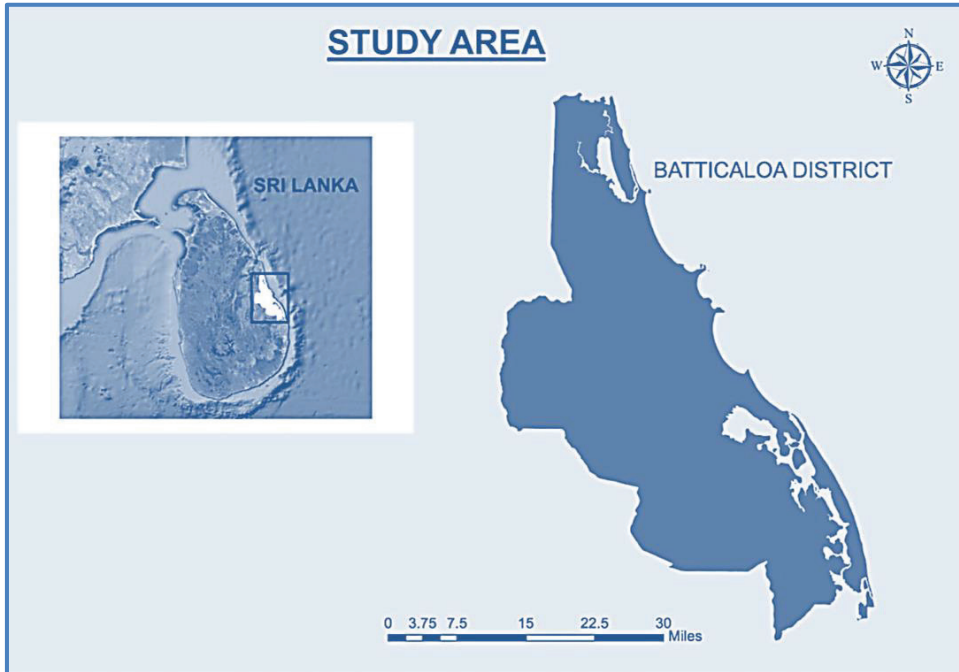


Figure 1: Mapping of Study Area

4.2 Measurement of Problem Faced Index (PFI) in the MSMEs during the pandemic period

Sixteen problems were selected based on the 4P concept and previous studies to measure the problem level in the MSMEs sector. The respondents were asked to show their responses as strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree against each problem according to their extent of problem faced during the COVID-19 period. The weighted score of the five responses was assigned as 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively.

The Problem Faced Index (PFI) of each of the problems was measured using the following formula:

$$PFI = 4 \times F_v + 3 \times F_h + 2 \times F_m + 1 \times F_l + 0 \times F_n$$

Where,

- F_v = Number of respondents who faced very high problem (Strongly agree)
- F_h = Number of respondents who faced high problem (Agree)
- F_m = Number of respondents who faced medium problem (Medium)
- F_l = Number of respondents who faced low problem (Disagree)
- F_n = Number of respondents who faced no problem at all (Strongly disagree)

To make a comparison among the problems during the pandemic period on MSMEs, a rank order of problems was constructed in descending order. PFI ranged from 0 to 400, where 0 indicated no problem at all, and 400 indicated very high problems faced (Rashid & Islam, 2016).

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Data collected from the respondents were analyzed and interpreted by the objectives of the study. The analysis of data was performed using statistical treatment with SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) computer program, version 25.

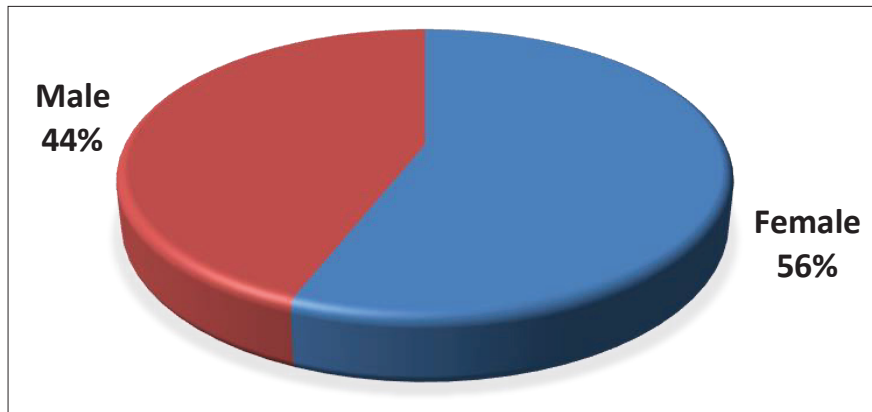


Figure 2: Gender Distribution

5.1 Demographic Characteristics

5.1.1 Gender

The female entrepreneurs are higher than male entrepreneurs. Because most of the women's head households, who are valuably involving these kinds of self-employment work for their livelihood activities. It will generate family income. Apart from that, they can utilize their skill with the human resource in the home environment. Eventually, males, who are supporting male enterprise work (Santhirakumar, 2010). Most of them are at home especially females during the lockdown. There was no much labor migration from place to place. The increase in the female labor force participation in MSME business may also be attributable to improving economic incentives in employment and policies favoring the employment of women. Also, the combined effects of increased years of schooling, access to family planning services, improved maternal and child care, leading to arise in the average age at marriage, have allowed women to take advantage of the increased employment opportunities (Latif, 2011)

5.1.2 Age

The age categories, which are showing a large number of entrepreneurs age between 30 and 50 compared with other categories. Households are very keen to participate in this field. Moreover, they are getting many supports not only from government organizations but also NGOs to develop micro, small, and medium enterprise training, tools and equipment, and other facilities from time to time.

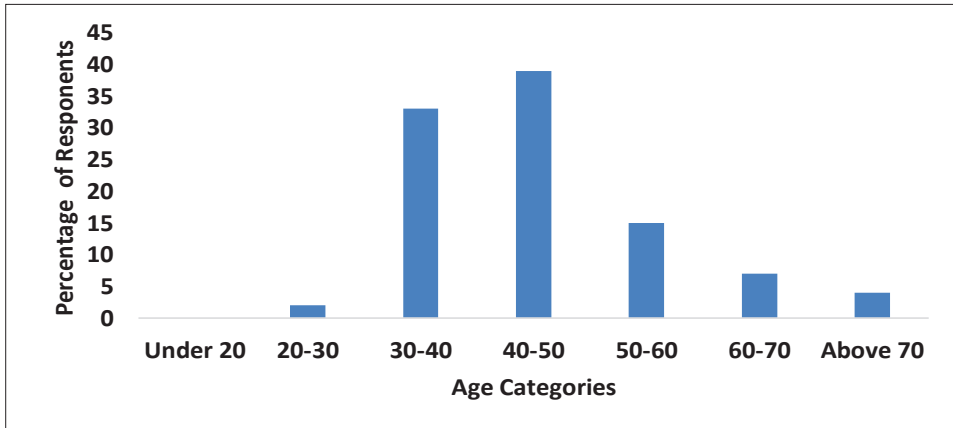


Figure 3: Age Distribution

5.1.3 Experiences

Experience is another important economic factor in MSMEs in the country. In this study area, MSMEs’ activities are continuing from generation to generation. According to the study, around 50% of respondents have 10 years to 15 years of experience in their field. Most of them are experts in this field apart from that they can try to adapt the new technology for their respective livelihood activities, for example, rice flour and handicraft items. Some of them are newly engaging in this field due to their poor income background and motivation from other entrepreneurs. Why does an individual take the personal, social, and financial risks that are associated with starting up a new venture? Individuals decide to engage in an entrepreneurial activity because of different (combinations of) motivations. Generally, a distinction is made between positive factors that ‘pull’ and negative situational factors that ‘push’ people into entrepreneurship (Shapero and Sokol, 1982; Gilad and Levine, 1986). Examples of ‘pull’ motivations are the need for achievement, the desire to be independent, and social development possibilities. ‘Push’ motivations may arise from the exit from or risk of unemployment, family pressure, and/or dissatisfaction with the present situation in general. In this paper, we investigate whether individuals, who report being motivated by pull start-up factors and individuals who report being motivated by push start-up factors, are different concerning the factors that influence their entrepreneurial engagement and failure.

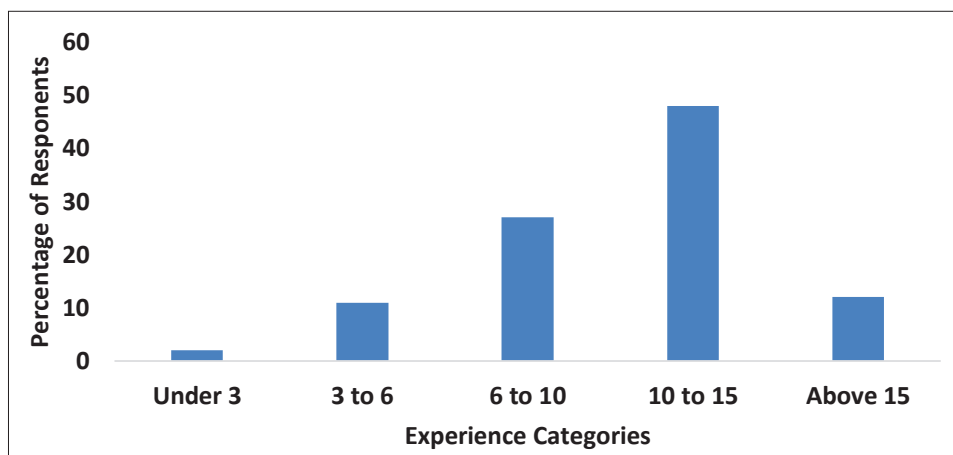


Figure 4: Experience of Respondents

5.1.4 Income Source

Mostly (around 51%), entrepreneurs are involving not only one production or services but also other production and services. Which depends on their skill, knowledge, and experiences. Moreover, the size of the family, the season of years, availability of time, etc.

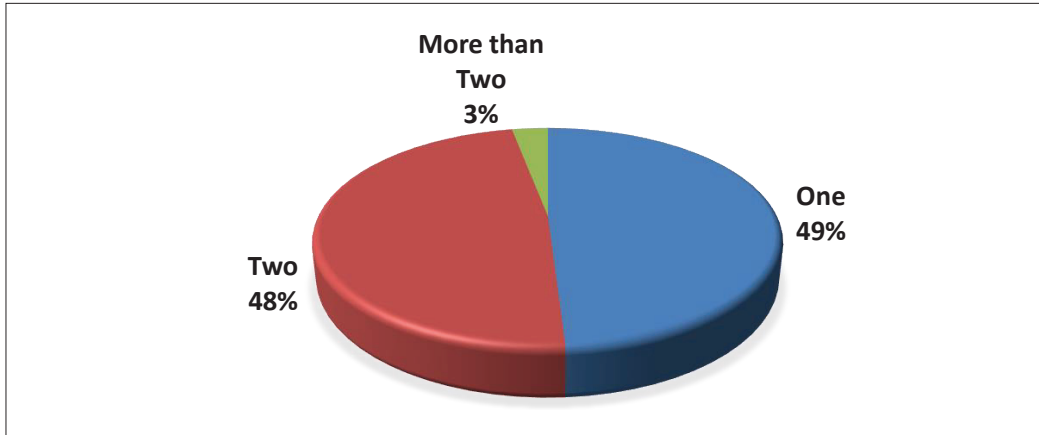


Figure 5: Income Source

5.1.5 Family Income

Entrepreneurs’ family income almost lay frequently between 10,000LKR and 20,000LKR per month compared with other categories of income level. The amount of income ranges is fluctuating depending on 4ps (Production, price, place, and promotion) and uncertainties. The main issue faced by the Micro and Small enterprises is the breakdown of their supply chain due to lockdowns and curfew. Also, the majority of them face working capital the problem as they do not receive payments for goods supplied and other income sources also have declined. Price escalation of raw material due to limited availability also has affected their operations. The curfew and lockdowns also have imposed constraints on disposable income affecting the economic cycle (Gunawardan, 2020).

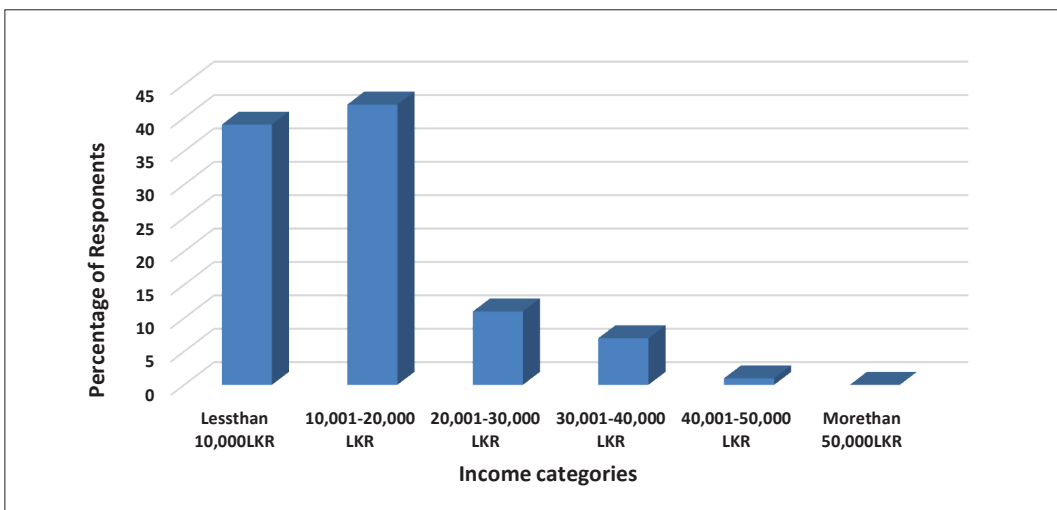


Figure 6: Family Income Distribution

5.1.6 Family Size

Human capital is an important factor in this field. The entrepreneur activities, which participate mostly in family members because of reducing the explicitly cost its' mean that if increasing input costs like labor that would raise out final production. That is one of the reasons family members and relatives involve and not expect labor charges among the family group work and production. If the entrepreneur has a lack of family members sometimes the cost of production increases. Generally, in most rural areas, the size of the family member is a little higher than in other parts of the areas.

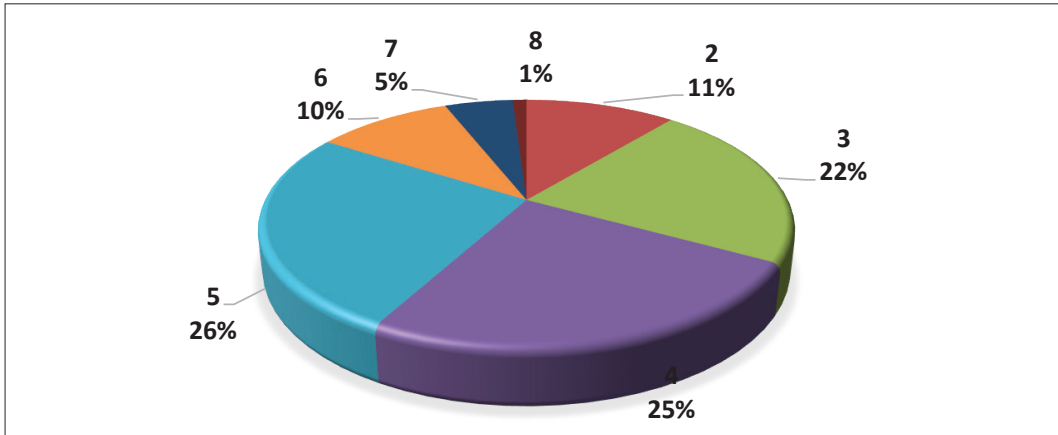


Figure 7: Family Size

5.1.7 Educational Level

Considerably, this study area is a large number of the women head households, who have completed primary level education (around 40%) but those who are very keen on MSME production and continuing their activities to maintain family income compared with other levels of education. Some other educated entrepreneurs, who are involving MSME production whenever they get free time like part-time work.

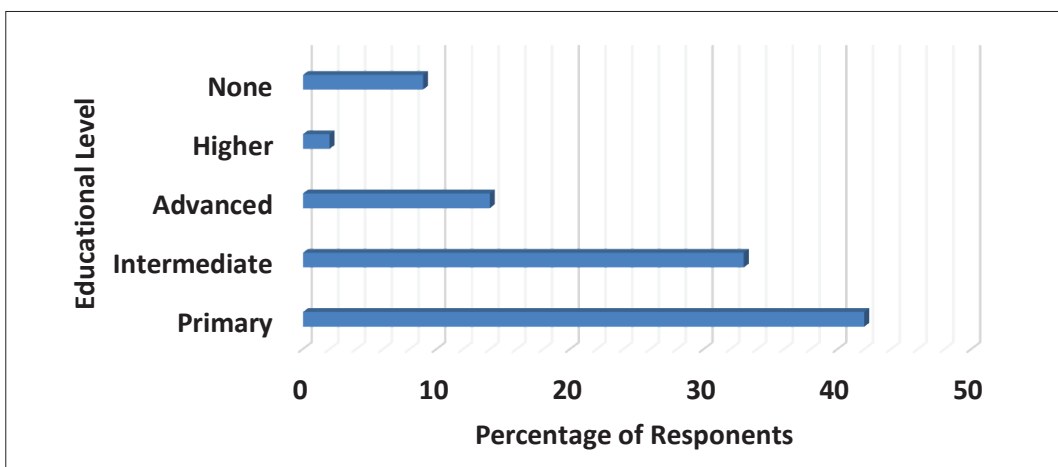


Figure 8: Educational Level

5.1.8 Business Sector

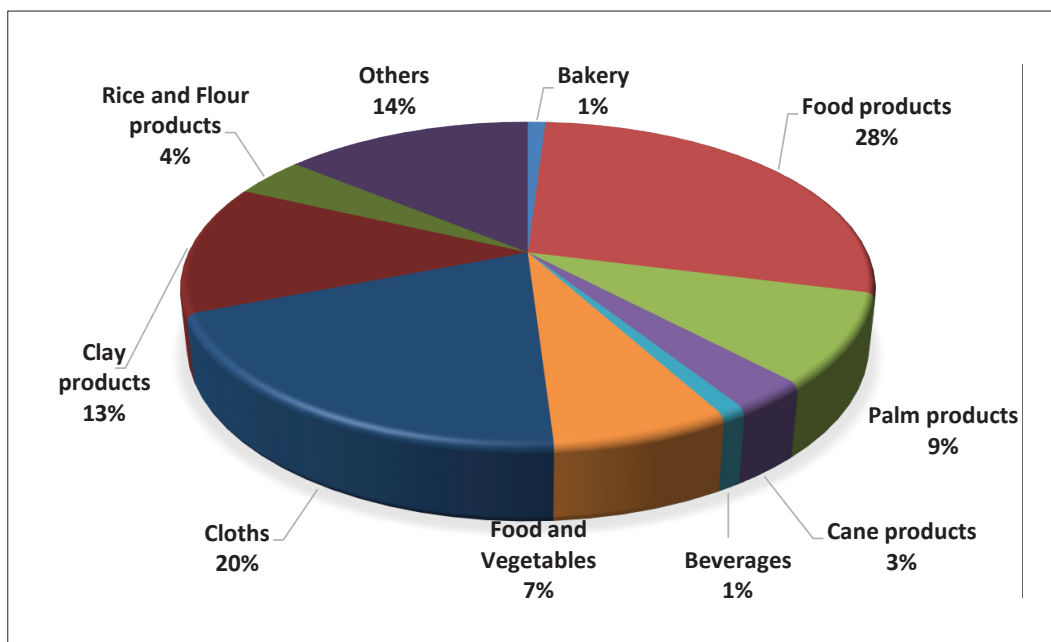


Figure 9: Types of MSMEs

According to the information, 28% of respondents were doing their MSME in the field of production of food. Then 20%, 13%, 9%, 7%, 4%, 3%, 1%, and 1% of respondents were categorized under cloths, clay products, palm products, cultivation of crops, rice and flour products, cane products, bakery, and beverage production sector respectively. Although there are many households involving MSMEs as their livelihood activities in this area this study is highlighting major MSME items, which are mostly affected during the lockdown. While the food products MSME is affected significantly much higher than the other business due to maintaining the social distance and supply chain. In addition to that, the government announced that there is no barrier to produce for bakery items that are why bakery enterprise did not affect significantly during the pandemic period. Interestingly, some entrepreneurs spent their time on handicraft production at home during the lockdown.

5.2 Problem Faced Index (PFI) in the MSMEs during COVID 19 pandemic period

4Ps and their factors were selected from secondary data collection techniques through government and non-government organizations related to MSMEs and previous studies related to MSMEs. According to the information obtained from NGOs, mentioned reduction of production, depletion of raw materials, price of raw materials increased, price of final products increased, impact on market place, impact on transportation, government regulations and impact on online business were major challenges due to COVID-19 in Batticaloa District Sri Lanka. Furthermore, Kirushanthi (2015) carried out to understand the main causes of the business failure of SMEs in Batticaloa district that mentioned above mentioned challenges. The challenges for the development of MSMEs are financial capital, infrastructure, employment opportunity, greater utilization of machinery, equipment and raw materials and intellectual and skill employees, sub-contracting with formal and informal sectors (Gamage, 2003). The main problems that small and medium enterprises encounter, especially during the start-up phase, deal with the lack of financial resources and also with administrative barriers in terms of bureaucracy (Kapurubandara and Lawson, 2006). The SMEs

in developing countries fall behind with adoption due to barriers, both internal and external, prominent and inherent in a developing country as cultural, infrastructure, political, social, and legal and regulatory Barriers. Interpretation of preliminary internal barriers: such as the lack of skills required and the lack of awareness of any return on investment (Kapurubandara & Lawson, 2006).

