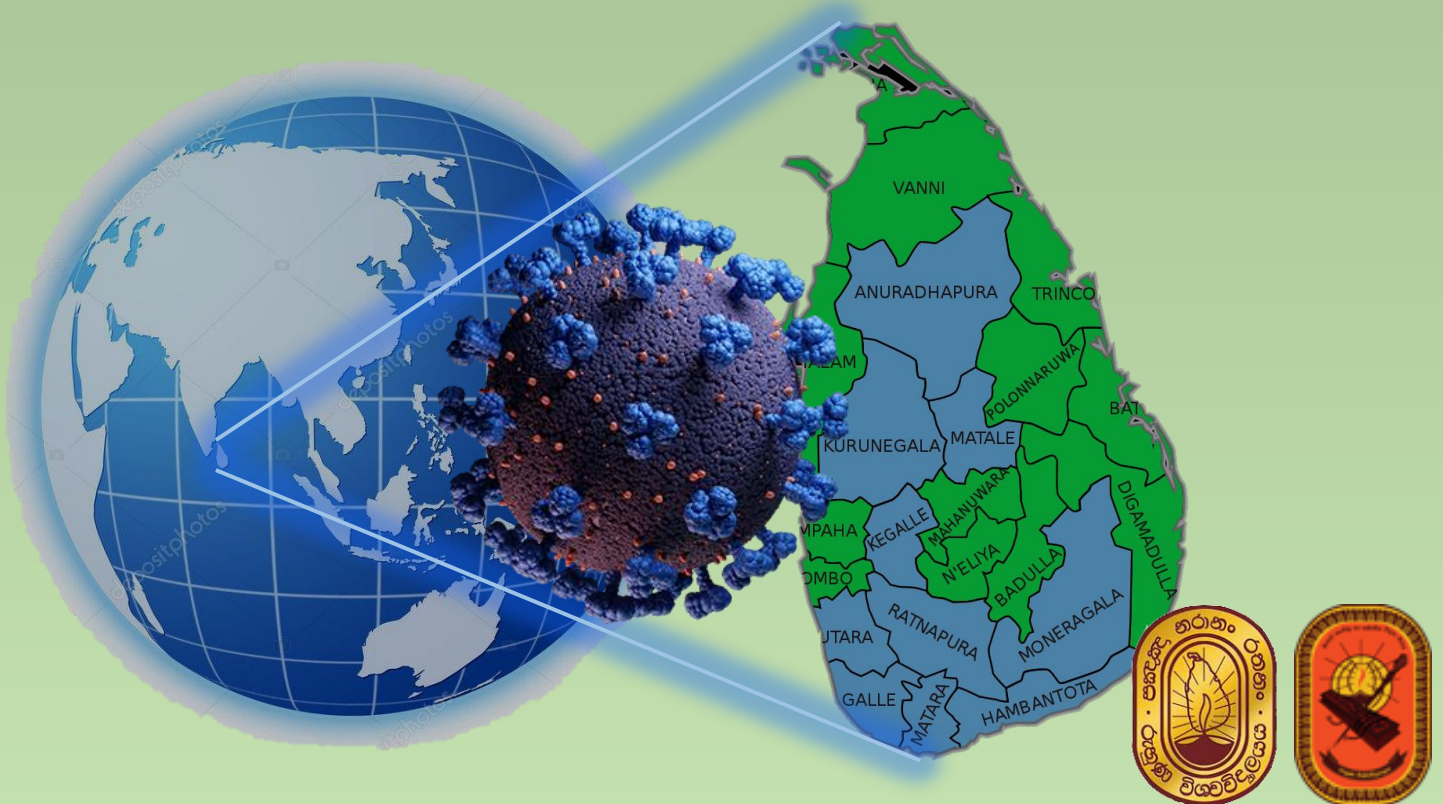


UNIVERSITY OF RUHUNA

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

# COVID-19 SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT ON SRI LANKA

## Part-II The Social Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka





**COVID-19  
SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT  
ON SRI LANKA**

**Part-II  
The Social Impact of the  
COVID-19 Pandemic in Sri  
Lanka**



Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,  
University of Ruhuna,  
Matara, Sri Lanka.

November 2020

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# ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

COVID 19 -	Coronavirus Disease
SME -	Small and Medium Enterprises
UN -	United Nations
BCE -	Before the Common Era
CE -	Common Era
SSI -	Semi-Structured Interviews
SQ -	Structured Questionnaires
LKR -	Sri Lankan Rupees

## GLOSSARY

- Samurdhi* – National program introduced by the government in 1994 and is intended to the alleviate poverty and unemployment among the youth in Sri Lanka
- Grama Niladhari* – Sri Lankan public official appointed by the central government to carry out administrative duties in a *grama niladhari* division (which is a sub-unit of a divisional secretarial
- Dhamma* – In Buddhism *Dhamma* means “cosmic law and order” as applied to the teachings of Buddha and can be applied to mental constructs
- Pirith Chanting* – Defined as “protection or safe guard” refers to the Buddhist practice of reciting certain verses and scriptures in order to ward off misfortune or danger

## EDITORIAL

By the 18th of October, 2020 at 1600 hrs., the global COVID-19 statistics was seen as 40,015,951 patients and 1,115,335 deaths. The enormity of its deadliness, never experienced after the World War II, has had a monstrous effect on human society and compelled the World Health Organization (WHO) to introduce it as a 'Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)' on January 30, 2020 and 'a pandemic global emergency' on 11 March 2020. Many governments imposed strict health and sanitary measures, including social distancing, mask wearing, sanitizing, travel restrictions, quarantine rules, curfews, and boarder shutdowns to control the spread of the virus, the results of which are already being witnessed. As it is reported elsewhere, lockdown and social distancing, for example, have made a strikingly negative impact on mental condition, domestic life, and sexual conduct. The United Kingdom reports a 25% increase in telephone calls with regard to incidents of domestic abuse.

The first confirmed COVID-19 positive case in Sri Lanka was reported on January 3, 2020, and the figure has now reached 5475. Fortunately, the death toll still remains 13. The Government of Sri Lanka and its COVID-19 operational body composed of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Defence, the Presidential Secretariat, the Department of Police, etc., have been commended internationally for their timely effort. In this concern, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Ruhuna, in keeping with its academic and social responsibility, initiated a research project to study the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka with the primary aims of exploring the effects of the pandemic on the economy and the society of Sri Lanka and making viable policy recommendations to overcome them.

The research was conducted as two separate projects under the themes "The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka" and "The Social Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka", respectively, under an overall coordinator and two subject specialist coordinators, either was supported by a subject specific team of researchers. The outcomes are presented in a report with two parts. Part I concerning economy was released in June 2020, and this is Part II concerning society. Both reports are considered integral parts of the overall research and the reader is encouraged to consult them both to perceive the big picture of the economic and social impacts of the novel Coronavirus on Sri Lanka.

As social scientists, here we look at human behaviour concerning seven different areas of life considered to have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; namely; geo-spatial, socio-political, socio-economic, media, psychological, religious and

cultural, and gender. While analyzing the information gathered from interviews with a cross-section of the populace, it was revealed that the impact of the virus has not been completely negative. It has provided new opportunities, avenues and directions for certain creative individuals and forward-looking communities. Regarding geo-spatial behaviour, the rural agrarian community remains almost unaffected, whereas the urban and semi-urban middleclass community has undergone a considerable change. It was discovered that the latter community has moved to a digital space and adopted novel economic strategies. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, the virus outbreak did not reach “a level of mass mental imbalance prevalent in certain societies”. It was revealed that the ‘stay at home’ order has made a positive impact on a section of society in terms of strengthening their family bonds. People became more religious and looked for spiritual support, and turned to indigenous health practices. It was reported that uncertainty prevailed among certain sectors of the daily-wage-earning community as they lost their livelihood. There were complaints about the distribution of the government subsidiary facilities, being, at times, politicized. As reported elsewhere in the world, short term negative impacts on gender relations, particularly among economically unstable people, are revealed in this research.

The novel Coronavirus delinked the so-called ‘global village’ into a multitude of isolated entities. Even the closest neighbours are now physically disconnected from each other. It is the technology, through its ability to create virtual links, which keeps the world connected. Its effects are also reflected in the research strategy adopted in the present study. As is evident from the chapter on Research Methodology, the entire research was carried out using virtual questionnaires and interviews. The research team could not meet up during the planning, data gathering, data analysis, and the writing of the research outcomes; the team members often operated in physical isolation. Consequently, the compiling of this report was, in a way, an effort to ‘piece together’ a collection of fragmentary chapter sections written by many individuals in seclusion.