5.2.1 Problem Faced Index on Production

Based on PFI in production in Table 01, it was observed that reduction of production during pandemic ranked first followed by uncertainty, storage problem, depletion of raw materials, and maintenance of machinery. The product makes up the first element of the marketing mix and affects the other three elements of the mix due to its nature and attributes. The product can vary in terms of its attributes and features based on the dissimilarity of the target markets in terms of the variance of the needs and wants that make up the market components and the marketing environment (Mathieu, 2001). In the SME context, the sum of features and attributes of a product or service is the cornerstone for the customer's satisfaction and loyalty. To build a profitable relationship with customers, the enterprise must provide products of good quality and high performance which are consistent with the needs and wants of the customers in such a way as to generate customer satisfaction.

Impact on Production	The extent of the Problem					Index	Rank
	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Medium (2)	Disagree (1)	Strongly Disagree (0)		
Reduction of production	65 x 4	20 x 3	10 x 2	0 x 1	5 x 0	340	1
Uncertainty	58 x 4	18 x 3	10 x 2	9 x 1	5 x 0	315	2
Storage problem	40 x 4	38 x 3	17 x 2	0 x 1	5 x 0	308	3
Depletion of raw materials	38 x 4	27 x 3	10 x 2	20 x 1	5 x 0	273	4
Maintenance of Machinery	25 x 4	31 x 3	19 x 2	15 x 1	15 x 0	246	5

Table 1: Impact on production

5.2.2 Problem Faced Index on Price

Based on PFI in price in Table 02, it was observed that the Price of raw materials increased during pandemic ranked first followed by the price of final products increased. The price is the second element in the marketing mix concept. It is affected by the purchasing power of the customer and is considered to be the critical element in the buying decision. Price can be defined briefly as the amount the consumer must exchange to receive an offering (Singh, 2012). Various factors affect the pricing strategy of an organization, including the cost of materials, product differentiation, competition level, market share, and the customer's perceived value of the product (Davenport & Harris, 2007).

Impact on Price	The extent of the Problem					Index	Rank
	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Medium (2)	Disagree (1)	Strongly Disagree (0)		
Price of raw materials increased	50 x 4	31 x 3	14 x 2	5 x 1	0 x 0	326	1
Price of final products increased	42 x 4	33 x 3	10 x 2	8 x 1	7 x 0	295	2
Price of final products decreased	20 x 4	27 x 3	17 x 2	23 x 1	13 x 0	218	3

Table 2: Impact on Price

5.2.3 Problem Faced Index on Place

Based on PFI in place in Table 03, it was observed that Impact on the marketplace during pandemic ranked first followed by the impact on transportation, government regulations, and reduction of middlemen. The place can be defined as the mechanism through which goods and services are moved from the provider or manufacturer to the consumer (Goi, 2009). The place is one of the marketing mix elements and includes distribution channels, warehousing facilities, modes of transportation, location, assortment, convergence, logistics, and inventory control management (Singh, 2012). The distribution channels comprise all those activities that contribute to the delivery of the product or service to the customer. These channels help the organization to promote, sell, and distribute its goods to final buyers, such as resellers, physical distribution firms, marketing services agencies, and financial intermediaries (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). The implementation of marketing strategies does not depend on achieving production objectives, price-fixing, or promotion only. It is also associated with a successful distribution process that allows the organization to meet the availability goal of providing the product in the right place and at the right time.

Impact on Place	The extent of the Problem					Index	Rank
	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Medium (2)	Disagree (1)	Strongly Disagree (0)		
Impact on market place	58 x 4	27 x 3	10 x 2	5 x 1	0 x 0	338	1
Impact on transportation	50 x 4	31 x 3	14 x 2	5 x 1	5 x 0	326	2
Government regulations	42 x 4	35 x 3	13 x 2	6 x 1	4 x 0	305	3
Reduction of middle mans	37 x 4	27 x 3	16 x 2	12 x 1	8 x 0	273	4

Table 3: Impact on place

5.2.4 Problem Faced Index on Promotion

The main objective of the promotion process is to identify the firm and its products or services for the target market and to increase the level of purchasing. The brand establishment and brand name are based on the promotion process. Based on PFI in promotion in Table 04, it was observed that the Reduction of Customer communication and relationship during pandemic ranked first followed by the impact on online business, effects on the direct advertisement and impacts on value added products. Promotion is one

of the most powerful elements in the marketing mix. It means to communicate and persuade the target market by identifying the needs of the target segment to buy the company's products. The promotion concept includes all marketing activities used to inform, persuade, and remind the target market about a firm and its products or services, in such a way as to build a favorable image in the mind of the customer (Sidhanta and Chakrabarty, 2010). In the same context, Kotler and Armstrong (2012) defined promotion as human activities based on a communication process that can be directed via personal selling points or indirectly via advertising messages through the media.

Impact on Promotion	The extent of the Problem					Index	Rank
	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Medium (2)	Disagree (1)	Strongly Disagree (0)		
Reduction of Customer communication	58 x 4	27 x 3	12 x 2	3 x 1	0 x 0	340	1
Impact on online business	49 x 4	31 x 3	14 x 2	6 x 1	5 x 0	323	2
Effects on direct advertisement	41 x 4	40 x 3	10 x 2	4 x 1	5 x 0	308	3
Impacts on value-added products	36 x 4	27 x 3	23 x 2	9 x 1	7 x 0	280	4

Table 4: Impact on promotion

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study found that the Problem Faced Index (PFI) method with MSME with '4Ps' the reduction of production during pandemic ranked first. Because The effects on business continuity, labor force, revenues, and occupational health and safety have been, and continue to be, devastating. The uncertainty ranked second due to the complete lockdown led to various issues ranging from shrinkage of exports, cessation of production, non-availability of manpower, The uncertainty of consumption, and liquidity squeeze in the market as well. The storage problem ranked third because the entrepreneurs had a lack of storage during this lockdown. The depletion of raw materials recorded in fourth due to the somehow the entrepreneurs manage the raw material with low production. The maintenance of machinery laid in the last rank because the mostly rural workers are not that dependent on the types of machinery even though they did not utilize the machinery for the production during the lockdown. The 4P concept to measure the problem level in MSMEs sector impacts of COVID-19. The price formation mostly affected suddenly increased material input prices due to the curfew. It means that there is no movement from district to district. The impact of the places ranked the first market place, for example, daily and weekly market facilities. Moreover, there is no other exhibition and maintain the social distance that was difficult to make good rape with producers and consumers' satisfaction during the lockdown period. The impact of promotion was recorded in the first reduction of customer communication due to the lack of access to meet both producers and buyers directly. Most of them did not adopt social media for advertising.

This study recommended initiating several activities like; Relaxing conditionality and interest rate on loans of micro and small enterprises; Channeling funds through microcredit agencies rather than formal banking channel; Separate loan schemes for return migrants, women entrepreneurs, youth; Online platforms for

selling local level produces for urban dwellers should be promoted with the help of local level NGOs; Local level government representatives, NGOs, local youth can help to keep the supply chain of agricultural production operations while strengthening the link with urban consumers; Increase budgetary allocation in the social sector for education and skill development.

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How Many Jobs Can Be Done at Home? Evidence from Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Labour markets across the globe are affected by the drastic uncertainties emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic. With the implementation of lock-downs and the social distancing measures, labour markets are affected at an unprecedented level. The resulting slowdown in the economy has led to the loss of work hours and jobs. Some firms have overcome this problem by allowing workers to work from home. However, it is evident that not all workers are able to adapt to work-from-home practice. In the Sri Lankan context, implementing the work-from-home practice has directly affected the different occupational groups in the labour market, particularly due to not being able to adapt to this practice. With this background, this study mainly aims at identifying the most-affected and least-affected occupational groups with the implementation of the work-from-home practice in order to stress the importance of investigating the different ways of encouraging to facilitate this practice effectively. Results reveal that while some occupational groups manage to adapt to this practice, most of the occupational groups are affected adversely due to the inability or difficulties in adapting to this practice, and these segments of the labour markets are characterized by the relatively low level of educational attainment and income level, and mainly centred in rural areas. Approximately, 13 per cent of total employed persons who belong to different occupational groups are unable to adapt to this social distancing practice completely, and the share of jobs that can be done at home is relatively lower in a significant number of occupational groups. Thus, these findings emphasize the importance of identifying the ways in which firms can be encouraged to facilitate the work-from-home for the well-functioning of economic activities, where this practice can be adapted, and investigating an alternate means of supporting adversely-affected workers, where the nature of certain occupations is resistant to adapt to this practice.

Keywords: *COVID-19 Pandemic, Labour Market, Work-from-home practice, Vulnerable Occupational Groups*

1. INTRODUCTION

Amidst severe economic impacts triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, labour markets across the globe are facing continuous challenges and uncertainties. Affected countries implement stringent measures of social distancing to contain the spread of the virus, and this has been a decisive factor in determining the workers' activities at workplaces during the pandemic. In particular, these measures mostly associate

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with closures of workplaces or limiting the number of workers at workplaces, differentiating this from the usual practice of work-on-location. Thus, governments' social distancing containment measures result in encouraging the workers to adapt to the "Work-from-home" practice. However, a key concern for understanding the negative labour market impacts arising from the pandemic is whether workers can plausibly work from home (Saltiel, 2020). Therefore, the extent to which this practice can practically be followed is an important factor of determining the economic consequences of social distancing containment measures.

As revealed by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), approximately 68 per cent of the total workforce, including 81 per cent of employers, live in countries with recommended or required workplace closures³. With this ambiance, employers are encouraged to take necessary alternate measures and make contingency plans as responses to the arisen issues of working-on-location. As a result, companies/institutes of both private and public sectors are moving towards adapting to the work-from-home practice as an alternate working arrangement, where it is possible. Since this practice requires information and communications technology (ICT) for workers to fulfill the assigned job-related responsibilities while staying at home, the ability to adapt to this varies depending on the nature of the occupation – physical involvement is mandatory or distance working is possible. As such, ILO estimates uncover that only 18 per cent of workers have occupations that are suitable for work-from-home and reside in countries with the infrastructure to enable this practice. This implies that limited numbers of occupations are least-affected by the social distancing measures while the majority of occupations are prone to be vulnerable. Hence, it is worthwhile to investigate the ability of adapting to work-from-home practice by country-wise or regional-wise, thereby identifying the inherent factors of which encourage or discourage adapting to this practice.

1.1 Labour Market in Sri Lanka during the Pandemic

In the Sri Lankan context, the rigidities of the labour market and the nature of occupations can cause hardships to some groups of workers when adapting to work-from-home practice in the face of COVID 19 pandemic. While some were able to manage working from home, most workers were experiencing the reduction of working hours, lay-offs, and pay cuts during the COVID-19 lockdown – started in mid-March, 2020. As revealed by the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS, 2020), the unemployment rate increased from 4.7 per cent in the first quarter of 2019 to 5.7 per cent in the first quarter of 2020, coinciding with the start of imposing the movement restrictions. Meanwhile, the higher level of contribution to the informal sector employment - 57.8 per cent in 2019 (DCS, 2019), and a significant cohort of the working population who do not enjoy any form of social security can intensify the pertaining issues of the labour market in the event of loss of income caused by the pandemic. As per the estimates, 81.3 per cent of private sector employees and 57.3 per cent of own-account workers are employed in non-agriculture sector (Wimalaweera, 2020). Thus, these segments of the labour force are at risk of experiencing income/job losses due to restrictions in workers' movements and business operations imposed by the government.

In terms of labour laws of Sri Lanka, labour issues which are emerged due to the pandemic are not addressed by the current labour legislation since the possibility of a pandemic situation threatening the labour market was not foreseen when inking the laws, except in very few instances. Although health guidelines for the workplaces are specifically designed for controlling the spread of the virus, labour legislation does not

³ As of 29th April 2020

underpin the practices by enabling the workers to adhere to certain guidelines. For example, respective health authorities have identified that pregnant women are at risk during the pandemic, but they are not allowed to seek specific relief from the job or special paid-leave by the legislation. Moreover, adversely affected employees tend to implement pay-cuts due to reduced working hours and other restrictions in business operations. In particular, an employer is not in a position to seek relief to reduce salaries for employees who have not been given work due to reasons beyond his/ her control. In such cases, it is required for the employers to adhere to the provisions of the ‘Termination of Employees Act (1971)⁴’ in the situation where employees need to terminate employers due to the effects of the pandemic (Wimalaweera, 2020). Similarly, legal provisions have not been introduced for work-from-home practice by labour law in Sri Lanka as an effort in containing the spread of pandemics. However, with the national lockdown starting from mid-March 2020 due to the COVID 19, the government declared a work-from-home week initially for both public and private sectors and extended it further as a social distancing measure to prevent congregation of people. While this measure contains and controls the spread of the virus, it exacerbates the issues of labour market due to the inability of adapting to this practice in certain contexts.

In such a scenario, the labour market in Sri Lanka has been vulnerable to the pandemic itself as well as the government’s containment measures including ordering the adherence to the work-from-home practices for both public and private sectors workers. Therefore, facilitating better social distancing work-from-home practices is indispensable to mitigate the intensity of the adverse effects. With this backdrop, it is timely important to examine the extent to which work-from-home can be practiced as a better option, with the intention of formulating and implementing proper labour market policies for tackling the issues of this pandemic as well as similar blows in the future.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recently, the research interest has been directed to investigate the feasibility of working from home practices associated with social distancing measures, workers’ socio-economic characteristics, and its likely impact on the economy and the labour markets in different contexts with the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic.

2.1 Adapting to work-from-home practice and characteristics of workers

It is evident that the workers who can adapt to the work-from-home practice (least affected by the social distancing measures) and/or face difficulties in adapting to this practice (most affected by the social distancing measures) are characterized by certain socio-economic attributes – gender/education level/economic status, etc. Dingel & Neiman (2020) and Mongey & Weinberg (2020) have examined the shares of teleworkability considering task-content information in occupational dictionaries - O*NET surveys in the United States. Dingel & Neiman (2020) found that 37 per cent of U.S. jobs can plausibly be performed entirely at home and there are substantial differences across cities and industries in the country. In addition, a country-specific result indicates that countries with lower income levels are less likely to adapt to work-from-home practice resulting in a lower share of jobs that can be done at home. As revealed by other related studies, workers in low work-from-home occupations are less likely to have a college degree, or have employer-provided healthcare, more likely to be in the bottom half of the income distribution, and

⁴ Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provisions) Act, No.45 of 1971.

more likely to rent their homes, compared to workers in high work-from-home occupations. In contrast, highly educated and high-income workers are much more likely to shift to remote work, indicating that workers in low work-from-home occupations are more economically vulnerable (Bick et al., 2020; Mongey & Weinberg, 2020; Mongey et al., 2020).

A survey-based study in the U.S. revealed that the offshorability prevails mostly in the industries such as manufacturing, finance and insurance, information services, and professional and technical services, which are identified as production work and in office and administrative jobs. Workers who have attained a higher level of education are likely to hold relatively more offshorable jobs. However, differences in offshorability by demographic factors such as gender, race, age, and geographic region is negligible (Blinder & Krueger, 2013). Further, due to the lockdown associated with spread of COVID 19, the unemployment rate recorded a sharp rise among less-educated Asian African workers who are more adversely affected by the lockdown than any other racial group. Irrespective of gender aspect, less-educated Asian Americans are substantially more likely to lose employment than equally educated Whites and are not more likely to regain employment during the reopening months (Kim et al., 2020).

However, due to prevailing limitations of the applicability of the empirical studies based on the U.S. economy, Saltiel (2020) examines the share of jobs which can be done from home in developing countries, and the worker characteristics associated with such jobs. The findings reveal that the feasibility of working from home is positively correlated with high paying occupations while some groups of workers are vulnerable due to the prevailing restrictive factors such as educational attainment, formal employment status, and household wealth. Results indicate that a small share of workers in selected developing countries may feasibly carry out their jobs from home, ranging from 6% in Ghana to 23% in China. Similarly, the share of employment that can work from home in poor countries – nearly 20 per cent is lower than that of rich countries (nearly 40 per cent) mainly due to the high agricultural employment in poor countries, thereby the workers' occupational composition is not conducive to adapt to the work-from-home practice (Gottlieb et al., 2020)

2.2 Economic consequences of social distancing measures

Studies emphasize that introducing work-from-home practice affects the workers in different degrees depending on its adaptability, indicating that remote work is not an option for a large segment of the workforce. Consequently, social distancing measures – work-from-home practice can lead to contract in output through reduced working hours, especially is the situation where work-from-home practice is not accommodating properly. As such, studies have revealed the potential adverse impacts of such practices on the economy. It is found that six weeks of social distancing measures brings the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) down by 5.6 per cent in France. This contraction is resulted by a decrease of 3.4 per cent due to administrative closings and school closings. The social distancing measures have directly affected, especially in some sectors such as arts and leisure, hotel restaurants, mining and utilities. In addition to France, the annual GDP is estimated to be dropped on average by 6.6 per cent in European countries ranging from 4.3 per cent - Denmark to 9.2% - Bulgaria. These differences are partly explained by the sectoral composition, and partly by the propensity to telework in these countries (Barrot et al., 2020). Moreover, it is evident that the social distancing measures exacerbate inequality depending on the accessibility of the internet and using internet-powered electronic devices which is a requirement

for engaging in work-from-home practice. As such, presence of above-average high-speed internet in a particular region leads to an increase in the residents' ability for practicing self-distance in the U.S. and intensifies the difference between high-income and low-income regions, further creating a digital divide (Chiou & Tucker, 2020).

2.3 Effects on the labour market

Mobilities of occupations and demand/supply of certain occupations are subjected to be changed due to the economic shocks which have emerged from pandemics such as COVID 19. Examples include demand for certain occupations such as health care services are likely to increase in the face of the pandemic, thereby changing the mobility of the occupations. At the same time, the institutional social recognition and individuals' perception of such occupations can also be more optimistic, changing the status of these occupations, thereby creating a substantial attraction (supply) of individuals to these occupations (Kramer & Kramer, 2020). In a broader context, the impact on employment is asymmetric across countries depending on its severity. As such, a study based on selected European countries revealed that the countries that are being hardest hit by the pandemic itself (Spain, Italy, UK) are the countries more likely to suffer the worst employment implications of the confinement, because of their productive specialization and labour market institutions (Fana et al., 2020). Apparently, labour markets of these countries were more vulnerable due to the high unemployment and precarious work – temporary contracts, even before the pandemic indicating that the adverse impacts on the labour market are intensified by this pandemic.

In addition, a significant change in the labour markets triggered by pandemic is encouraging the employees to shift to the work-from-home practice. However, prevailing rigidities in the labour markets may encourage employees to stick to the work-on-location practice rather than work-from-home practice. As such, workers in different occupation categories are affected at different degrees, depending on its nature and status – low/high-income, low/high-skilled, extent to which physical involvement is required and ability to adapt to this practice. In particular, certain occupational groups have substantial experience in working from home due to its ability to adapt by the nature of the occupation (e.g, translators). In the meantime, some occupational groups of which workers had very little experience in working-from-home has been shifted to relevant arrangements of adhering to this new practice as a social distancing measure. Examples include teachers in primary education (Kramer and Karen, 2020) and tertiary education. In contrast, certain workers who belong to the occupational groups in which physical involvements are mandatory, are resistant to working-from-home (e.g. workers in forestry and fishery).

3. MOTIVATION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS / OBJECTIVES

It has been recognized that work-from-home practice is one of the most compelling alternatives for workers to involve in their job-related activities while complying with the governments' social distancing measures during the pandemic. Most of the affected countries – including Sri Lanka have encouraged both public and private sector working bodies to move towards this practice with the intention of containing and controlling the spread of the COVID-19. However, a key concern over this measure is to what extent this practice is adaptable and who are the least-affected/most-affected groups due to implementing this measure, thereby how it mitigates or exacerbates the labour market issues triggered by the pandemic. As such, exploring adaptability of work-from-home practice, particularly identifying the most-affected

occupational groups due to this social distancing measure in labour market of Sri Lanka is an important area of research. With this focus, our study is directed to answer the following research questions through its comprehensive analysis:

- Who are the most-affected occupational groups due to the implementation of work-from-home practice?
- What are the socio-economic characteristics associated with most-affected occupational groups due to the implementation of work-from-home practice?

With these research questions, this study mainly aims at identifying the occupational groups who can adapt to the work-from-home practice as a social distancing measure and investigating who are the most affected occupational groups by such social distancing containment measures, while exploring the socio-economic characteristics of such workers. Further, this would lead off to find different means in which firms can be encouraged to facilitate a work-from-home environment as an alternative for work-on-location practice in the face of the pandemic.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts the methodology which is used by Dingel and Neiman (2020) for estimating the shares of jobs that can be done at home. In Dingel and Neiman (2020) work, occupations are classified based on two Department of Labour's Occupational Information Network (O*NET) surveys. This O*NET database includes hundreds of standardized and occupation-specific descriptors on almost 1,000 occupations. Next, derived information is merged with the U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics (BLS) on the prevalence of each occupation. This indicates the occupation-level data on work activities by occupation. The degree to which work-from-home practice can be adopted is measured considering the work context and generalized work activities. The criteria for each measurement are given below.

Measures from work context: This captures physical and social factors that affect the nature of work, and considers frequency of using emails, involving in outdoor job-related activities, wearing common or specialized protective or safety equipment, dealing with physically aggressive people, spending time on walking and running, to minor burns, cuts, bites, or stings and exposing to diseases or infection.

Measures from generalized activities: This captures general types of job behaviors occurring on multiple jobs, and considers importance of performing general physical activities, handling and moving objects, controlling machines and processes [not computers nor vehicles], operating vehicles, mechanized devices, or equipment, performing for or working directly with the public, repairing and maintaining mechanical equipment, repairing and maintaining electronic equipment, inspecting equipment, structures, or materials.