This task was undertaken by Subject Coordinator Dr Gayathri Wijesundara, with the assistance of a few team members. My challenge as Editor-in-Chief was to bring uniformity to the mass of ‘piecemeal writing’, so as to present a coherent report. The editorial process of the report is complicated and challenging as it strives to analyze the human response to the pandemic gathered in a diversity of approaches adopted by individual section writers. In this concern, Chief Language Editor Senior Professor E.A. Gamini Fonseka’s contribution is highly crucial. His input has been much more than that of a chief language editor. Prof Fonseka was assisted by Dr Sanjaya Samaraweera and Ms Indu Gamage. I express my gratitude to all of them. Dr Nandasiri Keebiyahetti, the Overall Coordinator, kept the project moving and resolving issues as and when they arose. I sincerely appreciate his enormous

contribution. Similarly, Mr W.A.N.D. Wijesinghe formatted the entire report in a very short period of time. The entire team involved in this endeavour had to work under severe stress and the constraints imposed by the lockdown and 'stay at home' conditions. The pressure to finish the report and make the policy recommendations without delay, amidst the duties assigned by the university, was exhausting for the team members. Finally, the report is the outcome of our struggle to accomplish the research objectives under so many discouraging circumstances, and the reader is the best judge of the outcome.

The final aim of this project is to bring out a comprehensive research volume, where it is expected that the most of the limitations are overcome.

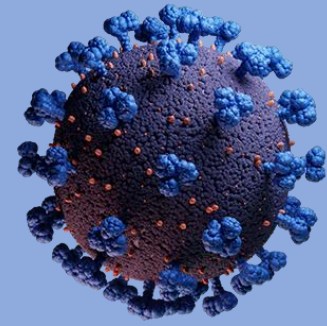
Once more, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Overall Coordinator, the Subject-Specialist Coordinator, the Language Editors and the team of contributors, as well as the participants of this research project, without whose assistance this report would not have been possible.

**Wijerathne Bohingamuwa, MPhil (Cantab), PhD (Oxon)**

**Editor-in-Chief**



# Executive Summary



Societies considered systems composed of various subsystems have been affected globally by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in significant changes in behavioral, attitudinal, relational, and thinking patterns. Although Sri Lanka, as a nation, successfully managed to control the spread of the first wave of the virus and kept the number of patients and deaths at a minimum, at present the impact of its outbreak made on the Sri Lankan society needs serious attention. In that context, this report, which is the outcome of a multidisciplinary research exercise conducted by a team of nineteen members appointed by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Ruhuna, during April to June 2020, which analyses the social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and proposes recommendations based on the findings.

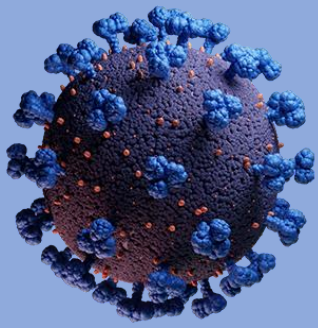
Qualitative dominant mixed methodology followed in formulating this report was such that the data was collected through semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaires and were analysed, using two standard methods - thematic analysis and descriptive content analysis. The findings are presented here under seven subsections under seven different areas of concern specifically identified as subjected to the impact of COVID-19: 1) geo-spatial behaviour; 2) socio-political behaviour; 3) socio-economic behaviour; 4) media behaviour; 5) psychological behaviour; 6) religious and cultural behaviour; and 7) gender behaviour.

Primarily, the pandemic affected the people's perception of time, space and distance and influenced their behaviour accordingly. While the geo-spatial behaviour of the rural agrarian community, which is the least involved in the process of the globalization, has not changed much, the geo-spatial behaviour of the urban and semi-urban middleclass has been shifted to the digital space and that of the upper-middle class in the urban areas has started dealing more actively with a form of neo-liberal capitalism. As a result, the stream of globalization has been seriously challenged. Further, the urban underprivileged community, which has emerged mostly as a product of neo-liberalism, has become the most vulnerable group. However, the lower-middle class in semi-

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The pandemic affected the people's perception of time, space and distance and influenced their behaviour accordingly.

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urban areas, which has long been suffering from the instabilities of neo-liberal capitalism, is enjoying some rest. Thus, it is clear that COVID-19 is in the process of breaking ideological values shaped up by globalization and neo-liberalism.

The emergency situation precipitated by the new coronavirus was a litmus test for the political leadership and the state mechanism. While the government's involvement and collaboration with the security services and state officials in managing the pandemic was appreciated, the malpractices of officials and politicians at grass root levels were highly criticized by the public. Although doubts were expressed on the possibility of holding a parliamentary general election during such a period, there were concerns about the possibility for an anarchic situation to emerge in the absence of a properly established government.