For this study, we extract the data on O*NET-derived baseline with the U.S. occupation codes (International Classification of Occupations -2008 (ISCOs)), and merged it with Sri Lanka - Labour Force Survey (LFS) -2016 data considering Sri Lanka Standard Classification of Occupations SLSCO 2008 (DCS, Sri Lanka Standard Classification of Occupations, 2008), to obtain related estimations in the 4-digit level of ISCOs. The ability of adapting to the work-from-home practice varies between 0 and 1, where 0 indicates that this practice cannot be adapted completely while 1 indicates that this practice can be adapted completely. For each major and

sub-major occupational group available in the SLSCO 2008, this value is estimated and presented as a share of work-from-home (WFH) occupations. In total, the share is estimated for 40 sub-major occupational groups. Moreover, graphical representations and descriptive analysis is adopted for identifying and explaining the socio-economic characteristics of different occupational groups in the labour market.

5. RESULT ANALYSIS

Results show the share of jobs that can be done at home, by major occupational group and sub-major occupational group. As per the estimations, 372 occupations in the country are matched⁵. The adaptability of work-from-home practice, which is described by the share of jobs that can be done at home, is reported as an average value at the 2-digit level (see Table 1 and Table 2). As shown, least-affected occupational groups are indicated by the higher share while most-affected occupational groups are indicated by the lower share of jobs that can be done at home.

Code*	Occupation	Share of WFH occupations
1	Managers, Senior officials and Legislators	0.72
2	Professionals	0.69
4	Clerks and Clerical support workers	0.58
3	Technical and Associate Professionals	0.44
5	Services and sales workers	0.18
9	Elementary occupations	0.05
7	Craft and related trades workers	0.04
6	Skilled Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery workers	0.03
8	Plant and Machine operators and Assemblers	0.02

Table 4: Impact on promotion

Note: Codes are presented as per the SLSCO 2008

Source: Authors' estimations based on (Dingel and Neiman, 2020) teleworkable data for detailed mapped to labour force data 2016, Department of Census and Statistics

Code*	Occupation	Share of WFH occupations
25	Information and Communication Technology Professionals	1.00
23	Teaching Professionals	0.93
11	Chief Executives, Senior Officials and Legislators	0.84
35	Information and Communications Technology Operations Technicians, Broadcasting and Audiovisual Technicians	0.70
21	Science and Engineering Professionals	0.66
44	Other Clerical Support Workers	0.60

⁵ As per the LFS 2016, the total number of employed people was 7,947,683. Out of these, 6,048,283 (76.1 per cent) workers who were engaged in 372 matched occupations were assigned O*NET-derived baseline values.

26	Legal, Social and Cultural Professionals	0.57
43	Numerical and Material Recording Clerks	0.49
51	Personal Services Workers	0.23
73	Handicraft and Printing Workers	0.14
22	Health Professionals	0.08
82	Assemblers	0.00
92	Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery Labours	0.00

Table 2: Share of jobs that can be done at home, by occupation sub-major group (selected)

Note: Codes are presented as per the SLSCO 2008

Source: Authors' estimations based on (Dingel and Neiman, 2020) teleworkable data for detailed mapped to labour force data 2016, Department of Census and Statistics

As given in the above Table 2, some occupational groups such as information and communication technology professionals, teaching professionals, chief executives, senior officials and legislators can adapt to the work-from-home practice at a higher-level while, science and engineering professionals, other clerical support workers, legal, social and cultural professionals can adapt this practice to a certain extent. However, most occupations are affected adversely due to not being able to adapt completely or the difficulties in adapting to this practice – assemblers, agricultural, forestry and fishery labours (see Appendix Table 1).

On average, the share of work-from-home occupations is relatively higher in the occupations which require less outdoor involvements/general physical activities, interactivity, operating vehicles, machines/equipment, etc. (e.g. in major occupation categories: 1 - Managers, Senior Officials and Legislators, 2 – Professionals). To complement, sub-major groups of these occupation categories indicate relatively a higher share of working-from-home. In contrast, occupations that require a higher degree of physical effort, interactivity and outdoor involvements have a lesser level of working-from-home (e.g. in major occupation categories: 8 - Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers, 6 - Skilled Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery workers, 7 - Craft and Related Trades Workers). This pattern reveals that high-skilled occupations, which require a higher level of education, have a relatively higher degree of adaptability of work-from-home practice while it is lesser in low-skilled occupations in Sri Lanka, showing the consistency with the findings of the empirical studies conducted by Saltiel (2020) and Gottlieb et al (2020). Results reveal that most of the occupations are affected adversely due to not being able to adapt completely or the difficulties in adapting to work-from-home practice. This is represented by the low share of jobs that can be done at home as shown in the above tables. Approximately 13 per cent of the total employed persons in the country are in a situation where work-from-home practice cannot adapt completely.

5.1 Socio-economic characteristics

As revealed by the descriptive analysis, socio-economic characteristics are different between the occupation groups who can adapt to the work-from-home practice and occupation groups who are adversely affected by this government social distancing containment measure. As such, notable differences exist among such groups by gender, education level, income level, sector and province. Regardless of the adaptability of

work-from-home practice, male employees are larger than the female employees generally (see Appendix Figure 1). However, the shares of jobs that can be done at home vary across different occupational groups by gender.

The ability to adapt to work-from-home practice is comparatively higher among the occupational groups whose education level is higher. For example, a significant segment whose educational attainment is a degree and above involves in the occupations of which the share of jobs that can be done at home is comparatively higher (vary between shares 1.00 and 0.57) - such as teaching professionals, business and administration professionals, information and communications technology operations technicians, broadcasting and audiovisual technicians, chief executives, senior officials and legislators. In contrast, adaptability of work-from-home practice is lower among the occupational groups who attained a lower level of education; e.g. education below G.C.E. Ordinary Level. This includes the occupational groups such as food processing, woodworking, garment & other craft and related trades workers, sales workers, mobile plant operators and drivers (see Figure 1). Similarly, the occupational groups whose adaptability is higher belong to higher income levels compared with the occupational groups whose it is lower. This implies that the occupational groups whose the ability of adapting to the work-from-home practice is higher are characterized by belonging to the higher income levels while the adversely affected occupational groups due to the inability or the hardships in adapting to the work-from-home practice are significantly characterized by belonging to the low-income levels (see Figure 2).

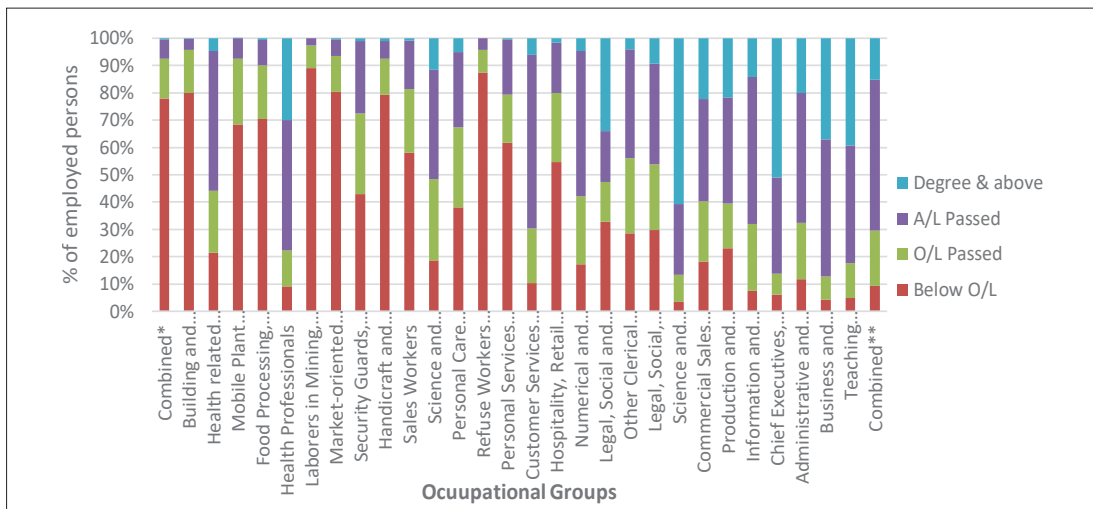


Figure 1: Occupational Groups, by Education Level

Note: Combined* indicates the occupational groups of which share of jobs can be done at home is 0 (mentioned in the Appendix Table 1) and Combined** indicates the occupational groups of which share of jobs can be done at home is 1 (mentioned in the Appendix Table 2)

Source: Authors' calculations based on Labour Force Survey (2016) data

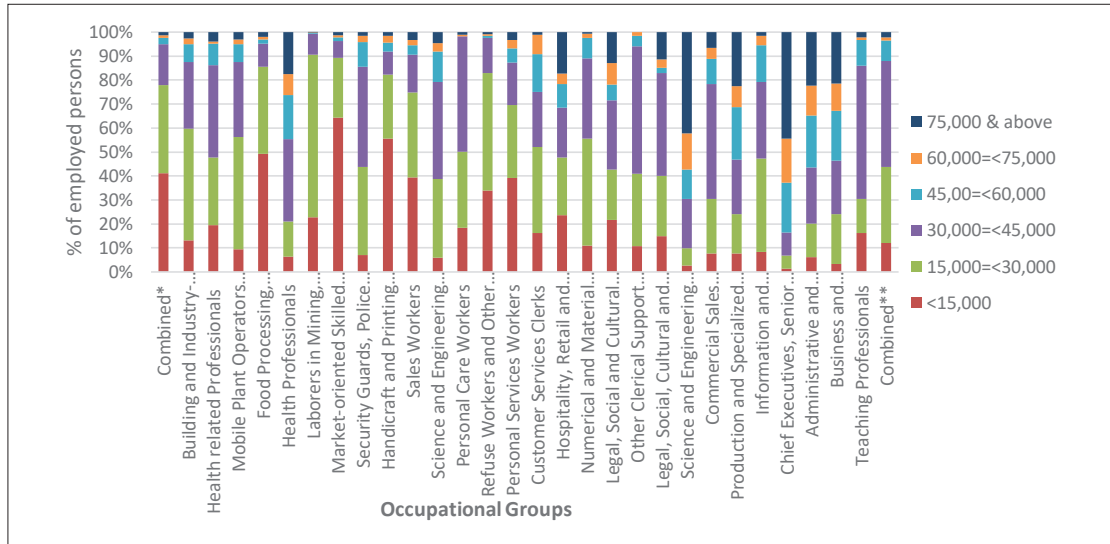


Figure 2: Occupational Groups, by Income Level

Note: Combined* indicates the occupational groups of which share of jobs can be done at home is 0 (mentioned in the Appendix Table 1) and Combined** indicates the occupational groups of which share of jobs can be done at home is 1 (mentioned in the Appendix Table 2)

Source: Authors' calculations based on Labour Force Survey (2016) data

In terms of the sector, occupational groups, whose adaptability of work-from-home practice is low, are mainly reside in rural areas – approximately 80 per cent of employees. Meanwhile, the share of employees in urban sector has increased with the increase in share of jobs can be done at home – approximately 40 per cent of employees who can adapt to the work-from-home practice. This implies that mostly affected employees mainly are centred in rural and estate areas showing that this social distancing practice is followed by certain socio-economic characteristics of workers (see Figure 3). Similarly, a larger share of employees who can adapted to this practice is centred in Western province where the most of employees involve in their economic activities (see Figure 4).

Thus, the degree of adaption to the work-from-home practice is attributed by the employees' socio-economic characteristics. Most-affected employees have a comparatively lower level of education, income and centred in rural sector and estate sector, while the occupational groups who can adapt to the work-from-home practice (least-affected) have relatively higher level of education, income and mostly centred in urban sector including Western province.

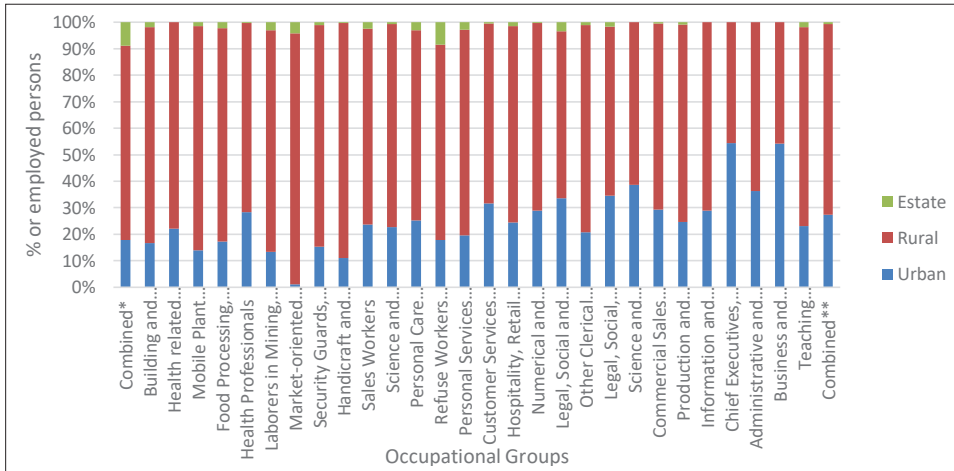


Figure 3: Occupational Groups, by Sector

Note: Combined* indicates the occupational groups of which share of jobs can be done at home is 0 (mentioned in the Appendix Table 1) and Combined** indicates the occupational groups of which share of jobs can be done at home is 1(mentioned in the Appendix Table 2)

Source: Authors’ calculations based on Labour Force Survey (2016) data

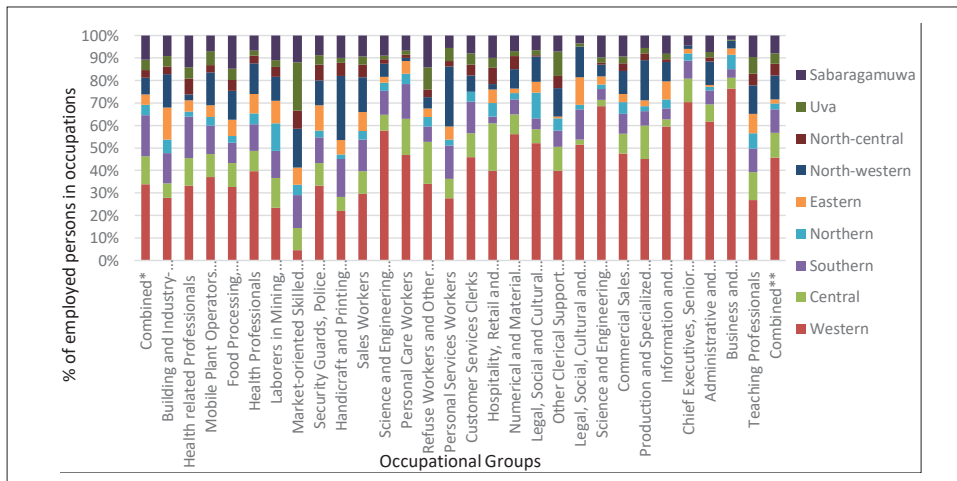


Figure 4: Occupational Groups, by Province

Note: Combined* indicates the occupational groups of which share of jobs can be done at home is 0 (mentioned in the Appendix Table 1) and Combined** indicates the occupational groups of which share of jobs can be done at home is 1(mentioned in the Appendix Table 2)

Source: Authors’ calculations based on Labour Force Survey (2016) data

Finally, these results indicate that the majority of employees belong to the occupations of which adaptability of work-from-home practice is relatively lower – most-affected segment is relatively larger. This prevailing condition in the labour market in the country therefore requires necessary changes to encourage to facilitate the work-from-home practice widely, where this practice can be adapted. Meanwhile, adversely-affected occupations require physical involvements, machine operations, interactivities, etc. to perform, so that moving towards alternate ways in supporting these workers in the face of pandemic is necessary.

6. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic and related lock-down and social distancing policies, as well as slowing down of the economy has deteriorated labour market conditions across the globe. Sri Lanka is also experiencing job losses, reduced work hours and increased unemployment. The government has advised a work-from-home practice to encourage firms to continue with business activities. However, not all firms are able to adapt to such an approach. First the nature of work performed by workers (whether it is ICT based or manual) affects the ability of a firm to adapt to a-work-from-home practice. Second, the availability of ICT infrastructure and IT literacy of the workers and the ability of the management of the firm to change into a work-from-home practice affect the success of this approach. In this study, adopting the methodology which is used by Dingel and Neiman (2020) and Labour Force Survey data, we tried to estimate which occupations are most likely to be affected by a work- from-home practice.

Our results show that the ability of adapting to work-from-home practice varies widely across occupational groups, income levels, sectors and provinces. Occupational groups such as information and communication technology professionals, general and keyboard clerks and teaching professionals will benefit most from a work from home approach. Approximately 2 per cent of workers in these occupations are able to work from home completely. Meanwhile, approximately 13 per cent of workers in different occupational groups such as agricultural, forestry and fishery labours, stationary plant and machine operators, cleaners and helpers, will be unable to work from home completely.

As indicated above, this study assessed the share of occupations/ industries that can benefit from a work-from-home practice. However, given infrastructure and management limitations, some of these firms may not be using a work from home approach. In order to improve economic activities, the government can find means of supporting these firms to adapt to work-from-home practices. Meanwhile, given the nature of employment, workers in some occupations will find it difficult to work from home. An alternate means of supporting these workers should be investigated.

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APPENDICES

Code*	Occupation	Share of WFH occupations
25	Information and Communication Technology Professionals	1.00
41	General and Keyboard Clerks	1.00
23	Teaching Professionals	0.93
24	Business and Administration Professionals	0.91
12	Administrative and Commercial Managers	0.88
11	Chief Executives, Senior Officials and Legislators	0.84
35	Information and Communications Technology Operations Technicians, Broadcasting and Audiovisual Technicians	0.70
13	Production and Specialized Services Managers	0.69
33	Commercial Sales Representatives, Government Social Benefits Officials	0.67
21	Science and Engineering Professionals	0.66
34	Legal, Social, Cultural and Related Associate Professionals	0.63
44	Other Clerical Support Workers	0.60
26	Legal, Social and Cultural Professionals	0.57
43	Numerical and Material Recording Clerks	0.49
14	Hospitality, Retail and Other Services Managers	0.45
42	Customer Services Clerks	0.24
51	Personal Services Workers	0.23
96	Refuse Workers and Other Elementary Workers	0.22
53	Personal Care Workers	0.21
52	Sales Workers	0.18
31	Science and Engineering related Professionals	0.18
73	Handicraft and Printing Workers	0.14
61	Market-oriented Skilled Agricultural Workers	0.10
54	Security Guards, Police Officers	0.10

22	Health Professionals	0.08
93	Laborers in Mining, Construction, Manufacturing and Transport	0.08
75	Food Processing, Woodworking, Garment & Other Craft and Related Trades Workers	0.07
83	Mobile Plant Operators and Drivers	0.06
32	Health related Professionals	0.03
71	Building and Industry-related workers	0.01
62	Market-oriented Trained Forestry, Fishery and Hunting Workers	0.00
63	Agricultural, Forestry, Fishery and Livestock Supervisors	0.00
72	Metal, Machinery and Related Trades Workers	0.00
74	Electrical and Electronic Industry Workers	0.00
81	Stationary Plant and Machine Operators	0.00
82	Assemblers	0.00
91	Cleaners and Helpers	0.00
92	Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery Labours	0.00
94	Food preparation Assistants	0.00
95	Street and Related Sales and Services Workers	0.00

Appendix Table 1: Share of jobs that can be done at home, by occupation sub-major group

Note: Codes are presented as per the SLSCO 2008

Source: Authors' estimations based on (Dingel and Neiman, 2020) teleworkable data for detailed mapped to labour force data 2016, Department of Census and Statistics



Appendix Figure 1: Occupational Groups, by Gender

Note: Combined* indicates the occupational groups of which share of jobs can be done at home is 0 (mentioned in the Appendix Table 1) and Combined** indicates the occupational groups of which share of jobs can be done at home is 1 (mentioned in the Appendix Table 2)

Source: Authors' calculations based on Labour Force Survey (2016) data

Human Resource Management Challenges during Covid-19 Pandemic: Comparative study of Public and Private Sector Organization in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Coronavirus disease, now officially named COVID-19, was declared a global health emergency by the World Health Organization in January 2020. Since then, it has spread all over the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. A pandemic, in WHO terms, is 'the worldwide spread of a disease.' It has spread to Sri Lanka too. At initially, Sri Lanka was in lockdown three months times from March 20 to May 2020. During the second wave of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka, since October 2020, more than 45,000 Sri Lankans have contracted the virus.

The first COVID-19 wave in Sri Lanka made lockdown the entire country. The lockdown is a crucial challenge to managing human resources (HR) in an organization. It created unpredictable situations in the entire public and private sector organizations. It was observed that most of the employees fear to come to the workplace but are willing to work from home. They fear to travel from their home to work, which creates challenges of business continuity, flexible work arrangements, employee communication, and employee concerns on workplace policies in this background. This research investigates the challenges faced by the public and private sector organizations in responding to COVID-19 lockdown. In particular, this study compares the Human Resource Management (HRM) challenges between Public and Private sector organizations in Sri Lanka during Covid 19 and recommends effective HRM practices to overcome the challenges for successful adaption and survival. The study adopted a questionnaire as a tool for data collection. The questionnaire consists of close-ended and open-ended questions. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). 220 Sri Lankan managerial level staff from public and private sector organizations responded via a google form. The study contributes to the existing literature and understands the challenges in a similar organizational situation in the future.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Human Resource Management, Public sector organization, Private sector organization, Lockdown*

1. INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease, now officially named COVID-19, was declared a global health emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO) in January 2020. Since then, it has spread all over the world. The WHO

declared a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. A pandemic, in WHO terms, is 'the worldwide spread of a disease.' It has spread to Sri Lanka too. Initially, the government of Sri Lanka decided to lockdown for three months times from March 20 to May 2020, covering the entire country. The second wave of COVID-19 hits Sri Lanka in October 2020, and the government is taking action to manage the outbreak. Managing Human Resources (HR) in an unpredictable situation is critical to any organization. It is a novel situation; no one knows how to manage it effectively. Hence, it is a crucial challenge for HR Managers. For example, organizations' significant HR challenges are performance appraisal, compensation, training, health and safety, human resource planning, and staff attendance. This study aims to learn the critical HR challenges in public and private sector organizations face and the differences in managing the challenges between these two sectors. The findings would contribute to the organization and HR Managers to manage HR in unpredictable situations. There are extensive studies available in managing HR in uncertain or unexpected conditions, but there are no studies to uncover the ways of managing HR during COVID-19.

1.1 Human Resource Management

Human Resource Management (HRM) is the strategic approach to the effective management of people in a company or organization such that they help their business gain a competitive advantage. It is designed to maximize employee performance in the service of an employer's strategic objectives (Johnason, 2009). HRM is primarily concerned with managing people within organizations, focusing on policies and systems (Collings and Wood, 2009). HR departments are responsible for overseeing employee-benefits design, employee recruitment, training, development, performance appraisal, and reward management (Paauwe and Boon, 2009).

Studies show that organizational leaders' perceptions of risk and their ability to deal with it directly influence an organization's plans for crisis preparation, prevention, and reactions (e.g., Pearson and Claire, 1998, as cited in Hutchins and Wang, 2008). HR can prepare their organizations to respond better to the complexities and ambiguities inherent in today's crisis events by taking a systematic and capability-driven approach. It helps shape a common goal and integrate efforts towards crisis management, create a crisis-prepared culture, and develop organizational readiness and capabilities to survive crises (HRMA 2014).

1.2 Role of Human Resource Management in Crisis Situations

HR's role in crisis management is to enhance preparedness among personnel and thus ensure effective disaster planning. By effectively managing the human side in crisis management, organizations are better positioned to deal with crises when they occur (Seif Athamneh, 2018).

Human resources professionals have a strategic role when a crisis strikes; and, their preparation reduces anxiety throughout the organization. So, the human resources department has probably the most critical role in an organization before, during, and after crises. Human resources management is to deploy and use the optimum number of personnel in relevant posts and times to enable the business to reach its goals. In this way, the motivation and job satisfaction of personnel will increase. Therefore, operational costs will decrease, and profitability will increase. All of these processes and activities may be collected under the umbrella of human resources management (Uyargil & Vd., 2010).

To effectively deal with a crisis, companies should be able to react correctly when such situations arise. Being prepared for a crisis is about building employees' capacity to tackle severe disasters by equipping them with the knowledge of making tough but essential decisions will safely steer the organization through the storm. Thus, the HR's role in crisis management is broad and varied and typically includes the functions of crisis communication and employee relations, policy and process management, employee skills and information tracking, Training and development, Employee service and benefits programs, talent and succession planning.

Also, HR teams must ensure that the strategic plan considers employees' health, safety, and welfare. Through collaboration with other organizational leaders, HR can assure that the human capital is taken care of in all crisis management and business continuity plans. Overall, HR's role is vitally essential to realizing a sound business strategy that will secure business success and, in some instances, the company's very survival. A re-evaluation of the following strategic priorities is necessary when a company changes and re-defines its HR functions:

Strategic HR Planning - The present uncertain business conditions and the environment has brought to the front the definition of long-term business strategies within the companies. The business strategies developed generally take different and alternative scenarios into account. It is based on various prospects of the future business environment, and the various company plans to adjust – each scenario presents a different labor demand and needs a different number of employees and skills; the problem of providing them cannot be solved overnight and requires able strategic HR planning. Therefore, it is a challenge that HR must plan how manpower will be sourced and securing and providing the manpower when these different scenarios become actual. HR can only fulfill this task if it actively takes part in strategic planning and in the subsequent decision-making that determines the business strategy. HR must also promptly receive the necessary data; analysing this information gives continuous feedback to strategy-making and development (Bianka, 2018).

To secure and increase employees' commitment - A company's long-term ability to survive and succeed is strongly influenced by the commitment of its employees. Nowadays some extra personal professional investment nearly always is necessary for survival, some additional engagement – that “extra mile” – from each and every employee in their everyday work. The Challenge: since the employees' commitment is significantly influenced by business decisions (either as firing, salary reductions, or changing the basis of performance evaluation), the role of HR is mainly limited to support management decisions and to stimulate their effects, to show the decisions' influence on the employees' commitment and to communicate the decisions (Bianka,2018).

Development of managerial skills - In the increased market competition induced by the crisis, it has become critically important that managers on different levels of the organization possess the necessary managerial skills so that they can execute their tasks well, whether it is performance management, problem-solving, motivating their staff, cooperating or communicating. Simultaneously, the general tightness of resources available for development limits the amount of training and development programs. For this reason, skill-development initiatives with specific goals must be stressed, rather than general programs applicable to all employees. Therefore, it is a challenge that the success of the workforce's development depends on the ability of HR to find and set up programs recognizing the most crucial development

priorities that support the business strategy. They determine who the managers and leaders are and what kind of skill-development programs are most critical to carrying out the business strategy as to where the highest return on such investments is expected (Bianka,2018).

Change Management - The crisis made one thing clear for the company managers. The only change is constant. The crisis causes several planned and unplanned changes within the company, which brings severe problems for many managers, who often expect HR to find solutions to the problems generated by the crisis and provide methods for the managers to overcome these difficulties. The Challenge: nowadays, the traditional methods and patterns are no longer enough to respond to the changes. Because of the continuous and often overlapping changes, HR has to endeavour instead to secure a framework in which change becomes part of its everyday life and is no longer a singular challenge. To reach this goal, a refinement of the company culture, the development of a way of thinking, and the manager's and employees' attitude and internal communication channels may also be necessary. To respond to the challenges, even the HR managers and their organizations themselves have to change, and they need to adapt to the new conditions provoked by the crisis (Bianka, 2018).

1.3 HRM Challenges during COVID-19

COVID-19 lockdown and unlocking lockdown challenges to managing HR in an organization. Some of the challenges are business continuity plans, manage flexible work arrangements, manage employee communication, and addressing employee concerns on workplace policies.

Organizations have to look after employee safety, travel restrictions, forming a response committee for prompt decision-making, split-working arrangements for specific functions and roles, differentiated measures to boost employee welfare. Top priorities include providing employees with protective equipment like masks, family care support like flexi-work for staff, and Employee Assistance Programs.

The sudden shift in work culture has brought new challenges for Human Resources such as keeping the employees engaged, providing the right communication channels and tools for remote work. Also, the pandemic has presented severe mental, physical, and financial complications to people everywhere. Organizations now have to rely more than ever on their Human Resource departments to ensure their workforce feels as safe as possible during this unprecedented and unpredictable time. Almost 7 in 10 HR leaders cite crisis management or business continuity planning as their top challenge during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Former president of CIPM Mr. Dhamika (2020) talked HRM Challenges of Post COVID-19, featuring a cross-section of Country representatives of APFHRM via webinar. He lists out several people challenges in the world of work in Sri Lanka. They are leave matters, pay issues, health, safety, additional employee cost, performance measurement, social stigma, remote work facilitation, cultural challenges, moral issues, and workers' wellbeing.

Due to COVID-19, A Hongkong and Taiwan-based technology organisation has offered paid leave for employees who have children below the age of 12. A financial services organisation has started sharing food coupon e-vouchers with employees to order their lunch at home. At the same time, other organizations have offered

employees free vitamin packs to focus on their health. In addition to the virus's physical threat, people's mental and emotional well-being is at risk.

Shurvo Sen (2020) conducted a study on COVID-19 impacts on the garment industry in Bangladesh, where they found that because of supply chain distribution, already a significant number of workers lost their jobs from garments.

Abhijit Majumdar (2020) conducted explanatory research on disclosing the myth of a socially sustainable supply chain for south Asian countries' clothing industry. He collected information based on semi-structured interviews from the experts. The researchers mentioned that COVID-19 disclosed the fragility of the supply chain in the clothing industry, such as many workers lost their jobs, and many companies are going to be bankrupted. ShurvoSen, Neel Antara, Susmita senn (2020) identified that the apparel workers are in the highest vulnerability due to Covid 19 in a study on the Bangladesh Industry.

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study compares the Human Resource Management challenges during COVID-19 between public and private sector organizations in Sri Lanka. Further, it identifies effective HRM practices to overcome the challenges for organizations' successful survival.

3. METHODOLOGY

The researcher adopted a questionnaire as a tool for data collection. The questionnaire consists of close-ended and open-ended questions. The questionnaire consists of 21 questions related to organization profile, COVID-19 situation, and Human Resource Management challenges. Convenience sampling technique was adopted to collect data. 220 Sri Lankan managerial level staff from public and private sector organizations responded questionnaire via a google form. One hundred twenty respondents from Public sector organizations and 100 respondents from private sector organizations responded to this study via a questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Respondents Profile

Respondents are from public and private sector organizations in Sri Lanka. In particular, 54.5% of the respondents are from the public sector, while 45.5% are from the private sector. As per the specialization areas, most of the respondents are from Academic (38%), Engineers (24%) others from corporate sectors.

4.2 HRM practices and challenges during COVID-19

4.2.1 Staff Attendance

Before COVID-19, the attendance practices in organizations were mostly based on the finger machine. However, it was not practical during the pandemic, and it was required to shift back to the manual

procedure. The government of Sri Lanka also accepted attendance practices whatever way employees prefer. Trade unions also did not like the fingerprinting system. They like manual attendance. It was a big challenge, especially for HR Managers in the public sector organization than the private sector. It is evident from the responses that attendance practices have changed in most of the organizations. 95.5% of the respondents agreed that they changed the attendance practices because of government-granted grace time and union pressure.

The organization adopted different attendance practices such as flexible time, rotation, work from home, change finger to manual, and finger to face recognition in Covid 19. The result shows that more than one method, and mostly they adopted work at home (90.9%), Flexible time (72.7%), and Rotation (59.1%). They have also adopted the following finger to manual 27.3% and finger to facial recognition (4.5%). Further, Public sector organization give paid leave for employees who are self-quarantine or lock down.

4.2.2 Salary to staff

The findings reveal that 54.5% of the respondents agreed that they were paid basic salary and allowances during the COVID-19 pandemic period of March, April, and May 2020. The remaining 31.8% of the respondents responded that they had been paid only a basic salary. In Sri Lanka, public sector organizations are paid salary and allowances during the above period. The Sri Lanka government instructed the organization not to deduct the loan settlement from their salary. Most of the private sectors paid the only salary without allowances, and some paid half salary.

4.2.3 Facilities for Healthy environment

The result of the analysis depicts that organizations in both sectors provided all three facilities such as Face Mask (86.4%), Handwash/Sanitizer (90.9%), and Social distance (95.5%). In Sri Lanka, the health department was very strict about fulfilling these basic requirements as a preconditions/request to reopening the organization. When they were reopening the organization, employees and customers agreed to adopt all health department suggestions. Later they were given up or not followed. After the second wave of COVID-19, the Government of Sri Lanka brought the government Gazette as rules to be followed by everyone. If anyone breaches it, they will be punished. Now everyone in the organization follows health instructions.

4.2.4 Trade Union and COVID-19

54.5% of the organizations had trade unions, while 45.5% do not have trade unions. Most of the Private sector organizations do not have trade unions. 59.1% responded that Trade unions supported Management. 27.1% of the respondents only did not provide their support. Other trade unions demanded the health and safety of the employees. Organizations responded to their request favorably to motivate staff availability. Respondents responded that unions focus on the overall well-being of the organization and employees (45.5%), the well-being of the employees (40.9%) in Public sector organizations, and the well-being of the organization (13.6%) in the private sector organization.

4.2.5 COVID-19 and its impact on HRM

COVID-19 impacts human resource management practices. These impacts were assessed in terms of respondents' perception of positive, negative, and no impact. 50% of the organization responded that positive impact on HR responded from private sector organization, but 40.9% responded that negative impact in public sector organization and 9.1% responded that COVID-19 did not impact Human Resource in both sectors. Managers from both sectors responded that COVID-19 impact HRM practices such as attendance, motivation, recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, compensation, health and safety, human resource planning, socialization, career guidance, employee relations, and employee behaviour.

4.2.6 Changes in HRM practices to response COVID-19

Respondents from both sectors (72.7%) had made changes in their HRM practices, and 27.3% responded that they had not made any changes. Private sector firms made more changes than public sector organizations. To respond to COVID-19, organizations have taken some steps such as termination of contract or temporary staff, halt allowances, overtime and benefits, and flexible working hours. Most of the organizations (45.5%) implemented halt allowance, overtime, and benefits.

4.2.7 Human Resource Management Challenges in COVID-19

There are challenges for managing human resources in their organization. They are a challenge for motivation (63.6%), the challenge of engagement (63.6%), challenge of dealing with COVID-19 fear (59.1%), the challenge of inadequate resources to work at home (50%), challenge of carrying out HR practices (45.5%), and getting things from employees (4.5%).

The remote workforce was a challenge during COVID-19. 54.5% responded that it was a challenge because they could not measure and supervise their performance in some duty and responsibility. The managers further stated that providing resources individually, getting the required output, providing appropriate technology, workers' capacity to work remotely, time constraints, difficulties in contact and communication, difficulties work at home, lack of infrastructure, and wages of wages in time were challenges to their organization.

Managers responded that their employees' complaining during COVID-19 workload was too high (36.4%), dissatisfaction with employees' health (45.5%), work-life balance (4.5%). Employees felt that fewer employees' attendance and flexi-time increase their workload. They fear their peers, subordinates, and special health conditions. No one looks after their children at home. There is no engagement with their children at home (no schools, tuition classes, sports, and engagement with a mobile phone, internet, and television). They fear that they may carry COVID-19 to their home from the workplace.

4.2.8 Overcome Human Resource Management challenges

Managers responded with these ideas: adopting best practices, well planning with a give and take the policy, educating employees on the situation to change, getting the cooperation of the staff, adhering to the policy guidelines and instructions issued by the Government of Sri Lanka, being flexible, and

accommodating new ways of working, being innovative and flexible, motivation, education and staying firm on unreasonable unions demands, innovative ideas, and cost-cutting to overcome HRM challenges during COVID-19.

5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

From that analysis, most of the organization used a finger scan machine for recording attendance before COVID -19. COVID-19 Pandemic staffs fear to access or touch their finger-on-finger machine because it may transmit COVID-19, and employees in some public sector do not like to adopt finger scanning for recording their attendance. Further, the study reveals that during COVID-19 and post COVID-19, attendance practices have changed in most public sector organisations than the private sector.

The analysis reveals that the organizations adopted different attendance practices such as flexible time, rotation, work from home, change finger to paper-based, and finger to face recognition due to COVID 19. The study inferred that public sector organizations paid a basic salary and allowances, and some private sector organisations paid a basic salary, some paid half salary only. Further, the study reveals a challenge to the private sector organizations paying salary to their employees.

The study found that Public and private sector organizations introduced all three necessary facilities to follow health instruction such as Face Mask, Handwash/sanitizer, and social distance. The public sector organizations have trade unions but less in the private sector. Most of the unions supported the new arrangements. They demanded the health and safety of their employees. The organization also responded to their demand to get things from employees in the COVID19 pandemic. Further, the trade unions focus on the organization's well-being, employees, and both at different levels.

Thus, COVID-19 makes a positive impact on Human Resource Management practices in private sector organizations. It changes their Human Resource Management practices in public and private sector organizations. The remote workforce was a challenge for public sector organizations than a private-sector organization. Motivation, engagement, COVID-19 fear of employees, inadequate resources to work at home, carrying out HR practices, getting things from employees are challenges in public sector organizations than in private sector organizations.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The result revealed challenges to HR managers' attendance, salary, motivation, performance measurement, etc. The organizations should adopt best practices to overcome HRM challenges in the COVID-19 pandemic or similar situation. Since it is a novel situation, Management develops a crisis preparedness plan that fully integrates human capital to manage the COVID-19 pandemic or crisis. The HR Department should conduct training or awareness programmes to educate employees to manage the crisis.

The management should cooperate with all the staff, accommodate new ways of working, be innovative and flexible, ensure employee safety and health, maintain regular communication with staff, equitable employee policies, collect employee feedback, reward and recognize employees, and establish a crisis management team.

7. CONCLUSION

The result contributes to the growing literature and understanding of the challenges in similar situations in the future. It may help to pre-plan the changes to make a successful overcome using effective or strategic HRM practices. The organization's success and survival in a similar situation depend on HRM practices.

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Handling employees' grievances during COVID-19 pandemic: Evidence from logistics service providers and factory warehouses in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Maintaining a positive relationship in the workplace in order to increase employee morale and organizational effectiveness has made managing employee grievances an essential organizational concern. "Grievance" can be explained as a feeling of dissatisfaction among workers regarding anything concerned within the company. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a daunting environment that may generate many grievances in work life. This pandemic may cause many disputes related to new organizational policies. This study focuses overall on the following group of employees; those who have to be physically present in their work despite the health risks associated with the pandemic, those who work remotely from home, and those who are on temporary leave. The study uses the case of logistics operations and warehouse operations to examine how organizations handle employee grievances during this period of the COVID 19 pandemic. The spread of COVID-19 persists as more locals purchase goods online. Logistical operations are required to work in extremely risky conditions and sometimes be excessively available for work or work extreme hours. Warehousing is regarded as one of the main logistical operations where businesses can deliver customized services. Expanding business operations to keep pace in a larger market is critical. The implementation of new policies and procedures might generate a stressful work life which results in many organizational disputes. This study mainly considers; what are common grievances that may arise, and their impact on the employees' financial and mental well-being, during COVID-19 in logistics-related employees in Sri-Lanka. Suggestions will be implemented according to the ACAS code of practices. Further, this study follows both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A non-probability sampling method with inferential statistical analysis has been used within the quantitative approach. The sample of the study is 42 logistics-related employees. Further to make suggestions for the identified grievances, Employees' ideas about the current grievance procedure were considered. The findings of this study reveal that implementing new policies for "organizational safety" does not cause employee grievances. However, their new work conditions during COVID-19 lead to many organizational disputes.

Keywords: COVID-19, Employee Grievances, Logistics, Warehousing, ACAS code of practice

1. INTRODUCTION

The necessity of maintaining a positive relationship in the workplace in order to increase employee morale and organizational effectiveness has made managing employee grievances an essential organizational concern. The term “grievance” can be explained as a feeling of dissatisfaction among workers regarding anything concerned within the company (Johnson, 2018). A grievance can be felt by any party (either Manager or employee) against the other party. Especially these days, the highly daunting environment that the COVID-19 pandemic has created may generate many grievances in work life. Managers have to step immediately through “new unknowns” and help their employees respond and dramatic changes in the workforce and in the social setting.

In brief, this pandemic may cause to occur many disputes related to new organizational policies (Both safety and work), financial and mental well-being of the human capital. Hence, employee grievances that may arise due to the COVID-19 pandemic can be considered as an emerging topic to evaluate. In this study, the case of logistics operations and warehouse operations are used to examine how organizations handle employee grievances during this period of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Considering the above background, the problem underpinning this study is what is the common grievances that may arise during COVID-19 in logistics related employees in Sri-Lanka. The research questions that guide this study are;

- 1) Does implement new policies for “organizational safety” cause more employee grievances?
- 2) While adjusting to the new work-life; has COVID-19 have impacted the financial & mental well-being of the employee?
- 3) Does the organization follow a mechanism to increase the morale of human capital within the organization?

Deriving from the above-mentioned research questions, the objectives of this research are as follows;

- Identify the commons disputes that may arise due to new organizational policies.
- Identify the impact of COVID-19 on the financial and mental well-being of employees.
- Evaluate the existing mechanisms and suggest solutions for those organizational disputes based on the ACAS Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures.

The methodology of this research is mainly quantitative. A questionnaire has been distributed as primary source of data collection method via google form among logistics-related employees working in both logistics service providing organizations and factory warehouses to gather information related to employee grievances and disputed that has arisen due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This study focuses overall on the following group of employees; *employees who have to be physically present in their workplace, employees who have to work remotely from home, and employees who are on temporary leave due to the pandemic situation.* The questionnaire of this study was developed using the guidelines of the ACAS Code of Practice.

This study may help Human Resource (HR) managers to identify that; COVID-19 pandemic has created novelty in the categorization of employee grievances. This paper has been structured in the following

way; The section that follows provide an overview of the literature on the topic which is followed by the methodology of the study. The data analysis is presented subsequently with the findings and discussions are provided. The paper concludes with the conclusions of the study and by providing future directions for research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

For the literature review various scientific journals, related literature, publications, the experience of the publishers as well as websites were considered. The objectives of this research are to identify what are the commons disputes that may arise due to new organizational policies, Identify the impact of COVID-19 towards the financial and mental well-being of the employee and Find out the existing mechanism and suggest solutions for those organizational disputes based on the ACAS Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures. First, it is necessary to have a better knowledge of “*Employee Grievances*” & “*ACAS code of practice*” itself before considering Logistics related grievances during COVID-19.

2.1 The term “Employee Grievances”

The grievance may be any authentic or imagined feeling of frustration and injustice encountered by an employee about his/her work and its existence, management policies and procedures. The employee must communicate it and notify the management and the company (Juneja, 2018). Grievances shall take the form of collective conflicts and if not resolved they would also reduce employee morality and productivity. Unattended complaints lead to dissatisfaction, unhappiness, low productivity, loss of job interest, absenteeism, etc. Briefly, grievance occurs when the desires of workers from the company are not met so they feel discontented and dissatisfied. This frustration has to be triggered by work problems and not by personal problems. Especially, during this COVID-19 pandemic, many unusual conflicts may occur over the physical and mental well-being of human resources linked to new organizational policies (both safety and work).

2.2 ACAS Code of Practices

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) is a Crown non-departmental public body of the Government of the United Kingdom. Its purpose is to improve organizations and working life through the promotion and facilitation of strong industrial relations practice. The goal is to foster and encourage good industrial relations by enhancing organizations and working life. This can be done through a variety of media channels such as arbitration or mediation, but the service is perhaps better known for its joint conciliation role – which settles conflicts between employee groups and Managers, often represented by trade unions. ACAS is an independent and neutral organization that does not assist a specific party but instead allows the parties to make adequate decisions in a dispute.