Another area which has been severely affected by the pandemic is the household economy that directly concerns the national economy. It was identified that certain groups are economically impacted fully or partially. While the urban dwellers, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), self-employers, and unconfirmed and temporary contract employees were highly affected, semi-urban and rural daily wage labourers were the worst affected. In contrast, it has also been discovered that, for certain fractions of the populace, the pandemic situation opened new paths, legal as well as illegal, for business and income generation.

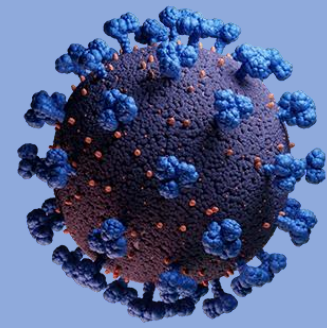
The role of the media was crucial during the period. In a forced situation in which the print media disappeared, the electronic and the social media were both in action in their fullest potential. The immediacy of these media had both pros and cons with regard to the reporting of the pandemic situation despite their vital role in raising awareness in the public about the gravity of the situation as well as the health measures to be taken against it. However, rivalries among the news channels had negative consequences in reporting certain sensitive issues, sometimes undermining fundamental media ethics. Although, social media have the potentials of being the citizens' journalism or participatory journalism, very often incidents of irresponsible use of social media could be observed.

Except the fear and panic witnessed at its initial stages, the pandemic has not made a serious psychological impact on the Sri Lankan society as a whole. In particular, it has not reached a level of

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It is clear that COVID-19 is in the process of breaking ideological values shaped up by globalization and neo-liberalism.

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mass mental imbalance prevalent in certain societies by and large. In fact, at least for a fraction of the society, it has made positive impacts in terms of their mental health, as the curfew and lockdown provided them with an opportunity to ‘stay at home’, and spend more time with their family members, and, in some instances, to strengthen the bonds with their close community.

However, the employees of the health sector, especially those who had to work with the virus-infected patients and the persons suspected virus-positive reported psychological imbalances. Similarly, the COVID-19 victims reported mental imbalances, not directly because of the pathological conditions of the disease but because of the negative responses from the others. Likewise, those who had lost their sources of income had worries over the uncertainty about their future. Nevertheless, the society as a whole has not been mentally unfit, and is now confident over restarting public life. Other than the family ties, the religious and philosophical roots of the culture enabled the people to make sense of the ‘nonsensical’ virus by taking a meaning-making detour, and that also helped them have mental relief during the pandemic.

Further, the COVID-19 pandemic caused several changes in the practice of religious rituals and indigenous knowledge in the Sri Lankan society. As the affairs at religious places accomplished by the devotees in general had been prohibited until further notice, religiosity became a private concern than a community matter. As such, during the pandemic period, one’s lifestyle shows how often one has engaged in the religious rituals, offerings and the other affairs, which are related to one’s life philosophy. Similarly, the pandemic situation revealed that, despite the numerous technological and scientific advances the society is exposed to, the individuals still rely heavily on their indigenous knowledge.

Gender issues related to COVID-19 vary in relation to factors such as the social class, the educational background, and to some extent, the geographical location of the individuals concerned. While some saw this as a good opportunity for strengthening their family bonds, the others were in a dilemma without any recovery plans for the economy of their families.

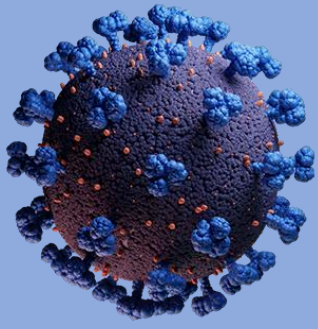
In this context, this study indicates a set of short-term and long-term policy implications in the areas such as rural development and

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social welfare, disaster management and emergency planning, media behaviour, psychological well-being, and the application of indigenous knowledge.