ACAS has carried out in a way that meets public health guidelines around social distancing and the closure or phased re-opening of certain workplaces, as a part of the coronavirus pandemic. Managers can be useful to understand their general policies about how they approach pandemic discipline and grievance procedures. Many organizations and employees will face additional pressures and there may be practical challenges to holding meetings. But procedures must still be taken forward without further delay.

2.3 Factors Affecting Employee Grievances During Covid-19

Grievances during Pandemic season may be different from the usual employee grievances. Since this study focus on the work condition of the employee; following grievances may arise according to the work condition;

- 1) *Employees who have to be physically present in their workplace:* Despite the health risks associated with COVID-19; some employees still have to present in their workplace. Those people are vulnerable to many health risks (due to the lack of safety actions is the organization) and many interpersonal challenges (such as; Staying away from the family, wearing uncomfortable PPE, Maintaining social distance with colleagues &, etc.). (Joel B Carnevale, 2020)
- 2) *Employees who have to work remotely from home:* Due to the failure to locate certain working spaces beyond the home itself (for example, cafés, libraries, co-working spaces) many employees face many difficulties to work from home. It will possibly also reduce the segmentation between work and the private environment which contributes to further affecting labor demands. (Chawla, 2020) Also, blurring the lines between work and family spheres sometimes it becomes uncomfortable the blending of work and home as well. Disputes such as distractions, bad eating habits, losing social interaction, and possible negative effects on career advancement may arise. While these work-family interconnections seem particularly demanding for some employees with children, single and childless workers are not immune to the negative consequences of such altered working conditions, as they may be at greatest risk of isolation, loneliness, a felt lack of purpose, and associated negative effects on well-being. (Joel B Carnevale, 2020)
- 3) *Employees who are on temporarily leave due to the pandemic situation.:* While employees have suffered many kinds of impacts resulting from the pandemic, one of the main consequences of COVID-19 has been the loss of jobs. This could be either temporary or permanent. Workers who are in lockdown areas are highly vulnerable to lose their job which leads many social risks including financial difficulties. Also Losing any job can be emotionally wracking.

2.4 Why Logistics related employees?

While the spread of COVID-19 persists as more locals purchase goods online. Employees in logistical operations are required to work in extremely risky conditions and sometimes be excessively available for work or work extreme hours. It is also important to focus on the implications that the nature of operations of logistical operations have on employees working in this sector admits a pandemic situation, it is also important to understand the measures taken by these organizations in addressing the health and wellbeing concerns of employees in this sector. It is seen that logistics operators are starting to take similar steps like those taken by grocery store chains and pharmacies. They are increasing the cleanliness of workplaces, trying to provide employees with as much PPE as possible, and providing more space between workers in the warehouses.

A warehouse is a facility in the supply chain that allows goods to be integrated and minimize transport costs, economize on manufacturing or inventory volume or offer additional value services to reduce response times. (Sander de Leeuw, 2013). Warehousing is also regarded as one of the main logistical operations where businesses can deliver customized services and achieve a competitive advantage with their consumers. To retain stability in the market, the output of the business should meet the changing demand.

But expanding business operations to keep pace in a larger market is critical; further, a lot of strategic approaches are needed for the process. As a result, most of the organizations in Sri Lanka outsource their logistical activities to logistics service providers and keep their factory warehouses to store their buffer stock. Warehouse operations are at the heart of a company and also it has a continuous process. And it needs undivided attention because, when warehouse operations are efficient, organizations keep costs low and customers are satisfied.

Other than warehousing; logistics activities such as exporting, importing, sort operations, and delivering are operating each and every day. Hence, some of the workers (ex: store assistants, drivers, sorting and packing helpers and etc.) cannot be transferred into remote working spaces. But during this COVID-19 adjusting new and current employees to drastically altered work conditions, such as shifting to remote work environments or implementing new workplace policies and procedures to limit human contact has become critical. This implementation of new policies and procedures might generate a stressful work life which results in many organizational disputes.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study follows both Qualitative and quantitative approaches. As the research strategy of this study non-probability sampling method with inferential statistics has been selected. To collect Primary data; a questionnaire has been distributed via google form among logistics-related employees working in both logistics service providing organizations and factory warehouses. The questionnaire of this study developed with the help of “Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures and Coronavirus (COVID-19): advice for Managers and employees”.

The constructive of “Organizational safety” Is measured based on “Reliability of the Organizational safety actions”, “Financial & Mental health” will be measured by the “Effectiveness of Organizational Work Policies & how well the employee treated with humanity”.

Further, Employee suggestions will be taken from the question No.3.7, 3.8, 4.6, 4.7 and 5.3. Those employees’ suggestions will be considered to suggest solutions for raised organizational disputes.

Simple inferential statistics were used to summarize the collected data regarding the respondent’s perspective towards the organizational grievance procedure due to the relevant working condition. With inferential statistics, collecting data from samples and make generalizations about the population. The sample size of the study is 40 logistics-related employees. Data were represented using descriptive statistics method and questions has been created representing “Organizational Safety”, “Financial and mental health” of the employee.

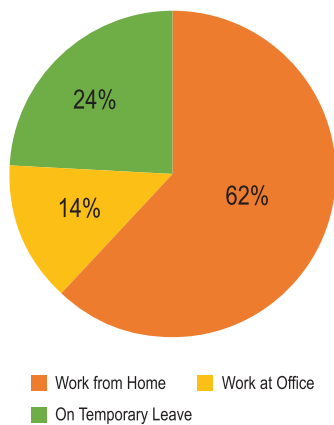
4. DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

This study adopts both inferential and descriptive statistics to analyze collected data such as graphical descriptions and statistical generalized commentary based on the results of 42 respondents. Areas focused for this study are employees those who working in 3rd Party Logistics service providers, Import/Export sector, Factory warehouses, Courier services, supply chain projects, Sorting centers, and Hubs. Out of these employees’ majority of the respondents are from Import/Export sector and Factory warehouses.

According to the respondents, Majority agreed that their organization;

- Consider enabling methods to keep physical distancing and implement appropriate controls for their settings and services.
- Support public health and the safety of the employees; the organization contact tracing efforts in the event that an individual test positive, operators maintain a record of the names and contact information of staff, clients, and visitors that have been to the workplace.
- Consider developing a rapid response plan that sets out a fast-action plan for operators when they have revealed to an individual who shows symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19.
- Organization promotes and facilitate frequent and proper hand hygiene for all staff and visitors, organization considers reducing staff movement within the facility by assigning specific lunchrooms, break rooms, or locker rooms to certain shifts/cohorts.
- Consider increasing the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting of; high traffic areas, common areas, washrooms, high-touch, and shared surfaces.
- Notify staff of the steps being taken to prevent the risk of transmission, and the importance of their roles in these measures.

Work life of the Respondents



But still nobody felt stressed or uncomfortable to work with COVID-19 safety measures at work. Based on the results proves so far implementing new policies for “organizational safety” **do not** cause for employee grievances.

Figure 1 shows that out of 42 respondents 62% respondents were working remotely from home (Work from home). But some of the employees stated that their organization does not provide necessary resources to work from home even though they have been allocated to work remotely. Further, 53.8% respondents agreed that they find difficulties with managing official work with household work due to the work from home condition.

Figure 1: Work Life Categorization of the Respondents

Even though the majority (53%) agreed that “most of the time” managers monitor the wellbeing of people who are working from home and put in place measures to support their mental and physical health and personal security. (All other respondents stated that their managers do not monitor the physical and mental wellbeing of the employees). Some organizations have arranged activities to reduce employee related stress during work from home. Such as; yoga sessions, employee competitions, supply chain got talent, weekly storytelling, sip and chat with directors, cardio sessions, podcast sessions, dramas and online game competitions. Which proves the third research question of the study.

As result of above mentioned issues; some of the respondents were unsatisfied being working from home and said it is unproductive. Further, they stated follow reasons; complicated to take solutions for organizational issues, lack of interaction with subordinates, distractions, isolating, lack of communication and coordination, hard to learn what employees do, hard to improve skills and hard to keep focused on work.

When considering the employees who are on temporary leave; majority of the respondents (60%) have stayed more than 4 weeks at home. Further 40% out of them are not getting at least their basic payment. This may lead to many financial problems within their households. But still, their management has promised that they would be able to work as usual once the critical situation is over.

Out of the 42 respondents 14% employees had to be physically presented at work. Even though the organization provide transportation; any organization does not provide an extra allowance to be present at work. Further, 33% of respondents stated that their organization ask to be present at office even though they have the ability to arrange work from home. Results proves that adjusting to the new work-life; during COVID-19 caused to generate many grievances among the employees.

According to the findings of this study; nobody felt stressed or uncomfortable to work with COVID-19 safety measures at work. Further, **implementing new policies for “organizational safety” is not a cause for employee grievances.** But the changing the work condition of the employees during COVID-19 lead to many organizational disputes. Such as;

- Not providing necessary resources to work from remote locations.
- Difficulties to manage official work with household work.
- Managers do not monitor the mental and physical wellbeing of people who are working from home.
- Lack of interaction with subordinates.
- Distractions
- Feelings of isolation
- Lack of communication and coordination.
- Learning curve issues.

With above mentioned disputes within the organization; respondents stated that their thoughts and opinions are not seen to count during work all the time. Also 14.3% respondents said that they are unable to report any kind of a disciplinary or grievance to management and unsatisfied with the current grievance handling procedure of the organization. Further, some of the employees have stayed more than 4 weeks at home unemployed and some of them don't get at least their basic salary. These reasons may **affect the financial and emotional well-being of the employees.**

5. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL DISPUTES

Human capital is the life-blood of any organization. Even though the most of the organizations, found to be technology driven, yet human resources are needed to run the technology. They are the most essential and dynamic resources of any organization. The biggest challenge that organizations are facing today is not only managing these resources but also maintaining them. Securing and retaining skilled employees plays an important role for any organization, because employees' knowledge and skills are central to companies' ability to be economically competitive. Besides, continuously satisfying the employees is another challenge that the managers are facing today; specially during this pandemic. According to the findings of this study many disputes has been experienced by the employees who are working from home temporary on leave.

ACAS has introduced their latest advices for managers and employees during COVID-19 pandemic (ACAS, 2020). According to that;

During work from home: Managers and employees should be practical, flexible and sensitive to each other's situation when working from home because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

When making decisions about working from home, it's important that managers and employees communicate regularly. For example, to discuss:

- Which roles can and cannot be done from home.
- Who may or may not want to work from home.
- Any concerns and how best to handle them.

This can also help make sure that decisions about working from home are fair and will avoid performing duties that has not mentioned in the job description.

Payments

An employee's pay and other terms and conditions of their employment stay the same, apart from having to work from home on a temporary basis. Employees working from home should be covered by the law on working hours. Managers should talk to their management about covering any extra costs employees might have when working from home.

These homeworking expenses include:

- Equipment, services or supplies you provide to employees who work from home (for example computers, office furniture, internet access, pens and paper)
- Additional household expenses, such as gas or electricity charges, for employees who need to work from home.

Equipment and Technology

It's important for employees to have the right equipment and technology needed to work from home effectively. This can also help avoid extra stress.

Things Management and employees should agree on include:

- What's needed to do the job, for example a reliable and secure internet connection?
- Who will provide or cover the costs of equipment and repairs?
- Technical support for setting up any new equipment or technology, including any training.

Managers should have clear policies around work equipment and technology, including:

- How to report any issues and to whom? (for example the IT team)
- How they will monitor use and handle information?
- Rules around data protection and cyber security
- What to do if a work device is lost or stolen?

Managers should regularly check with employees to assess how technology and equipment is working, and make any improvements. For example, checking:

- IT systems are handling the number of staff working remotely.
- The level of IT support needed for homeworkers.
- Any extra equipment that might be needed from time to time, for example headsets or stationery.

Establish a Homeworking Policy

Having a homeworking policy helps everyone to know:

- How people will be set up to work from home, including how the Manager will carry out risk assessments.
- Who will provide and pay for equipment.
- How homeworkers will be managed.
- How things like expenses, tax and information security are handled.

To run Work from home condition smoothly, The management should;

- I. *Build trust between staff who work from home and their manager:* This can be a challenge for managers who prefer to have employees in sight and supervise face-to-face so they can actually see if employees are having difficulties, working too much or not enough. Such managers can question whether staff who cannot be seen are committed and productive. Concerns of this nature can be legitimate and may need investigating, but an entrenched attitude of this nature can be a challenge to constructive business change.
- II. *Agreeing how work performance will be supervised and measured:* The manager should make sure the homeworker, those they cooperate and liaise with and report to all fully understand:
 - What is expected of them in their roles
 - How they are expected to work together.

It is also advisable for a line manager to monitor homeworkers to make sure they do not over-work. A manager who recognizes that a homeworker is over-working should have a quiet word with them as a first step towards getting them back on the right course, so they take breaks and do not work excessive hours. It may impact the mental and physical health of the employee.

If a homeworker is not performing as they should; Performance management of staff who work from home should be consistent with that of office staff, so it would be advisable to focus all assessments on work produced and whether or not objectives have been met.

If a homeworker is not performing as they should: If a manager has concerns, they should have a quiet word first as this may clear up misunderstandings or help them understand the problem. The manager can then provide support if necessary. But, if the homeworker's performance does not improve, the manager may need to act further in line with the organization's disciplinary or capability policies.

- III. *Communicating effectively:* Before any homeworking arrangement is approved, a manager should explain to the prospective homeworker how information, ideas and feedback will be shared with managers and colleagues. This might be through email, telephone, video conferencing, regular and planned face-to-face meetings, or a blend of these.

In practice, a manager will need a system for keeping in touch with all staff who work from home in similar roles. Otherwise, running the organization could become overly complicated and, as a result, ineffective. Regular face-to-face meetings can help employees overcome any feelings of isolation and keep in touch with the rest of the business. Managers could expect homeworkers' attendance at these regular meetings and they should only be excused if the manager gives permission for business reasons or because of approved absence for personal reasons.

- IV. *Training:* It would be helpful for both staff who work from home and their managers to be trained in what is expected of them in their roles, and for each to understand the other's perspective, particularly regarding supervision and reviewing job performance.

Although some homeworkers might not want to go for promotion because it might mean spending more time at the organization's main base, the manager should ensure homeworkers generally are not disadvantaged.

Examples of encouragement might include offering time with a mentor, providing training to help them develop, and ensuring they are considered for key projects and opportunities for promotion in line with office colleagues.

- V. *Arranging Activities:* Arranging activities to reduce employee related stress during work from home. Such as; yoga sessions, employee competitions, supply chain got talent, weekly storytelling, sip and chat with directors, Tik-Tok competitions, cardio sessions, podcast sessions, dramas and online game competitions.

On Temporary Leave: If someone's on temporary leave ('furlough'), they can still;

- Raise a grievance.
- Take part in a disciplinary or grievance investigation or hearing.

The government can implement a Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme for those cannot maintain the workforce because their operations have been affected by coronavirus (COVID-19), so which let managers to furlough employees and apply for a grant to cover a portion of their usual monthly wage costs where record them as being on furlough.

Managers should;

- Make sure that the agreement is consistent with employment, equality and discrimination laws.
- Keep a written record of the agreement.
- Keep records of the number of days the employees work they are furloughed.

6. CONCLUSION

The pandemic of Covid-19 is not simply a short-term epidemic. It has long-term impacts on the working of people. They are the most essential and dynamic resources of any organization. Managing these resources and also maintaining them is the biggest challenge that organizations are facing nowadays. The findings of this study reveal that implementing new policies for “organizational safety” do not cause employee grievances. But their work life during COVID-19 lead to many organizational disputes. Since work from home condition is new to Sri Lanka, there are no regulations, guidelines or mechanisms for solving these disputes. Further, the outcome of this may help to identify that; COVID-19 pandemic has created novelty in categorization of employee grievances. The suggested solutions based on ACAS code of practice may help organizations to retain skillful employees who are having trouble with their working conditions.

The main aim of the study was to find out what are the emerging grievances that may arise among logistics-related employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. First, the suggestions introduced for the findings of this research are mainly based on the ACAS code of practices. There might be other laws or practices that may provide solutions for employee grievances (ex: OSHA). Secondly, this research is limited only to the logistics industry; future researchers can focus on other industries that are required to work in risky conditions.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Sir/Madam,

I'm Dishanthi Kahaduwa, a final year undergraduate in the Faculty of Management Social Sciences and Humanities, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University. I'm collecting a dataset regarding the "Handling employees' grievances during COVID-19 pandemic; Evidence from logistics service providers and factory warehouses in Sri Lanka." for developing a research project.

If you wish to participate in, please add your response for the following questions and statements provided herewith. Your responses are completely anonymous. I recognize the value of your time and gratefully appreciate your efforts in completing this questionnaire to assist me in my educational endeavors.

Thank you!

1) GENERAL QUESTIONS

1.1 Personal Questions

1. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
2. Age Category
 - a. 18 - 25
 - b. 26 - 40
 - c. 41 - 55
 - d. More than 55
3. Marital Status
 - a. Married
 - b. Unmarried
4. Number of Children
 - a. 0
 - b. 1-3
 - c. More than 3

1.2 Work Related Questions

1. Work category
 - a. Managerial
 - b. Non-managerial
2. Area of work
 - a. Third Party logistics providers (3PL)
 - b. Courier Service/ Online Shopping Delivery service
 - c. Factory Warehouse (Ex: Apparel, FMCG & etc.)

3. Years of Experience
 - a. 0 - 1 years
 - b. 1 - 5 years
 - c. 5 - 10 years
 - d. More Than 10 Years
4. Mode of coming to the work
 - a. By public transport
 - b. By own vehicle
 - c. Using staff service
 - d. Other:
5. Distance from home to office
 - a. 0 - 10 km
 - b. 10 - 25 km
 - c. 25 - 50 km
 - d. More than 50 km
6. During work, does your opinion seems to count?
 - a. All the time.
 - b. Most of the time.
 - c. Sometimes.
 - d. Rarely.
7. Have you ever asked to perform a duty that is not in the given job description?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
8. Do you have a good relationship with immediate supervisor?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
9. Have your organization arranged flexible working time?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
10. Does your immediate supervisor treat all grievances as important?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

2) Organizational Safety Actions

1. Notify staff of the steps being taken to prevent the risk of transmission, and the importance of their roles in these measures. (Ex: COVID-19 signage are posted in highly visible locations.)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. To support public health and the safety of the employees; the organization contact tracing efforts in the event that an individual tests positive, operators maintain a record of the names and contact information of staff, clients and visitors that have been to the warehouse (visitors include anyone coming to the facility who does not regularly work there, such as delivery persons, repair technicians, and social visitors).
 - a. Yes
 - b. Most of the time
 - c. No

3. Does your organization consider following methods for safety of the employees?

	Yes	No
I. Enabling methods to keep physical distancing and implement appropriate controls for their settings and services?		
II. Developing a rapid response plan that sets out a fast-action plan for operators when they have revealed to an individual who shows symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19.		
III. To reduce staff movement within the facility by assigning specific lunchrooms, break rooms, or locker rooms to certain shifts/cohorts.		
IV. To increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting of; high traffic areas, common areas, washrooms, high-touch and shared surfaces.		
V. Organization should promote and facilitate frequent and proper hand hygiene for all staff and visitors. (Arranging soap or alcohol-based hand sanitizer)		
VI. Keep departmental risk assessments under review to ensure that a safe place of work is maintained.		

4. Do you believe that your organization follows and obey the guidelines given by the Government?

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

5. During this COVID-19 pandemic have you been asked to Work from Home?

- a. Yes
- b. No

3) Work from Home

3.1 Does your organization provide necessary resources to you to Work from Home? (Ex: Laptop, Internet connection & etc.)

- a. Yes
- b. No

3.2 Does your organization provide enhanced IT support & arrangements help homeworkers to stay connected to the rest of the workforce as appropriate?

- a. Yes
- b. No

3.3 Do you find any difficulties with managing official work with household works?

- a. All the time
- b. Most of the times
- c. Sometimes
- d. Rarely
- e. Not at All

3.4 Does managers in your organization monitor the wellbeing of people who are working from home and put in place measures to support their mental and physical health and personal security?

- a. All the time.

- b. Most of the time
- c. Sometimes
- d. Rarely
- e. Not at all.

3.5 Does your organization arrange video meetings whenever needed?

- a. Yes
- b. No

3.7 Are you satisfied being Work from Home and do you believe it is productive?

- a. Yes
- b. No

IF “NO”; What are the problems that you are facing during Work from home?

.....

.....

3.8 Have your organization arranged any activities to reduce your stress during Work from Home?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If “YES”;

.....

4) Open Work Place

4.1 Designation:

4.2 Does your organization provide transport?

- a. Yes
- b. No

4.3 Does your organization provide Extra allowance to you to come to the office?

- a. Yes
- b. No

4.4 Are you involving with activates such as In-bounding, Picking, Packing, Sorting, Labeling, Storing, out-bounding or delivering Packages or goods?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes, does your organization provide necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

- a. Yes
- b. No

4.5 Do you feel that your work place is safe?

- a. Yes
- b. No

4.6 Do you feel stressful or uncomfortable to work with COVID-19 safety Measures at work?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If “YES”; Why?

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.....
.....

- 4.6 Do They ask you to be presented to the work even though they have the ability to arrange Work from Home facilities?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

If yes, Why?

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.....

5) Organizational Grievance Handling Procedure

- 5.1 Are you able to report any kind of a disciplinary or grievance hearing to management?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

If yes; Does, your immediate supervisor has taken actions to solve it?

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.....

If no, how did your immediate supervisor respond?

.....
.....

- 5.2 Are you satisfy with the current grievance handling procedure of your organization?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

5.3 Suggestions to improve it better;

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SOCIO ECONOMIC IMPACT ON DIFFERENT LABOUR MARKET DURING COVID-19 PANADEMIC: A CASE STUDY OF CONTRACT LABOURS

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has already infected almost 148 countries in the world and the crisis has already transformed into socio economic impact on labor market in Sri Lanka. Social distancing, self-isolation and travel restrictions have led to a reduced workforce across all economic sectors and caused many jobs to be lost. COVID-19 has affected businesses, communities and organizations globally affecting the financial markets and the global economy. Sri Lankan labor market has main three categories including public sector, private sector and entrepreneurs. In response to this global outbreak, the effort of this research is to identify socio-economic and health impact of COVID-19 on labor market and give suggestions to overcome issues. Total numbers of 103 labors were selected from Kahathuduwa North GN Division using convenience sampling method. Primary data were collected by using structure questionnaire .Secondary data were collected by using published scientific articles and conference papers. Descriptive methods of analysis were followed to analyze the data. The majority of labors were belonged to (38%) 46-60 years old and most of the labors age belonged to 31-60 age range. And also most of the labors are males (55%) and 45 % are female labors. Results indicate that, according to the total marks, the sample of respondents had economic, social and health safety issues respectively. 29% of the respondents lost their job while 49% of labors had their full salary and 22 % of labors had salary deduction. Labors showed good knowledge and high demand for health and safety needs. Government authorities, bankers, researches and religious leaders have to make proper system of loan and deposits for labors to face pandemic situations and researches have to do innovations for keep good health and safety at workplace, religious leaders and psychologies can arrange programs to keep good mental health of labors at work place after Covid 19 pandemic Sri Lankan labor market.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Health and safety, Socioeconomic impact*

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has already infected almost 148 countries in the world and the crisis has already transformed into a socioeconomic and health issues on labor market shock. Social distancing, self-isolation and travel restrictions during lockdown have led to a reduced workforce across all economic sectors and caused many jobs to be lost. This case most of labors faced economic, social and health

problems in many ways. COVID-19 has affected businesses, communities and organizations globally affecting the financial markets and the global economy. Sri Lankan labor market has main three categories including public sector, private sector and entrepreneurs. Lockdown restrictions significantly reduced the production of goods from factories, while quarantine and self-isolation policies reduced consumption, demand and utilization of products and services (Tanne et al, 2020)

COVID-19 has had an impact on social impact whereby labors had to work from home or lived with family without go to work outside. In Dubai, 13,900 people have signed a petition to decrease independent school fees by 30% as parents struggle to source these funds amidst recent pay cuts reaching as high as 50%, and high costs of living. Furthermore, parents are being asked to provide schools with confidential information such as bank statements and profit and loss company statements (Yanne, 2020). When consider health sector labors most of them are unable to work remotely, strategies including the early deployment of viral testing for asymptomatic and/or frontline healthcare staff is imperative (Tanne et al,2020)

The decreased demand for tourism, exports, imports and migrant workers coupled with loss of livelihoods will severely affect the external and internal sectors and the labour market of Sri Lanka. This scenario will result in laying off workers due to closing of business, leading to unprecedented levels of unemployment. Social and physical distancing and continued curfew for several months has restricted the income earning opportunities of the daily wage workers and own account workers too. It is needed to be mindful that with continued physical distancing measures in place, revival of total employment will not take place in the immediate future. Similarly, the loss of income earning opportunities for almost two months have led to the closure of a significant percentage of small and medium scale enterprises.

This research study is suggested that it is useful to think about new saving systems, loan schemes with innovations. At the individual level, research on the adoption of new saving methods is very important to face the economic crisis on pandemic situations. Because lot of labors in Sri Lankan labor market doing day to day jobs. They never tend to save money for tomorrow. Then they cannot survive on “curfew” situations. For individuals and society there is an urgent need for research clarifying when and why labors need to adopt new saving methods. Not only the employee, but also employers has to find new innovations on savings to survive on pandemic situations and to protect their employees. It is urgent to find main social problems in pandemic situations. Because social problems impact on different labor market in a different way. While some labors can go to buy their needs from village shops and sales lorries, some labors cannot adopt to it. Because Sri Lankan labors having different educational, social, economic background. Therefore, in pandemic situations lot of labor had social problems. Therefore, it is needed to find the best way to sell daily needs to different labors. Also, it needs to establish new methods and precautions to protect laborers' health and safety in the workplace.

The present study is to explore the impact of Covid 19 on different (public sector labor, private sector laborers and entrepreneurs) labor market during Covid 19 pandemic. In response to this global outbreak, the effort of this research is to identify socio-economic and health impact of COVID-19 on labor market and make suggestions to overcome issues.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Labour Market of Sri Lanka

Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) indicate that in the 4th quarter of 2019, the economically active population was at 8.6 million, with 35.5 % females and 64.5 % males. The segregation of employment in major sectors indicates 46% of employment in services sector, with 37% in industries and 27% in agriculture. Services sector includes 13 out of 21 key occupational clusters including the wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles, transportation and storage, accommodation and food services activities, education, public administration and defense. Manufacturing and construction are included in the industries sector.

Further, the private sector employs almost 3.5 million people whilst own account workers amount to 2.7 million. It is noteworthy to mention that 81.3 % of the private sector employees and 57.3 % of own account workers are employed in non- agriculture sector. The minimum economic activities carried out since Mid-March to date have impacted all stakeholders of the labour market.

The estimates from the U.S. Census Small Business Pulse Survey indicate that roughly 50 percent of businesses report having a large negative effect from the COVID-19 pandemic and that only 15-20 percent of businesses have enough cash on hand to cover 3 months of operations (U.S. Census Bureau 2020; Bohn, Mejia and Lafortune 2020). Bartik et al. (2020) conducted a survey in late March of nearly 6,000 small businesses that were members of the Alignable business network. They find that 43 percent of businesses are temporarily closed, large reductions in employees, and the majority of businesses have less than one month of cash on hand. The Stanford Latino Entrepreneurship Initiative (2020) surveyed 224 high-revenue Latinx-owned businesses and found that 86% of respondents reported immediate negative effects such as delayed projects and closure from the pandemic.

2.2 Sri Lanka and Covid 19

All over the world covid 19 has affected most of the economic activities. Supply chains of food and other essential and non-essential things have been disrupted and Sri Lankan entire economies are collapsing. Many countries have locked down their economies to control the spread of COVID 19 pandemic and save lives. Simultaneously, the economies will be crippled and to recover, it seems that Sri Lankan economy will take many more months if not years. Sri Lanka has been able to contain and control the 'first wave' of the pandemic successfully. Yet, these same measures have disrupted the economic activities in the country, and obstructed the earning opportunities of the masses. The steps taken by the government to re-start agriculture sector including tea, fisheries, coconut, paddy, turmeric and rubber while protecting the lives from health point of view are commendable and have had significant impact on production, less import, employment, and livelihoods in that sector to a greater extent (Wimalaweera,2020)

However, services and industrial sectors have almost become a stand still. Garments and factories highly impacted by import and export barriers. No exports except tea and health related products are taking place owing to none or lack of demand and due to inability of importing raw materials from the rest of the world. Not barriers to tea industry are good to high income of tea growers in Sri Lankan labour market. The

tourism sector which was struggling to survive after Easter Sunday attack in 2019 has slumped further, with no indication of when it could revert to normalcy (Wimalaweera,2020). After Easter attack now again the tourism industry have lot of problems as this industry have many more dependents.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sampling Area

There are 13 Divisional Secretariat Divisions (DSD's) in Colombo district namely Colombo, Homagama, Kaduwela, Kesbewa, Kolonnawa, Maharagama, Moratuwa, Padukka, Ratmalana, Seethawaka, Sri Jayawardhanapura Kotte and Thimbrigasyaya. Homagama is a town in the Colombo District, Sri Lanka, about 24 kilometers south east of Colombo. The total land area is about 137 square kilometers (53 sq mi) of 90 GN division. It is home to notable places such as the campus of the National School of Business Management, Sri Lanka Institute of Nanotechnology, the Panagoda Cantonment, Upali Newspapers, Mahinda Rajapaksha College Homagama, The Sri Lanka Buddhist and Pali University, Ceylon Biscuits Limited and Laxapana Battery Company. Therefore this area is very favorable for workers and entrepreneurs.

3.2 Sample Selection

The contract labors in Sri Lanka were considered as total population of interest. The sampling method used in this study is the nonprobability sampling method which is convenience sampling. This study will focus on Kahathuduwa North GS Division. There are around 140 houses at this area. Each of the house consists of average 1 labor assuming one family is consists from one labor one housewife and two children. Therefore, the population of this study was assumed to have approximately 140 individual.

The sample size representative of the labors in this study is 103 and assume that this sample consist labors from different labor market including public sector, private sector and entrepreneurs. The Krejcie and Morgan's sample size calculation was based on $p = 0.05$ where the probability of committing type I error is less than 5 % <0.05 .

3.3 Data Collection Method

The study conducted a pre-tested questionnaire survey to identify the impact of different labour market during covid 19 pandemic. The questionnaire opened with a few demographic items and a screening question about labour market. The data accumulated from the primary source was subject to various statistical tools for verification and interpretations. Data analysis was categorized as Descriptive and Inferential analysis. To present the understanding of data analysis, the results represented using necessary graphs; tables and charts were derived using Microsoft Excel. The questions were phrased in the form of statements scored on a 5-point Likert type scale, ranging from 1 "Highly disagree" to 5 "Highly agree". The knowledge and demand for health and safety needs were measured using total marks given by respondents.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The majority of labors were belonged to (38%) 46-60 years old and according to the results, most of the labors age belonged to 31-60 age range. And also most of the labors are males (55%) and 45 % are female labors. Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) indicate that in the 4th quarter of 2019, the economically active population was at 8.6 million, with 35.5 % females and 64.5 % males. In Sri Lankan labour market economically active male percentage is higher than female. In past female workers were very less amount. Now female also get good education and ready to get challenges. 87 % of labors are married and 13 % of labors are not married.

Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) indicate that in the 4th quarter of 2019, the segregation of employment in major sectors indicates 46% of employment in services sector, with 37% in industries and 27% in agriculture. In this sample majority (49%) of labors were belongs to public sector and 32% of labors were from private sector and 19% of labors were entrepreneurs. In here majority of respondents from public sector and government continued paying salaries on time. Therefore they had not any salary problem. In private sector some companies tend salary deduction and reduced their work force. Then most of private sector workers faced economic crisis as their expenses not reduced. The entrepreneurs like salon owners, hotel owners, shop owners fully lost their incomes. Therefore, entrepreneurs in Sri Lankan labour market faced big economic crisis. 29% of the respondents lost their job while 49% of labors had their full salary and 22 % of labors had salary deduction.

All respondents are highly agreed with need well planned health safety system at work place and need to maintain masks, sanitizers and other safety items stock to keep supply without any deficit. Because lot of people have good knowledge about the importance of health and safety need at work place. Majority (54%) of labors highly disagreed with “I had family problems during lockdown” statement. Also 46% of respondents were agreed to that statement. In Sri Lankan labour market employers not consider about employees mental health. Then labours cannot balance family life and work life. During lockdown season all family members were together and some labours had to work from home.

64% of labors highly agreed to the statement of “I had enough supply of food and daily essential commodities. Because lot of sellers were started to sell daily needs by own vehicles. But not all respondents were agreed to this statement is revealed that some labours had problem to find daily essentials. Sri Lankan labor market is filled from different educated, qualified labours. Then some labors not able to buy their essentials from this way. This also was a big problem to different labor market. Majority (56%) of respondents were highly disagreed with “I had good internet facilities during lockdown” statement. Because some labours had to work from home. Also to connect with friends and other social needs. They wanted a way to pass the time. Internet was the major essential on lockdown season.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The majority of respondents examined in our sample showed good knowledge and high demand for health and safety needs. Research should focus on how to increase the health and safety needs on workplace. Because they have identified the importance of well-planned health safety system and keep enough stock of health items without deficit.

It is need to give good counseling programs after lockdown. In Sri Lanka some areas not covered by any online marketing system or selling foods and other needs using vehicle. Therefore, it is need to

make proper food and essential commodities supply with “Grama Niladhari”. Otherwise some labors have problem to buy essential items during lockdown. Marketers should implement their online promotions based on the different labour market. It is usually recommended that campaigners should focus on the different education level, occupation level and different locations.

According to family life of different labour market during lockdown nearly half of the respondents agreed to the statement of “I had family problems during lockdown”. It is need to suggest that employers should implement proper counseling programmes after lockdown to refresh their employees mind before work again.

In this sample majority (49%) of labors were belongs to public sector and 32% of labors were from private sector and 19% of labors were entrepreneurs. And 29% of the respondents lost their job while 49% of labors had their full salary and 22 % of labors had salary deduction. Government authorities, bankers and researches have to make proper economic system including loan and deposits and innovations. Government authorized daily savings and other loan systems are very important to entrepreneurs and private sector labours. Bankers have to minimize their interest rates on credit cards specially. And reduce the minimum payment for credit card during lockdown. Sri Lankan government should apply proper rules regulations for employers and bankers to protect private sector labours and entrepreneurs as well.

As short term recommendations continue the granting of loans to provide working capital to the businesses at lower interest rates and allow for the employers to recover a portion of ‘lost paid hours without work’ in future having consent with Trade Unions or relevant parties are very important. As medium term recommendations establishment of a comprehensive integrated social security scheme including unemployment benefit scheme linked to reskilling, re-employment, and up-skilling and strengthen social dialogue mechanism at enterprise and sectorial level to mitigate the negative impact of the labour market leading to industrial peace are very important.

For future researchers it can be suggested to try for getting a bigger sample then the results can be more representative. And do analyze the data according to different labour market as different samples. It will also be beneficial if someone can conduct a study on the same topic with qualitative approach as it will be valuable to know the point of view of employers regarding the health and safety precautions, savings and loan schemes. And also, it can be recommended to ask very specific and simple questions and try to categories respondents’ answers for better health and safety of labours’ in future, necessary savings for hard situations, loans from government and other associations and specially supply of human needs and wants including food items, sanitary items and internet connections.

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A therapy service ‘unmasked’: Reflections on the impact of Covid-19 on a feeding support clinical service

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ABSTRACT

As for all professions, Covid-19 hit speech and language therapy services hard and in unexpected ways. Given the close proximity at which speech and language therapists sit and engage in assessment and intervention sessions with children and adults experiencing communication and/or swallowing difficulties, adhering to the government’s health guidelines posed particular challenges. How could speech and language therapists work on speech, language and communication skills while donning a mask, and at a distance? More challenging, still, how could speech and language therapists support children experiencing feeding or swallowing (dysphagia) difficulties when international speech and language therapy professional associations advice against specific aerosol generation assessment tasks, given the propensity to stimulate coughing, projection of droplets and drooling? This article will reflect on the challenges faced and lessons learnt in offering a paediatric feeding support clinic during the Covid-19 pandemic. Through the method of action research and through a critical disability studies lens, specific changes were made to the usual service delivery model. It entailed developing a clear new care pathway for children experiencing feeding or swallowing difficulties, identifying a mechanism for prioritising dysphagia high-risk or Covid low-risk clients. A translated Sinhala Pedi-EAT parent questionnaire was trialled to gain adequate details to help prioritize children for face-to-face consultations. Given the arguably lengthy time duration required to complete the above questionnaire via telephone, a short and accessible new parent questionnaire was devised and used to aid the prioritization process using key questions that could signal feeding/swallowing difficulties in a child. The new service delivery model offered a limited face-to-face clinical service for priority clients under strict health guidelines, and a new telehealth service for non-priority clients or clients who are at high-risk for Covid-19, avoiding client abandonment. On reflection, the telehealth consultations offered using Zoom, WhatsApp or telephone were observed to pose varied challenges and unexpected positives.

Keywords: *Speech and language therapy, Feeding support clinic, Covid-19, Aerosol generation procedures*

1. INTRODUCTION

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on work life across professions has been evident during the course of this year. The specific scope of practice of a speech and language therapist entails the assessment of, and intervention with, children experiencing feeding and swallowing difficulties known as dysphagia (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2020). Dysphagia is defined in simple terms as ‘a swallowing disorder’. In children, difficulties with feeding or swallowing could include failure to gain and maintain weight impacting overall growth, inadequate oral chewing skills, restricting the food textures the child can eat safely, an aversion to particular food textures, smells and tastes connected to food or drink resulting in limitations in nutrition and hydration, and the propensity for food, fluid or saliva to go into the lungs called aspiration, with the serious consequences of developing recurrent chest infections, chronic lung disease and aspiration pneumonia’ (Arvedson, 2008; Winstock, 1994).

In common parlance, aspiration is referred to as ‘ismolle yanawa’ or ‘pita ugre yanewa’ in Sinhala, and ‘nuraiyīralkaḷil pōkiḷatu’ in Tamil. Difficulties in the co-ordination of breathing during the swallowing process could result in food and drink trickling down through the larynx (voice-box) into the lungs. For children, particularly for children diagnosed with cerebral palsy who experience difficulties with posture and movement, aspiration-related pneumonia is a significant and potentially life-threatening condition with increased risk morbidity and mortality (Chidekel & Greenawald, 2018). Therefore, early and accurate assessment and timely intervention by a speech and language therapist and a multi-disciplinary team is imperative in supporting children with feeding and swallowing difficulties.

Part of the remit of a speech and language therapist is to undertake a comprehensive assessment of a child’s eating and drinking skills. This requires very close contact with the child to assess how the muscles involved in eating and drinking function, and to observe the coordination of swallowing and breathing. As therapists work in very close proximity to children, and because children might cough, clear their throat and/or drool saliva during mealtime observations or during direct feeding assessments, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) (2020), American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) (2020) and Speech Pathology Australia (2020) have all issued very distinct guidelines including clear restrictions on working in dysphagia management during the pandemic.

The guidelines include minimizing physical contact, limiting face-to-face consultations, avoiding direct oromotor assessments (of the tongue, lips, cheeks, jaw and soft palate involved in eating) or assessments of reflexes such as cough and gag, and the use of specific instrumental assessments such as cervical auscultation in which a stethoscope is used during mealtimes to listen to swallow sounds. Additionally, the use of objective instrumental assessment of fiberoptic endoscopic evaluation of swallowing (FEES) test that uses a flexible tube or endoscope with a tiny attached camera and light to view the structures of the larynx and pharynx, swallowing of saliva and swallowing of different food textures, and a videofluoroscopic swallow study (VFSS) or modified barium swallow (MBS) study that is a radiographic procedure offering dynamic observation of oral, pharyngeal, and upper oesophageal function during swallowing, have been restricted. All the above aspects of assessment carry a risk of ‘aerosol generating procedures’, which the Centres for Disease Control (CDC cited in American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2020) indicates are “procedures that are likely to induce coughing (e.g., sputum induction, open suctioning of airways).” The airborne particles (aerosols or droplets) released can lead to the spread of respiratory

infections (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2020). Within speech and language therapy, aerosol generating procedures are particularly likely in the assessment of children with eating/drinking difficulties or dysphagia, with drooling from the mouth, liquid coming out of the nose, and coughing during meals quite common.

In the local context, objective instrumental procedures, such as VFSS or MBS and FEES, are not routinely conducted as part of the dysphagia assessment protocol, due to its cost and its limited availability, similar to other countries of the Global South (Dharmarathne, Miles & Allen, 2020). A few hospital-based dysphagia services in Sri Lanka do have access to objective instrumental assessments including VFSS, currently considered the 'gold standard' in the diagnosis and management of oropharyngeal dysphagia (Belafsky and Kuhn, 2014), though the 'best standard' debate continues between VFSS and FEES (Martin-Harris & Jones, 2008). That said, most local dysphagia services for children, be it in a hospital or community centre, relies heavily on the expertise of the therapist who uses a range of subjective observations to gain a comprehensive understanding of the child's strengths and needs connected to eating, drinking and swallowing. In clinical terms, this does mean that local therapists are very reliant on their subjective clinical feeding evaluation that includes a detailed case history, mealtime observations of the child's oral sensorimotor, feeding and swallowing skills (Weir et al., 2009), direct assessment of oro-motor skills required for eating/drinking and testing of oral reflexes (e.g. cough and gag reflex), trials of food/drink and cervical auscultation using a stethoscope. The adjunct clinical technique of cervical auscultation involves the placing of a stethoscope on the child's neck close to the larynx whilst swallowing, to listen to the sounds of breathing and swallowing in the child's throat, to determine if a safe clear swallow is present. Though there is little research evidence at present for its clinical usefulness within a paediatric population (Frakking et al., 2019) given its subjective nature, it is the most widely used and heavily relied-on instrumental assessment available to local speech and language therapists. Given this reliance on subjective clinical evaluation via observation and hands-on direct assessment alone with cervical auscultation not recommended during the pandemic (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2020; Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, 2020; Speech Pathology Australia, 2020), the focus has shifted to the importance of parents within assessment in offering valuable information. This does, however, rely on the relevance and accuracy of the questions posed to parents by therapists, whether in the form of questions on a questionnaire or in a direct interview.

The concept of *client abandonment* or 'leaving a caseload without coverage by an appropriately qualified professional' (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2020) is an ethical issue within speech and language therapy. It violates principle I of the Code of Ethics (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2016), which asserts that the professional must "honor their responsibility to hold paramount the welfare of persons they serve professionally." What has come into sharp discussion is the need to continue to offer a therapy service so that children are not left behind or abandoned, but the need to do so safely and responsibly, with the 'welfare of persons they serve' taking on multiple connotations during Covid-19. The organization also makes the point that clinicians should not place themselves in physical danger in their pursuit of offering client care (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2020), which has resonance for work undertaken during the pandemic.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association acknowledges that some disruption to clinician-client relationships are unavoidable, particularly during natural disasters, encouraging an exploration of

alternative service delivery models of telepractice¹ adhering to professional standards (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.). The unprecedented nature of the Covid-19 pandemic has propelled speech and language therapists to use telehealth in the management of dysphagia (Malandraki, 2020). Telepractice is defined within professional practice as “the application of telecommunications technology to the delivery of speech language pathology and audiology professional services at a distance by linking clinician to client or clinician to clinician for assessment, intervention, and/or consultation” (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.). Even for urgent management of swallowing disorders, tele-rehabilitation is recommended on any occasion when the technical requirements are available (Mattei et al., 2020).