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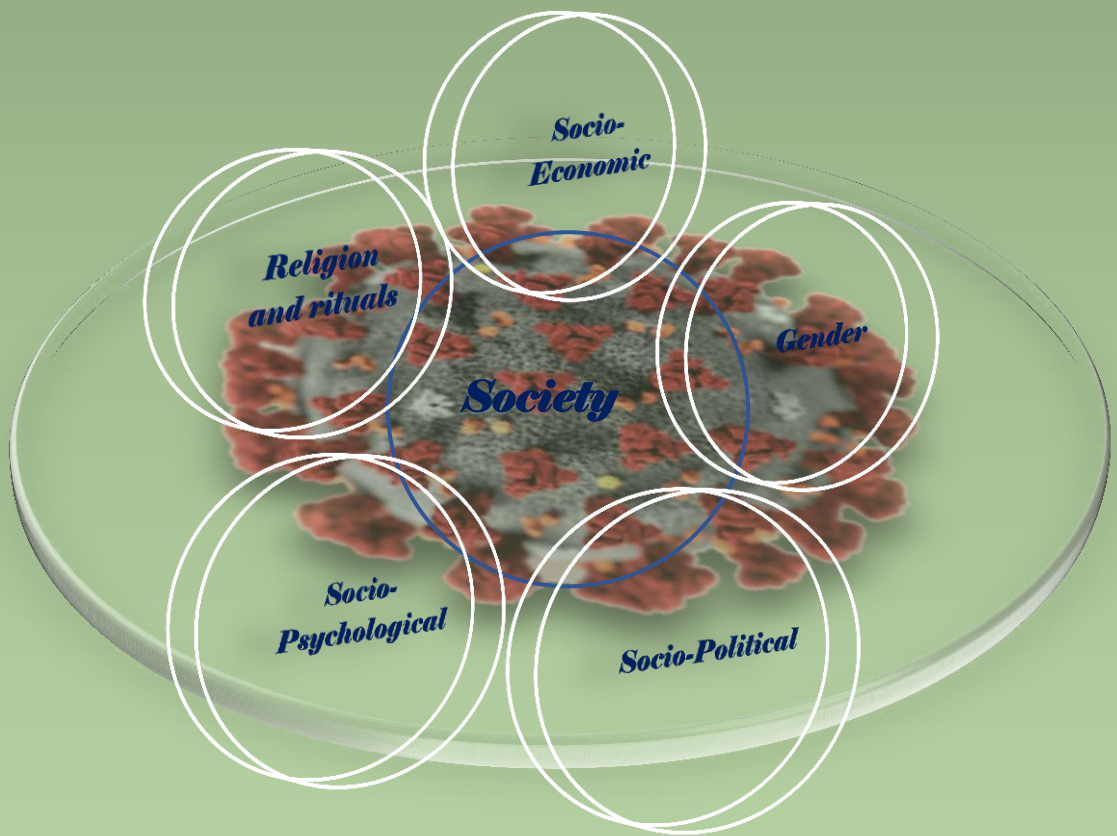
This study indicates a set of short-term and long-term policy implications in the areas such as rural development and social welfare, disaster management and emergency planning, media behaviour, psychological well-being, and the application of indigenous knowledge.

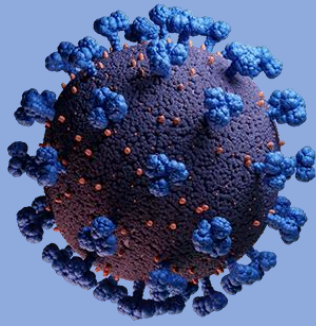
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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION





# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

At the inception itself, the COVID-19 pandemic became a global concern, and the World Health Organization declared internationally a public health emergency on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020 (World Health Organization 2020). Later on, new health and sanitation measures were taken in terms of imposing social distancing, lockdown, and curfew. The focus was further extended to the social and economic impact of the pandemic. The idea that *“the COVID-19 pandemic is far more than a health crisis: it is affecting societies and economies at their core”* (A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19 (April 2020) gained ground thanks to the global-level intervention of the UN. The social impacts of the outbreak, which range from the immediate effects to the long-term structural changes, are, in fact, gaining much attention from researchers all over the world.

From a historical perspective, virus outbreaks can be traced back to the ancient civilizations in Greece (Little, 2006) as well as in India (Piyadassi Thero, 1999). Ever since, the world has witnessed waves of different diseases caused by a strain of viruses: Antonine Plague, Leprosy, Plague of Justinian, New World Smallpox outbreak, Cholera, Yellow Fever, Russian Flu, Spanish Flu, Asian Flu, Hong Kong Flu, HIV/AIDS, Swine Flu, SARS, Ebola, MERS, causing the deaths of millions of people and altering the course of history. Sri Lanka Brief 18/03/2020. “Visualizing the History of Pandemics”.

Sri Lanka, since her historic settlements started in the middle of the first millennium BCE, has encountered a number of epidemics as is evident from its recorded history. For example, the outbreak of Malaria has been considered as one of the main causes for the collapse of the *Rajarata* civilization (First civilization of the island that originated in the dry zone) in the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE (Roberts & Indrapala, 1971).

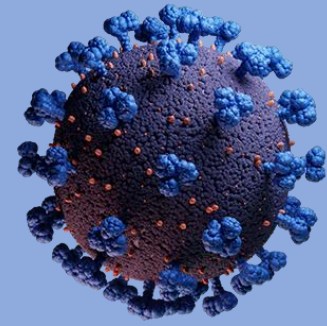
With the arrival of western powers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century CE, the island appears to have been exposed to several epidemics that had been

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previously unknown. This is primarily due to the migration of people/ labour force from various regions in the world. The Portuguese, the first western power to rule the littorals of the island, frequently used imported labourers, such as African slaves, for fortifying their territories. With the arrival of African slaves on the island leprosy and cholera spread and as a quarantine measure the leprosy patients were kept on the Island of Leprosy in Batticaloa, where they had their own community-level administration.

During the British occupation in Sri Lanka, under a *laissez-faire* economic policy a large number of Indian labourers were brought into the island to work in the plantation sector in the 1850s. With their arrival, Cholera, Small Pox, Measles and Malaria spread rapidly within the country. As a result, the Public Health Department established quarantine centres in Mannar on the north-western coast of Sri Lanka and introduced the relevant vaccinations to restrict the spread of an epidemic (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020).

This report presents the results of a research conducted on the ‘Social Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka’. This research was undertaken by a team of researchers appointed by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna.

## 1.2 Research problem

What are the Social Impacts of COVID-19 on Sri Lanka?

## 1.3 Main research objective

To Examine Social Impacts of COVID-19 on Sri Lanka in a Wide Scope.

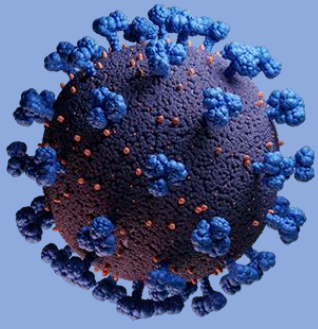
## 1.4 Specific objectives

- I. To examine the social changes in the human geo-spaces of Sri Lanka
- II. To analyse the social impact of COVID-19 from a gender perspective
- III. To identify and explain the socio-political impact of COVID-19 on Sri Lanka

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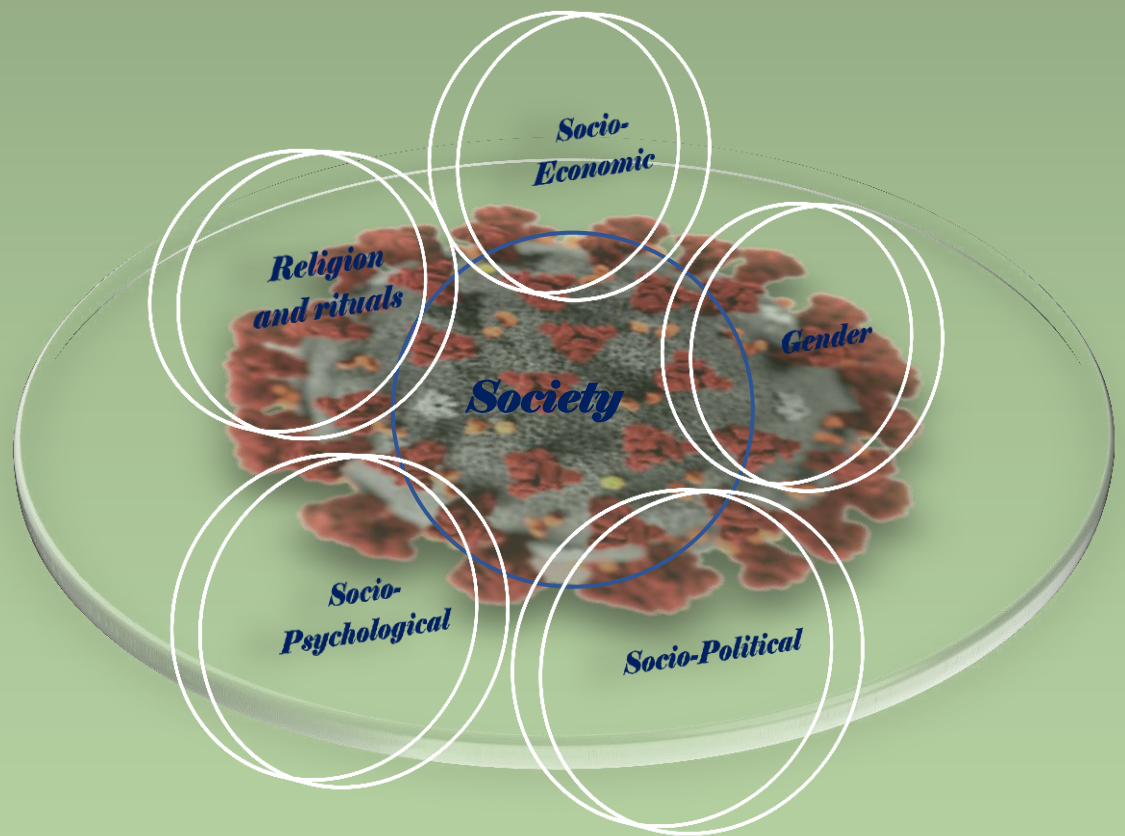