In exploring possibilities for service delivery, Malandraki (2020) argues that public health and the health and safety of clients and therapists is paramount, with telehealth affording a beneficial mode of service delivery. She proposes the need to consider the current evidence-based practice and recognised guidelines when offering an ethical and useful telehealth service. Critical review of the research on telepractice for dysphagia management, though limited to just four papers recommended by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2020), reveals no marked difference in efficacy between face-to-face and telepractice assessments of dysphagia (Molini-Avejonas et al., 2015). Given the onus on technology for the effectiveness of this service delivery model, speech and language therapists must critically reflect on possible issues of equality/equity of access in Global South countries such as Sri Lanka. Molini-Avejonas and colleagues (2015) report that most studies reviewed by them concluded that telehealth practices were more advantageous compared to non-telehealth approaches, though barriers of technology were highlighted.

The main telepractice types of synchronous, asynchronous and hybrid have been considered by speech and language therapists. Synchronous refers to the use of interactive dynamic audio and video connection in a real time consultation, mirroring a traditional face-to-face session. Asynchronous includes the use of captured and stored data that could include copies of reports, audio-recordings or video-recordings sent to a speech and language therapist for interpretation. A hybrid service includes an amalgam of synchronous and asynchronous practices that could also include face-to-face services (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.).

A mechanism to prioritize children for face-to-face appointments vs telehealth consultations is the clinical need of the day. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (2020) and Speech Pathology Australia (2020) recommend speech and language therapists to use their expertise and judgement to apply a risk: benefit decision making process for each individual client consultation during the pandemic, considering all relevant factors. This clinical risk assessment has the potential to minimize transmission of Covid-19. Following-on from the primary question of a prioritization mechanism, the secondary question is whether parents and children are able to follow therapy guidelines offered via the new medium of telehealth. In one study meeting the inclusion criteria of a systematic review, Nordio and colleagues (2018) found no marked difference in adherence to therapy guidelines between groups accessing clinician-directed face-to-face therapy, person-directed therapy or a telepractice application. The challenge facing the professionals of the Feeding Support Clinic attached to the University of Kelaniya was how to offer a safe accessible clinical service to children experiencing feeding and swallowing difficulties within the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic while taking account of the local realities in Sri Lanka.

¹ The terms telepractice and telehealth will be used interchangeably within this paper.

2. METHODS

This paper reports on an action research study, and aims to share changes made to a clinical service, together with the critical impressions of the authors on these initiatives. It entails the presentation of changes made and new initiatives undertaken to enable a continued clinical service through the Feeding Support Clinic during the pandemic. The changes made and trialled will be presented together with a critical discussion of its potential implications through the lens of abandonment (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2020), critical disability studies (Campbell, 2009) and the intersectionality of poverty and disability (Davis, 2019; Goodley, Lawthom, Liddiard, & Runswick-Cole, 2019).

The question facing the Feeding Support Clinic was on how to offer a safe service amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The working definition of action research within this paper is “an approach in which the action researcher and a client collaborate in the diagnosis of the problem and in the development of a solution based on the diagnosis” (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In relation to the Feeding Support Clinic, this included a planning of innovative service delivery models and care-pathways, and a critical review of these, in order to offer a safe and accessible clinical service specific to supporting children with feeding and swallowing difficulties. As recommended by Kemmis and McTaggart (2000), an action research spiral of self-reflective cycles of planning to initiate change, implementing the change or action, observing the implementation process, and critically reflecting on the process was adopted.

Within this action research study, a range of initiatives were introduced in order to continue to offer a clinic service to support children with feeding and swallowing difficulties during the pandemic. A new prioritization protocol and care-pathway, a synchronous, asynchronous, and a hybrid service, and new information resources were introduced as new initiatives with a critical review of all undertaken. Data was collected through the trialling of a translated parent questionnaire, the introduction of a new short parent questionnaire and observations of face-to-face, Zoom-based and WhatsApp-based consultations and telephone appointments and reflections on the resources developed.

Setting

Given the implications for weight gain and growth and risks of food/drink frequently going into the lungs (aspiration) resulting in recurrent respiratory infections, chronic lung disease and aspiration pneumonia, the Feeding Support Clinic offers a specialist clinical service. Following a self-referral or a referral by a healthcare or educational professional, an assessment would be offered face-to-face with a speech and language therapist. The Feeding Support Clinic is part of a university clinical service offered free-of-charge to the public. The clinic is conducted every Wednesday, and has been offered as part of a final year clinical placement under supervision to students following a degree programme in Speech and Hearing Sciences.

Prior to Covid-19, the clinical service offered was 1:1 face-to-face consultation with a team of primarily two speech and language therapists and two nurses, with Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists and Paediatricians collaborating to offer joint-sessions as required. Each consultation takes approximately one hour. This involves conducting an initial interview with the parent/caregiver to obtain vital background information, taking a diet history, followed by direct assessment of oro-motor skills required for eating and drinking, observation of a mealtime and food trials to determine safety of eating/drinking different food textures. At the end of the assessment consultation, the child is offered a range of recommendations

to be followed by the parents, based on the assessment findings and a review appointment offered as necessary.

Participants

The clinic service is accessed by a large group of children ranging in age from birth to 18 years, with diverse medical diagnoses and feeding difficulties. This includes children with a range of developmental disabilities such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorder and global developmental delay.

3. RESULTS

Devising a prioritization mechanism

In order to prioritize children for face-to-face consultations and to identify children who may be appropriate for telehealth consultations, a new care-pathway was devised for the Feeding Support Clinic. The care-pathway appropriate for each individual child would be determined based on a needs assessment and on the potential risk of having contracted Covid-19. High-priority and low-Covid 19 risk clients were to be offered face-to-face consultations under strict health guidelines and non-priority and high-risk clients for Covid-19 were to be offered a form of telehealth. Based on the 'traffic lights' prioritization scheme suggested by Speech Pathology Australia (2020), the following care pathway was developed (Figure 1).

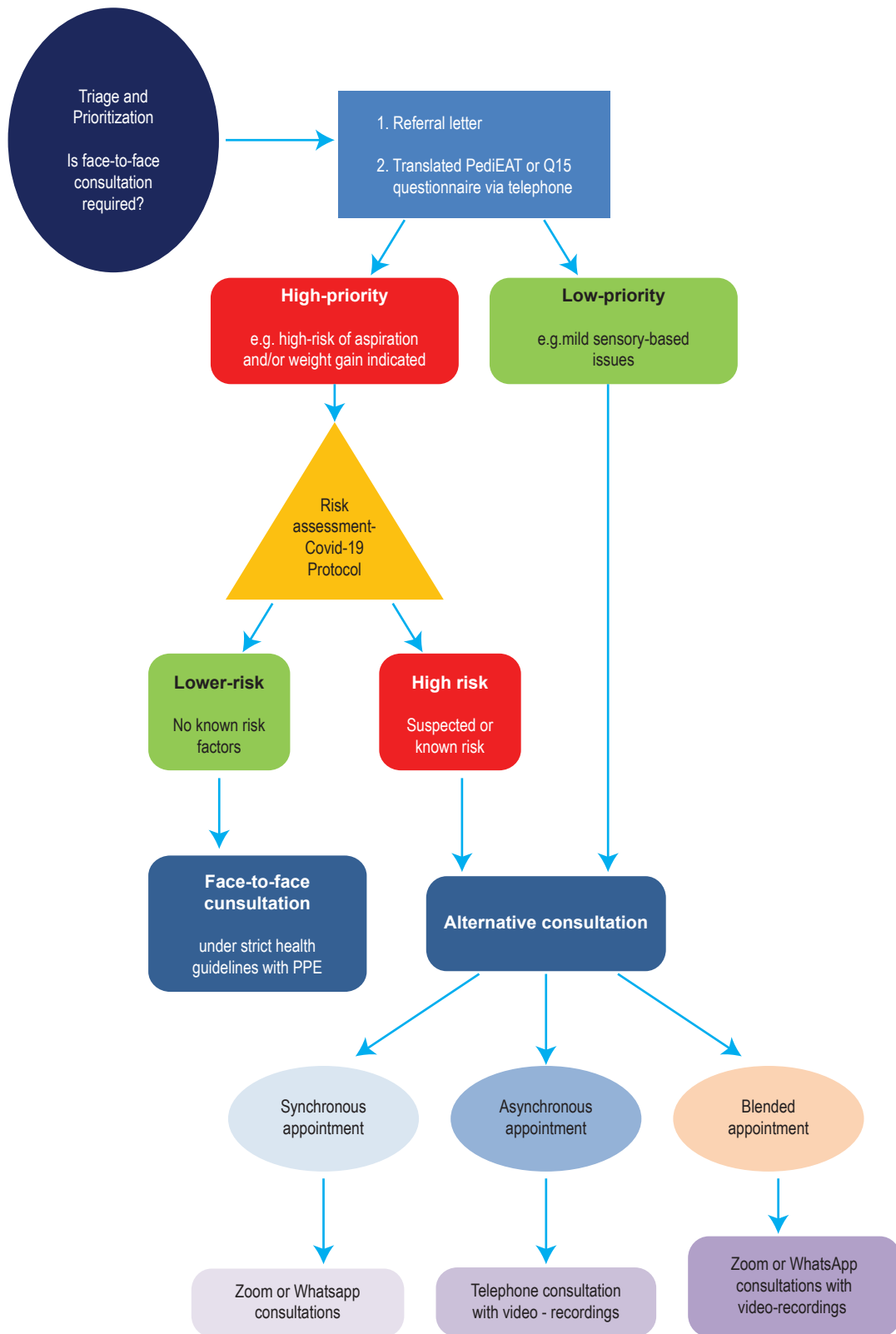


Figure 1: New Feeding Support Clinic care-pathway (Adapted from Speech Pathology Australia, 2020)

This supported the prioritization of children for face-to-face contact and an alternative service delivery pathway for children deemed to require a review but who were not high priority. It ensured both accurate prioritization of clients, and a pared-down face-to-face service in-line with Covid-19 health guidelines.

With a view to finding a quick and relatively easy way to prioritize clients for face-to-face assessments, an existing parent questionnaire of the PediEAT (Thoyre et al., 2018) translated into Sinhala (Jayawardane & Dharmarathna, 2018) was used. Parent perceptions are particularly useful in establishing the pattern of feeding difficulties and to identify any persistent factors suggestive of aspiration. On trial, this proved to take long, as it has 78 questions, particularly effortful over the telephone as part of an initial parent interview. This, in turn, led the researchers to develop a short screening questionnaire that was titled '*Paediatric Dysphagia Q15 Screening Questionnaire*' or '*Q15*', for short (Hettiarachchi, Nelum & Saleem, 2020). It is a 15-item caregiver questionnaire designed using 13 yes/no questions and 2 questions with a 10-point Likert scale from '*no difficulty*' (0) to '*significant difficulty*' (10) (Appendix 1). The questionnaire was developed following a review of the literature on parent-report questionnaires in paediatric dysphagia. A range of parent dysphagia questionnaires consulted included the Behavioural Paediatric Feeding Assessment Scale (BPFAS, Crist & Napier, 2018), the Montreal Children's Hospital Scale (MCHFS, Ramsay et al., 2011), Pediatric Assessment Scale for Severe Feeding Problems (PASSFP, Crist et al., 2004), PediEAT (Thoyre et al., 2018) and STEP-CHILD (Seiverling Hendy, & Williams, 2011). The questionnaire covered the areas of eating and drinking skills, nutritional status, mealtime behaviour (including potential signs of aspiration), duration and general health. It was sent to Prof. Mershen Pillay, a member of the International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) Committee for review, and a change made to the final question explaining '*aspiration pneumonia*' as '*a chest infection because of food/liquid going down the wrong way*', to aid better understanding. The Q15 was translated and made available in Sinhala, Tamil and English to the parents.

Overall, the Q15 has been a useful adjunct to the prioritization process, although not without limitations. Occasionally, parents would not identify feeding difficulties as a concern, in spite of noting potential signs of aspiration or concerns about weight gain. Following reflection, only the 15 yes/no questions were considered, excluding the two additional Likert-scale questions. The overall scoring was out of 15, although more weight was given to the identification of potential signs of aspiration when prioritizing for face-to-face appointments. The short administration time of 5 minutes or less was a bonus, particularly when conducted via telephone. Additionally, the centre's Covid-19 protocol questionnaire, which had a series of questions commonly asked in hospital-settings was also administered by a colleague via telephone. Using the information gained through both questionnaires, each child's care-pathway was determined by the two speech and language therapists attached to the Feeding Support Clinic.

3.1 Following strict health guidelines

The children whose care was prioritized were offered face-to-face appointments for an initial assessment or review of their eating and drinking skills. The face-to-face appointments of the Feeding Support Clinic were only offered when the client's hometown was not under curfew or lockdown. As some of children would be considered a 'high risk' population due to respiratory difficulties and as the assessment could entail aerosol generation procedures, strict precautions were adhered to. This included a brief telephone discussion with the parent or caregiver with a speech and language therapist who conducted the Q15 questionnaire on the

telephone. When a child was prioritized for a face-to-face clinical appointment, the Covid-19 protocol was also undertaken by the centre via telephone to establish any exposure to the virus or a history of quarantine.

To aid the adherence to health guidelines, we displayed three posters designed by our BSc Speech & Hearing Sciences students in all languages, with simple language and pictorial support, in an easy-read format. The simple pictorial posters may have been useful, though it would have been prudent to display them prior to the start of the face-to-face clinic service rather than following a few weeks and to include very specific guidelines such as recommendations on bringing in their own food, drink and utensils to the clinical appointment as no food or cups and spoon were to be offered by the therapists due to health restrictions.

The healthcare professionals of the session prepared suitably with hand washing, wearing of disposable gloves, a mask, and a face-shield. Similar clear guidelines were implemented for clients and their families, with wearing of masks made mandatory, hand-washing at the entrance to the building and seating in the waiting area only permitted in keeping with the required maintenance of social distance. For the Feeding Support Clinic, all food and drink and all utensils to be used in the consultation were to be brought in by the parents/caregivers.

Critical reflection on the clinical sessions undertaken revealed that on occasion, the masks and face-shields in particular inhibited the assessment process, rendering the face-to-face consultation less useful if a child was negatively impacted by these safety measures. For instance, a little 2-year old boy with a medical diagnosis of Down syndrome was observed to look at the two speech and language therapists who were in masks and face-shields, and then look at his mother who was also with a mask trying to feed him as he sat on her lap, and burst into tears, distressed at the sight of three 'masked' adults; the visual too overwhelming for him. Given that his mother would not be wearing a mask at home when feeding him, and with the place and adults appearing unfamiliar, the assessment, which usually aims to observe 'natural' mealtime behaviour, was, in fact, the opposite, with a telehealth appointment more appropriate.

On a more practical level, the shield could not be worn for very long as it was tight around the temples, creating a 'tension headache' when first worn. Gradually, however, the therapists did get used to wearing the face-shield during the consultations, removing it after each session for some much needed relief. Time was spent on the safe disposal of gloves after each consultation, washing of hands with liquid soap and water and donning of new gloves for each new child, with the table cleaned with appropriate sanitizer liquid. This additional time to follow health-guidelines needed to be factored into the consultation time, making each appointment longer.

In addition, part of the assessment is a close observation of the child during mealtimes to observe any changes in breathing and any signs of food/drink entering the airway (aspiration), which may be apparent through an overt sign such as coughing or throat clearing. This invariably would place the speech and language therapist at risk of aerosol droplets. While adequate distancing is recommended, in doing so, the therapist might compromise on their ability to closely observe subtle changes of breathing and distress in the child. The compromise solution was to sit at a reasonable distance but to the side of the child, so as not in the line of any direct projected saliva or drooling.

3.2 Communication barriers

Communication is at the very centre of a speech and language therapy appointment, with the aim of engaging in an open non-judgemental discussion, and to develop respect and a rapport between the therapist and the client or caregiver. To do so, speech and language therapists rely on a combination of verbal and non-verbal communication, including the use of facial expression, body language and gesture, while also interpreting what is expressed (or not) by children and parents using non-verbal communication. The mask often created a communication barrier between the therapist, child and parents/caregivers, particularly during a first visit. The face mask, together with the face-shield, added two layers that dampened the voice, with parents often requesting for repetition of what was said. This was particularly visible at a first visit where the parents were not familiar with the style of speaking of the therapist and needed to 'tune-in' to the idiosyncratic nature of each therapists' speech and communication style. Speech and language therapists rely heavily on their verbal and non-verbal communication skills to build-up a rapport with the child and caregivers. The mask appeared to deter easy access to facial expression, making therapists rely more on tone of voice, eye contact and natural gesture.

Following critical reflection, a simple clear mask was designed based on a template found online by the first author. Notwithstanding some initial shortcomings due to fogging of the clear material covering the mouth, this new mask (Figure 2) enabled better access to the therapist's lip pattern, thereby promoting easier communication, particularly with the Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing community.



Figure 2: Transparent mask

3.3 Alternative service-delivery possibilities

The telehealth service offered through the Feeding Support Clinic took diverse forms. This included synchronous, asynchronous, and a hybrid service delivery mode. Synchronous appointments were offered via Zoom, or over WhatsApp. The asynchronous telehealth service included the review of videos sent in by parents followed by a telephone discussion.

Within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, all alternative methods of consultation via telephone, Zoom or WhatsApp were safer than face-to-face consultations. Telephone consultations were usually set-up with at least one day's notice, with parents encouraged to send in short video-recordings of their child during mealtimes. Nevertheless, video-recordings were sometimes of less than one-minute duration and of poor quality. Though the most commonly used and therefore accessible alternative method of appointment, a telephone consultation was limited to a therapist-parent discussion with no additional professional involved to gain a multi-disciplinary perspective. In contrast, both WhatsApp and Zoom consultations offered the opportunity to include more than one healthcare professional. However, the increased number of professionals on a group WhatsApp call decreased the size of the visuals, which in turn affected the clarity of observations. Particularly if an initial interview call, a telephone consultation felt subjectively formal creating difficulties with building-up a rapport. Within some appointments, the discussion was also less informative, as it was not possible to trial any therapeutic techniques directly on the child or through the parents. Within WhatsApp and Zoom consultations, healthcare professionals could work

through the parents to trial recommendations based on mealtime observations. Both Zoom and WhatsApp consultations enabled the trialling of recommendations, with clear guidance offered to the parent to follow, under the therapist's watchful gaze.

Telehealth sessions were organized via Zoom with only a speech and language therapist or jointly with a nurse and two speech and language therapists together. The opportunity for 3 professionals to work together via Zoom was a bonus, particularly to introduce a weaning programme of moving the baby from exclusive breast-feeds to solid food around 6 months of age. This entailed observing the child being fed in real time, trialling of positioning and postural changes, and direct advice on weaning. The observations offered insights into the reality of the mealtime for the child and parent, as it was conducted at home, presumably in the child's and parent's natural environment. Following-on from an online review of the child's skills through a live observation of a mealtime, the speech and language therapist offered recommendations on food texture, communication during mealtimes and techniques to assist safe feeding. This advice was reinforced through the modelling of appropriate posture and techniques using soft-toy dolls to illustrate the advice. The nurse offered a PowerPoint presentation shared via Zoom with specific advice on meeting the nutritional needs of young children.

While Zoom appointments were particularly useful for mealtime observations, and could be offered without any charge to the parents (with no loss of data to the service-user), connectivity was an issue. This, together with the non-availability of smart phones, meant that the service offered was inherently unequal. Nevertheless, Zoom and WhatsApp appointments were, to a large extent, able to circumvent issues with communication difficulties due to wearing masks at the face-to-face consultations at the centre. This was a positive as long as there was good connectivity and appropriate home lighting.

Among the other practical benefits was that no special preparation was required for the child or mother, with a natural mealtime observed during the synchronous telepractice session. The asynchronous telepractice sessions using video-recordings were also of natural everyday mealtimes. The meals offered were not specifically prepared for the consultation, but regular meals, offering a glimpse into the everyday reality of the child and parent. Often, parents who travel from a far for consultations prepare special meals that are less complex than usual, cooked very early and frequently dry by the time of the observation. This can make it more difficult for children to safely swallow the food offered, and has implications for the accuracy of observation. Equally, Zoom and WhatsApp consultations offered the opportunity to give the child freshly prepared regular meals.

In order to address the limited face-to-face service and supplement the alternative telepractice sessions, clear resources with recommendations were devised to be shared with families. This included a video demonstration of *'messy play with food'*, which is a step-wise programme to support children with sensory-based feeding difficulties. Leaflets were also developed on *'Supporting weight gain in children with cerebral palsy or developmental difficulties'* for children with concerns regarding weight gain and *'mealtime recipes'* based on pureed or blended consistency for children experiencing chewing difficulties and/or concerns with weight gain. Diagrams of specific techniques to encourage chewing skills (i.e. the muslin cloth technique) and to relieve constipation (i.e. use of baby massage techniques) were also collated to distribution.

3.4 Insights into the real home situation

In the hybrid service offered, caregivers had shared video footage of their child during mealtimes, which was sent ahead to the clinician to watch, with Zoom-based opportunities to observe the child eating or drinking in real time during the appointment. Initial reflections are of the usefulness of Zoom-based observations as a method of assessment, even compared to real-life face-to-face assessment at the centre, as it offers the opportunity to observe a typical mealtime in the natural home setting. This may benefit the child and parent, as the setting is familiar, it may also benefit the therapist as she is able to get a bird's eye view of the 'realistic' mealtime, which includes the opportunity to observe the child in the usual seating position, including any special seating, the food texture offered is what is given routinely, and a clearer picture may emerge of the home setting and environment. In contrast, although face-to-face appointments afford the opportunity for direct assessment of the child's swallowing skills at close proximity, it offered little information on the home-setting and the ground reality of the 'lived experience' of feeding and swallowing difficulties for the child and the caregivers.