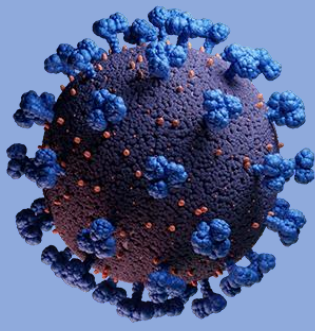
- IV. To describe the socio-economic impact COVID-19 on Sri Lanka
- V. To examine socio-cultural impact of COVID-19 on Sri Lanka
- VI. To describe socio-psychological impact of COVID-19 on Sri Lanka
- VII. To analyse the role of religious rituals and indigenous knowledge while facing impacts of COVID-19 on Sri Lanka
- VIII. To make policy recommendations on the basis of research findings and conclusions



## CHAPTER II

# METHODOLOGY





# METHODOLOGY

The research project was carried out under a qualitative dominant mixed methods approach.

## 2.1 Qualitative dominant mixed methods approach

The Social Impacts of COVID-19 on Sri Lanka are deeply concerned with socio-cultural, socio-political, and geo-spatial factors implicitly rooted in the complex socio-cultural norms, beliefs, and practices of the Sri Lankan society which the respondents are sometimes not ready to discuss openly. Therefore, the primary concern was to deal with the 'rich and deep' primary data rather than the 'numeric' data, and hence, the focus was made on a qualitative research methodology (Bryman, 2012).

Understanding the social impacts of COVID-19 on Sri Lanka was a main objective of this research project. The data collecting procedure under a qualitative dominant mixed methods approach considers 'words' more significant than 'numbers': such an approach focuses on facts elicited in terms of 'what', 'how' and 'why' of social phenomena, rather than those by 'how many', 'how often', and 'how much.' Accordingly, socio-cultural, socio-economic, and socio-political issues are well-grasped when a qualitative research methodology is followed, since it focuses on the comprehension of social experiences, attitudes, practices, norms and beliefs (Bricki & Green, 2002; Bryman, 2012, Kumara, 2016). Philosophically, an ethno-methodological approach was considered useful to understand and analyse, the 'real' of social impacts of COVID-19 on Sri Lanka as it is. A popular qualitative research methodology tradition followed in the ethnomethodology model introduced by the American sociologists Harold Garfinkel and Harvey Sacks focuses on 'how people make sense of the everyday aspects of their world and how they make their social environment accountable to themselves' (Babbie, 2012; Heritage, 2013; in Kumara, 2016).

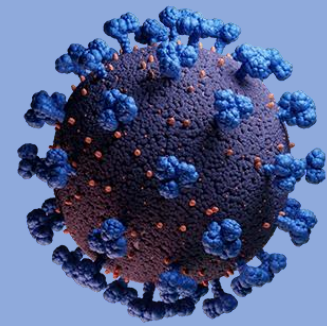
The data collecting procedure under a qualitative dominant mixed methods approach considers 'words' more significant than 'numbers'

## 2.2 Quantitative methodology to support the qualitative methodology

Even though this research project is principally conducted under a qualitative research approach, a number of issues surfaced while generalizing and validating the data. The reliability, objectivity, and generalizability of the qualitatively obtained results is analysed quantitatively, since it deals with numeric data related to mathematically and statistically calculated social phenomena. (Harwell, 2011; Muijs, 2011, Kumara, 2016), However, a quantitative methodology is not appropriate in researching into the nature of the social arrangements and the circumstances that influenced them. In addition, the measurement process of social facts has often the danger of becoming artificial. Hence, even if a quantitative methodology does not play a dominant role in this particular research project, it is used only to counterbalance the biases that may occur in the qualitative data.