For instance, on several occasions, parents were observed to position the child without adequate head and trunk support, placing the child at high risk of aspiration or food/drink trickling into the lungs. The team was able to observe how the child was positioned at home, which may be different to how parents position the child at the clinic. Though the advantage in a face-to-face consultation is that positioning and seating can be adjusted and trialled with the help of a physiotherapist, occupational therapist and speech and language therapists working as a team including the trialling of available seating equipment, the video consultations offered the opportunity to make more realistic changes based on the 'real-life' home seating/positioning used.

The opportunity for observation of mealtimes at home also offered a glimpse into the reality of communication between the child and parents. For example, in the mealtime observation of an infant, the surrounding noise-level of adults in conversations and the television blaring the news, with no communication between the mother-and-child was witnessed. This afforded the opportunity to have a discussion with the parent on the importance of communication during mealtimes.

Older siblings played a vital role in the telehealth sessions, often operating the phone or laptop. Younger siblings were less helpful, competing for attention and distracted by the camera or laptop. Having to manage other young children during the consultation appeared to add to the overall stress of the mealtime situation for some parents. For instance, one mother who had requested for an urgent Zoom appointment for her 2-year old son with down syndrome had to contend with her two older sons' interest in waving at the therapists, and walking across and covering the screen.

Connectivity issues led to occasional delays in Zoom consultations. If one consultation for the day is delayed, it usually had a knock-on effect on the rest. At times, this delay in starting the consultation resulted in the child being overly hungry and distressed. For example, in a Zoom-based consultation with a little girl with Rhetts syndrome and her mother, the appointment was delayed due to the late-start of the previous appointment. The client could not be consoled, crying throughout and spitting out her food, making it difficult to observe her current eating and drinking skills.

3.5 Developing observational skills

Given that objective instrumental assessments are not recommended at this time, referrals for VFSS and FEES though recommended were postponed to a later date as hospital access (in the few hospitals offering this service) was currently deemed unsafe. This resulted in the speech and language therapists and speech and language therapy students using subjective observation of children via Zoom or WhatsApp and of reviewing home-based video footage of mealtimes to determine the eating/drinking pattern and to observe any signs of distress or overt signs of aspiration.

Parents required explicit instruction on the angle and proximity of the mealtime recording. Invariably, the video-recordings were short clips due to technical difficulties of storing and sharing data. Confidentiality was guaranteed as the video-recordings were only directly accessible to the speech and language therapists and not to the students. The main concern was the clarity of some of the video-recordings or real time Zoom or WhatsApp observations due to the placement of the phone or laptop computer, lighting and/or connectivity. For example, a few children, particularly with sensory-based feeding difficulties were observed to walk around at home during the meal, with the parent walking or running behind them attempting to feed them while also trying to get video-footage of the mealtime. The Zoom-based or WhatsApp observation or video-recordings required family support, usually of at least two people; with one feeding the child and the other recording.

The poor quality recordings or limited connectivity does mean that a therapist or student may miss a crucial observation, especially of a subtle observation, for instance, of a gag reflex, changes in breathing, or attempts at throat clearing. While this is a key concern, the alternative to address this issue was to request for additional video-footage, if unclear, with clearer guidelines offered. Additionally, parents were requested to send-in multiple videos across mealtimes in order to determine a pattern of feeding/swallowing rather than a one-off observation of skills. The positive, however, was the ability to go over the video-footage multiple times to verify observations; principally useful for students.

3.6 Unequal access

While the alternative consultation options may have been cheaper due to no additional travel costs that could often include taxis or three-wheelers for children with disabilities who are not able to access public transport, varied costs were incurred. The consultations could be arranged for a convenient time for the parents, but telephone calls and WhatsApp calls of 45-60 minutes could be expensive for the service provider. In contrast, the Zoom consultations were offered at no extra cost to the parents and no implications for loss of data. Some parents who do not have a smartphone or computer were excluded from direct consultation via WhatsApp or Zoom, in which the child's mealtime could be observed in real time as part of an assessment or review. Instead, the only telepractice mode available to some parents was a telephone conversation, which would not be ideal if it was a first assessment. However, we did offer review appointments through a telephone discussion for selected children experiencing issues mainly with weight gain or sensory-feeding difficulties, but not with a high risk of aspiration. It was explained to the parents that this was an interim arrangement and only a parent interview was undertaken as part of the assessment/review process, with a follow-up face-to-face appointment to be offered when lockdown restrictions were lifted. Even when WhatsApp or Zoom access was a possibility, issues of connectivity persisted, contributing to the overall challenges with equal access to all to the service offered.

4. DISCUSSION

In summary, the action research study was undertaken to address the issue of how to offer a safe clinic service for children experiencing feeding or swallowing difficulties during the Covid-19 pandemic. A critical review of the initiatives introduced showed the Q15 to be an acceptable parent-questionnaire that was quick and easy to administer, generating sufficient information to prioritize the caseload. A combination of synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid appointments were offered, depending on the level of urgency of the feeding or swallowing difficulty. While each mode has its positives and negatives, the hybrid mode of video-recordings of mealtimes plus a Zoom-based or WhatsApp observation of a mealtime in real time was found to be the most useful as it offered opportunities for observation across mealtimes, which could help determine a pattern of difficulty rather than a one-off problem. This helped to better understand the conducive nature or otherwise of the environment and what, if anything, needed to change. Strict health guidelines were adhered to during the limited face-to-face appointments. The donning of masks appeared to make some children anxious, particularly if it was their first or second visit to the clinic. The masks also interfered with ease of communication, ameliorated to some extent by the use of a clear mask. The transition from a traditional face-to-face service to telepractice presented the therapists and team of health professionals of the Feeding Support Clinic with many challenges, but also opened-up new possibilities. The first new possibility was the opportunity to carry-on offering a clinical service in the face of health restrictions and the lockdown of areas during the pandemic. Secondly, in order to meet the challenge of the moratorium of or pruning down of face-to-face consultations, was the opportunity to develop a new care pathway for the dysphagia service, together with the development of tools to help uncover the primary feeding-related concern, prioritize face-to-face consultations, and identify the most appropriate service-delivery mode for each individual child referred to the clinic. Third, and most importantly, the use of Zoom, WhatsApp and video-recordings offered insights into children's everyday feeding realities at home. This included environmental noise, parent-child communication patterns, the presence of siblings, and usual positioning or seating during mealtimes.

4.1 Establishing a safe service with alternative service delivery models

The combination of telehealth practices adopted and the care pathway established offered viable options to maintain a useful service while taking heed of the health and safety of the clients and clinicians (Malandraki, 2020). From an ethical standpoint of non-abandonment (American Speech-Hearing Association, 2020) of clients accessing a particular speech and language therapy service, though the American Speech-Hearing Association recognises that the clinical relationship will be disrupted during public health emergencies, the introduction of a new clear clinical pathway enabled the Feeding Support Clinic to continue to offer a clinical service. This took the form of offering synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid appointments, as safe and appropriate for each individual child. In so doing, the clinic was able to adhere to principle 1 of the Code of Ethics (2016) of the American Speech-Hearing Association (n.d.), which stipulates that speech and language therapists must uphold their responsibility to ensure the welfare of their clients. In the light of the current pandemic, this has not only meant continuing to offer clinical services to clients, but to do so in a manner that ensures their right to access a safe service, given that persons with disabilities, including those with respiratory difficulties are of high risk of contracting Covid-19 (World Health Organization, 2020).

The ability to offer Zoom, WhatsApp or telephone consultations to children at risk of Covid-19 or who are considered low priority dysphagia clients, enabled the face-to-face consultations to be prioritized and limited to high priority clients. Arguably, this allowed the therapists to offer a safe service to the chosen clients, with health guidelines easier to follow due to the small number. The home-based consultations via Zoom, WhatsApp or telephone were in-line with the World Health Organization's recommendations on delivering telehealth services to meet the rehabilitation needs of people with disabilities (World Health Organization, 2020).

The parents accessing the Feeding Support Clinic for face-to-face appointments appeared to adhere to the health guidelines set. The simple pictorial posters may have been useful, but needed to have been displayed at the start of the face-to-face clinic service with specific guidelines relevant to the feeding clinic. Better access to health messaging may be useful, with particular consideration paid to the reported exclusion from information faced by the Deaf community (Swanwick et al., 2020) and by children and adults with learning disabilities (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2020) This may include health messaging in sign language, with clear pictorial support, in an easy-read format (Mencap, n.d.). Connected to the above, the use of clear masks with face shields when in close proximity with children with feeding and swallowing difficulties, aided clearer communication. The development of a parent-questionnaire and guidelines in the form of a clear care pathway established the foundation for local guidelines for a telehealth service for children with feeding and swallowing difficulties. Further research is required to develop a local evidence-based practice for paediatric dysphagia management that can influence guidelines for ethical and safe service delivery (Malandraki, 2020). The Q15 parent-questionnaire administered through a telephone interview appeared to offer sufficient information to make critical decisions on prioritizing children for face-to-face consultations and to determine the type of telepractice service to offer; whether synchronous, asynchronous or hybrid consultations. Comparable to other screening questionnaires, it was found to be quick and easy to administer, with a short administration time and simple scoring system. The questionnaire could be self-administered and filled by the parent on their own, which is comparable to a range of parent-report instruments including the BPFAS (Crist & Napier, 2018), MCHFS (Ramsay et al., 2011), PASSFP (Crist et al., 2004), PediEAT (Thoyre et al., 2018) and STEP-CHILD (Seiverling Hendy, & Williams, 2011). It could also be administered by the therapist either in person or on the telephone. The latter option was particularly useful given the current public health situation.

Reflecting on the scoring system, as the question on the potential signs of aspiration carry the same weightage in terms of scores (i.e. yes=1, no=0), it may be more useful to introduce a Likert scale of 0 – 5 with descriptors as used in a range of parent dysphagia screening tools (Crist & Napier-Phillips, 2018, Archer, Rosenbaum, & Streiner, 1991, Ramsay et al., 2011, Crist et al., 2004, Thoyre et al., 2018). This may help differentiate between a mild swallowing difficulty and a severe disorder, which can be potentially life-threatening. Additionally, it may offer parents clearer graded options than only the presence of a symptom as yes/no, with more nuanced choices of always, sometimes, and never as in the most efficacious dysphagia parent questionnaires (e.g. Crist & Napier-Phillips, 2018).

Given its short administration time, the Q15 is comparable to the MCHFS (Ramsay et al., 2011) and the PASSFP (Crist et al., 2004); both of which are said to take 5 minutes to complete (Jaafar et al., 2018). Contributing to this rapid administration time is the number of questions, which is limited to 15; similar to the MCHFS (Ramsay et al., 2011) and the PASSFP (Crist et al., 2004) that include 14 items and 15

items respectively, as well as the STEP-CHILD questionnaire (Seiverling et al., 2011) that contains 15 items. In stark contrast, the most efficacious questionnaire parent questionnaire has been reported to be the BPFAS (Crist & Napier-Phillips, 2018), which, however, consists of 35 items. That said, a research study analysing the psychometric properties of the Q15 is required to ascertain its validity, reliability, overall effectiveness and clinical applicability. Jaafar and colleagues (2018) in their review of parent-report instruments conclude that none of the six tools reviewed offer a comprehensive evaluation of feeding and swallowing difficulties in children with neurological conditions. It must, however, be borne in mind that the purpose of the Q15 as a prioritization tool varies from the predictive use of STEP-CHILD (Seiverling et al., 2011), discriminative feature of the PediEAT (Thoyre et al., 2018), and MCHFS (Ramsay et al., 2011), and the evaluative use of PASSFP (Crist et al., 2004), BPFAS (Crist & Napier-Phillips, 2018), and Children's Eating Behavior Inventory (CEBI, Archer, Rosenbaum, & Streiner, 1991) as asserted by Jaffer and colleagues (2018).

The most clinically useful advantage of Zoom and WhatsApp consultations was the opportunity for the healthcare professionals to observe and ascertain the reality of the mealtime home environment. This included observing how the child is positioned during the mealtime, for instance, whether on the parent's lap with head and trunk support, or with the head tilted back with no support or if placed lying down in a reclining position, as well as any special seating, and where and how the parent positioned themselves. Clinicians have been advised to use teletherapy sessions to offer recommendations on safe and secure seating during mealtimes (Grover, Velella & Murthy, 2020). As the key consideration for children experiencing feeding and swallowing difficulties is to ensure or minimize the risk of food/liquid going down the wrong way to the lungs (aspiration) resulting in chest infections (aspiration pneumonia), speech and language therapists generally aim to enable the child to be positioned upright, with the help of a physiotherapist and occupational therapist (Arvedson, 2008; Winstock, 1994). Increased inter-professional communication has been recommended to ensure the efficacy of teletherapy for children with feeding difficulties (Grover et al., 2020).

Grover and colleagues (2020) assert the need to evaluate a range of factors in determining the viability of offering dysphagia therapy via telehealth, including how to deal with the limited opportunities for modelling and hands-on facets of intervention. Through Zoom and WhatsApp consultations, the therapists were able to demonstrate recommendations, model strategies, request for parents to adopt the recommendations or strategies and to offer feedback. The lack of opportunities to undertake hands-on demonstrations with the child led to the innovative use of alternatives, such as the use of dolls, PowerPoint presentations, CDs, diagrams and leaflets.

That said, a key point was the need for preplanning and preparation ahead of the telehealth sessions. This includes a rethink of the timing of sessions (Grover et al., 2020), with observation sessions offered to mirror the individual child's mealtimes at home. Currently, the telepractice sessions are limited to observations of mealtimes, with any specific assessment of where a child can eat particular food textures not observed. Instead, at present, following-on from the mealtime observation, parents are requested to video-record the child trying specific textures, as advised by the therapist. As the therapist and team became more familiar with the possibilities of telepractice and as this new service-delivery model evolves, pre-planning of the sessions with parents requested to get specific textures ready (Grover et al., 2010) could afford the opportunity to watch the child eating the textures 'in the moment'. This, in turn, would offer a chance to

trial a range of techniques with new food textures to be trialled so that the task and techniques could be modelled.

What was evident during the Zoom and WhatsApp observations and review of video-recordings is that in spite of repeated advice on mealtime positioning, parents were not always adhering to this advice. The multidisciplinary team advice on keeping the child's head and trunk as upright as possible with physical support using the parent's hand, arm or chest or with a rolled towel or soft cushions and advice on the position of the feeder, was not always followed. This reiterates the clinical challenge of parental non-adherence to recommendations reported in the literature including in countries of the Global South, such as Sri Lanka (Hettiarachchi & Kitnasamy, 2013). In a previous study, the reason for non-compliance with speech and language therapy recommendations connected to positioning during mealtimes was found to be a lack of understanding of the adverse health-related consequences of aspiration (Hettiarachchi & Kitnasamy, 2013). Observation of mealtimes at home, whether 'live' or recorded, was immensely useful in uncovering this lack of adherence to positioning/seating recommendations, affording the opportunity to address this concern head-on and to demonstrate and trial changes in positioning and seating. In fact, the opportunity to observe what actually transpires at home during mealtimes via Zoom, WhatsApp and video-recordings has been tremendously useful as part of assessment and intervention strategies, that the team have decided to use it as an essential part of our service hence forward, to enhance the face-to-face consultation. While drawing on the international evidence-base on telehealth and guidelines (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.; Malandraki, 2020; Molini-Avejonas et al., 2015), there is a need to develop a Sri Lankan evidence-base for telehealth services in this country, taking account of local socio-cultural and economic realities.

4.2 Developing observational skills

Although the 'gold standard' for assessment of risk of aspiration is VFSS, FEES and manometry, Dharmarathne and colleagues (2020) argue within their systematic review that no one objective instrument could be said to be comprehensive. The cost of assessments such as manometry (Dharmarathne et al., 2020), as well as its availability, are the primary deterrents for the use of objective assessments in the Global South. This means that Global South speech and language therapists are arguably more reliant on their observational skills within assessment, with the video recordings offering students in particular, additional opportunities to hone their clinical observation skills. This gains some support from the use of video as a pedagogical method within clinical teaching (Cummins & Hulme, 1997; Stokes & Cummins 2013) encouraging reflective practice.

4.3 Grappling with communication barriers

The barriers to clear communication due to the donning of masks is not unusual, though the children becoming distressed as a result at times during the consultation, was not anticipated. Even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community have documented challenges faced in communication during health-related consultations (Cudmore, Henn, O'Tuathaigh, & Smith, 2017; Shukla et al., 2019). This, it is argued, may be a contributing factor to the reported relatively poor health outcomes for this community. Arguably, similar challenges in communication have been experienced by children with speech, language and communication difficulties, especially children with cognitive or learning disabilities.

The muffling of high frequency sounds by masks and the inability for children and parents to access the facial expression and lip patterns of the speech and language therapist and vice versa, placed a burden on communication, which is central to the consultation. The use of clear masks was a viable option. Though these masks have not necessarily been used for the benefit of children with feeding and swallowing difficulties, they have been recommended for use with children and adults who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, who have faced many communication challenges during the pandemic (Taylor-Coleman, 2020). Worldwide, there have been limited commercial suppliers of clear masks, with the Deaf community taking the lead in designing and manufacturing their own. Looking to the future, with the presumed need for wearing masks for a considerable number of years, Chodosh and colleagues (2020) predict that 'masking in healthcare will be an area of activism and practice innovation'.

4.4 Addressing issues of inequality

Given the intersectionality between poverty and disability (Campbell, 2009; Davis, 2019; Goodley et al., 2019) unsurprisingly, access to healthcare services are generally unequal. With the reliance on technology to deliver telepractice, these existing inequalities have, on the one hand, been exacerbated. The lack of smartphone technology or a computer along with adequate computer literacy, impacted on access to the new telepractice initiatives, with those without this technology excluded from this service. This highlights the prevalent inequalities within healthcare, and the intersectionality between poverty and disability. The bidirectional nature of disability and poverty, particularly in low and middle income countries is well documented (World Health Organization, 2011). The families who did not have access to Zoom or WhatsApp were arguably from a working-class background, with only telephone-based alternative telepractice sessions available. This reflects the long-established intersectional nature of poverty and disability (Davis, 2019; Goodley et al., 2019) with the Covid-19 pandemic said to have exacerbated existent inequalities (World Health Organization, 2020). Reflective of this, parents from more remote areas with limited access to computers and technology struggled with the technical aspects of telepractice; a factor to be considered when offering teletherapy (Grover et al., 2020).

5. LIMITATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary limitation is the lack of direct qualitative feedback from parents. In a follow-up study, ethical clearance will be sought from the Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Medicine, in order to interview parents to ascertain their experiences of accessing the Feeding Support Clinic during the pandemic. A more in-depth qualitative study, capturing multiple perspectives of parents, children (where possible and appropriate) and healthcare professionals, would provide richer insights that could eventually influence better models of service delivery.

Four main recommendations can be proposed based on the findings of this study.

1. The formulation of a national policy document in establishing a paediatric dysphagia clinical pathway and prioritization mechanism to be used across clinical settings of hospitals and community centres.
2. The development of a national policy-level document on health guidelines during health pandemics for speech and language therapists and other multi-disciplinary team members involved in paediatric dysphagia management, including the use and disposal of relevant personal protective equipment (PPE).

3. Undertaking research studies capturing multiple stakeholder perceptions of telehealth within the Sri Lankan context, to develop a local evidence-base.
4. Exploring possibilities of varied telehealth modes, in order to offer an equal and equitable paediatric dysphagia service at a national level.

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APPENDIX



Paediatric Dysphagia Q-15 Screening Questionnaire

Name:
D.O.B.:

Date:
Age:

Please fill in the questions below.



Eating and drinking skills

1. Does your child have difficulties with eating? Yes No

If yes, how would you rate your child's difficulties with eating on a scale of 0-10?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

No difficulty Significant difficulty



2. Does your child have difficulties with drinking? Yes No

If yes, how would you rate your child's difficulties with drinking on a scale of 0-10?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

No difficulty Significant difficulty



Nutritional status

3. Do you think your child is underweight? Yes No

4. Does your child have difficulties with gaining weight? Yes No

Mealtime behaviour

- 5. Does your child cough frequently during mealtimes? Yes No
- 6. Does your child cry and get distressed with his/her eyes watering or tearing during mealtimes? Yes No
- 7. Does your child try to clear his throat, gag or choke during mealtimes? Yes No
- 8. Does your child's breathing change (get faster or slower or noisier) during mealtimes? Yes No
- 9. Does the sound of your child's voice change during mealtimes? Yes No
- 10. Does your child vomit during or after mealtimes? Yes No
- 11. Does food/drink come out through your child's nose during or after the meal-time? Yes No
- 12. Does your child often refuse to eat or drink or is he/she very particular about what he/she will try? Yes No



Duration

- 13. Does the mealtime take longer than 40-45 minutes for your newborn or more than 30 minutes for your child who is above 6 months of age? Yes No



General health

- 14. Does your child have a history of frequent coughs, colds, fever and/or phlegm? Yes No
- 15. Has your child been hospitalized due to a chest infection because food/liquid going down the wrong way? Yes No of

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COVID-19: LABOUR ISSUES AND RESPONSES

The Ministry of Labour is the leading government authority in formulating labour policies and implementing strategies and programmes in order to address labour market issues affecting 8.5 million labour force in the country while strengthening employer and employee relationship and improving productivity. The Ministry and Department/Institutions under the purview of the Ministry are taken necessary steps to uplift the overall economic performance of the country by way of assisting in raising labour productivity, upgrading labour standards and maintaining industrial peace. The peace and reconciliation of the workplace which should ensure through tripartite relationship, is the unbreakable foundation of the sustainable industrial development of the country. In this process, laws, legislations, policies and procedures need to be amended considering current global and socio economic environment in order to achieve development objectives of the area of labour in the country.

In this regard, conducting researches are important and findings of the academic research will facilitate to the policy makers to make sure the correct directions are being taken in the process of the policy development. Further in this new situation due to pandemic, requirement of research finding has crucial in policy making for shaping up future of world of work. Therefore, having academic research on labour and employment is a timely requirement of the country. Academic research will provide information, ideas and opinions in shaping up policies and strategies to address the existing and emerging challenges in the labour market.

Ministry of Labour
Colombo, Sri Lanka

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