## 2.3 The selected type of qualitative-dominant mixed methodology

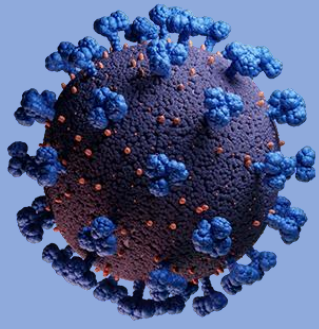
The typology of mixed methodology is three-dimensional at the level of mixing (partially-mixed or fully-mixed), time orientation (concurrent or sequential), and emphasis on approaches (equal status or dominant status) (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, Kumara, 2016). According to this dimensional typology, a mixed methodological research is categorised under eight themes: partially mixed concurrent-equal status design (P1); partially mixed concurrent-dominant status design (P2); partially mixed sequential-equal status design (P3); partially mixed sequential-dominant status design (P4); fully mixed concurrent-equal status design (F1); fully mixed concurrent-dominant status design (F2); fully mixed sequential-equal status design (F3); and fully mixed sequential-dominant status design (F4) (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). When the above eight themes are mixed with this notation system, there are 24 combinations of qualitative and quantitative approaches in the mixed research methodology' (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Kumara, 2016).




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## 2.4 'Partially mixed concurrent dominant status design (P2)'

According to its objectives and questions, this research mainly focuses on examining social issues/ challenges/ impacts of COVID-19, including gender, religion, norms, beliefs, traditions and local knowledge. Hence, a qualitative research methodological approach is mainly used. On the other hand, questionnaire surveys were conducted as a strategy to counterbalance qualitative data. Thus, when the mixing of this research dimensions is considered, it can be identified as a 'partially mixed'. Both qualitative and quantitative data collecting methods were applied 'concurrently'. Therefore, the research methodology can be identified as 'partially mixed concurrent qualitative dominant' status.

## 2.5 Online questionnaire survey

In this research study on the social impact of COVID-19 of Sri Lanka, a questionnaire survey was conducted with the foremost objective of collecting numeric data and a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to collect qualitative data. The questionnaire was circulated among the university students from diverse social categories scattered all over the island of Sri Lanka, through the university Learning Management System (LMS), and among the rest of the community through social media. By these methods, a total of 447 copies of the questionnaire were collected from a wide range of diverse social spaces.

## 2.6 Data analysis

### 2.6.1 Thematic analysis methods

Basically, as prescribed by Tuckett (2005), thematic analysis methods were applied in identifying, sorting, and breaking up of sub-segments of qualitative data gathered from the interviews.

### 2.6.2 Descriptive content analysis method

In order to analyse the communicative aspects, the purpose, the content, the messages and the impacts of spoken as well as unspoken elements in the communication, the multiple human

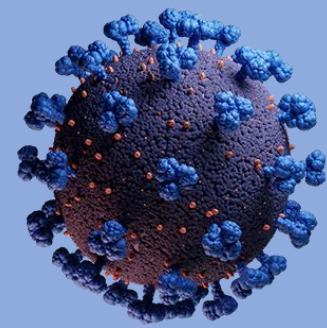
Thematic analysis methods were applied in identifying, sorting, and breaking up of sub-segments of qualitative data gathered from the interviews.

responses gathered from a wide variety social contexts were studied under the descriptive content analysis method introduced by Krippendorff (2018).

## 2.7 Research ethics and Limitations of the Study

Research ethics must be thoroughly respected at all times in social researching, which is a complex but crucial task. Any society is multifaceted. As a result, social ethics vary in relation to diverse social structures, arrangements, beliefs, cultures, norms, religions, economic situations, and politics. The importance of research ethics has been realized by many social researchers since the 1960s. That supported the enforcement of regulations as well as the application of social and behavioural research methods and theories in order to secure no-harm results from the research (Anderson & DuBois, 2007; Kumara, 2016). Notions of research ethics have been strongly considered in the research project and particularly, participants were well-informed and made to agree to the process of research, data collecting, audio recording, anonymity, and confidentiality.

The research was done during the quarantine period of COVID-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka from April to June 2020. Therefore, the researchers were unable to do face to face in-depth interviews with the respondents. Hence, the researchers did not have an opportunity to observe respondent's facial expressions and gestures. Further, to overcome the above limitation, the researchers conducted the interviews via telephone conversations. Moreover, 66 Semi Structured interviews were done. Interestingly, telephone conversations allowed people to be more honest than face to face conversations as they do not get an opportunity have direct eye contacts of the interviewer.



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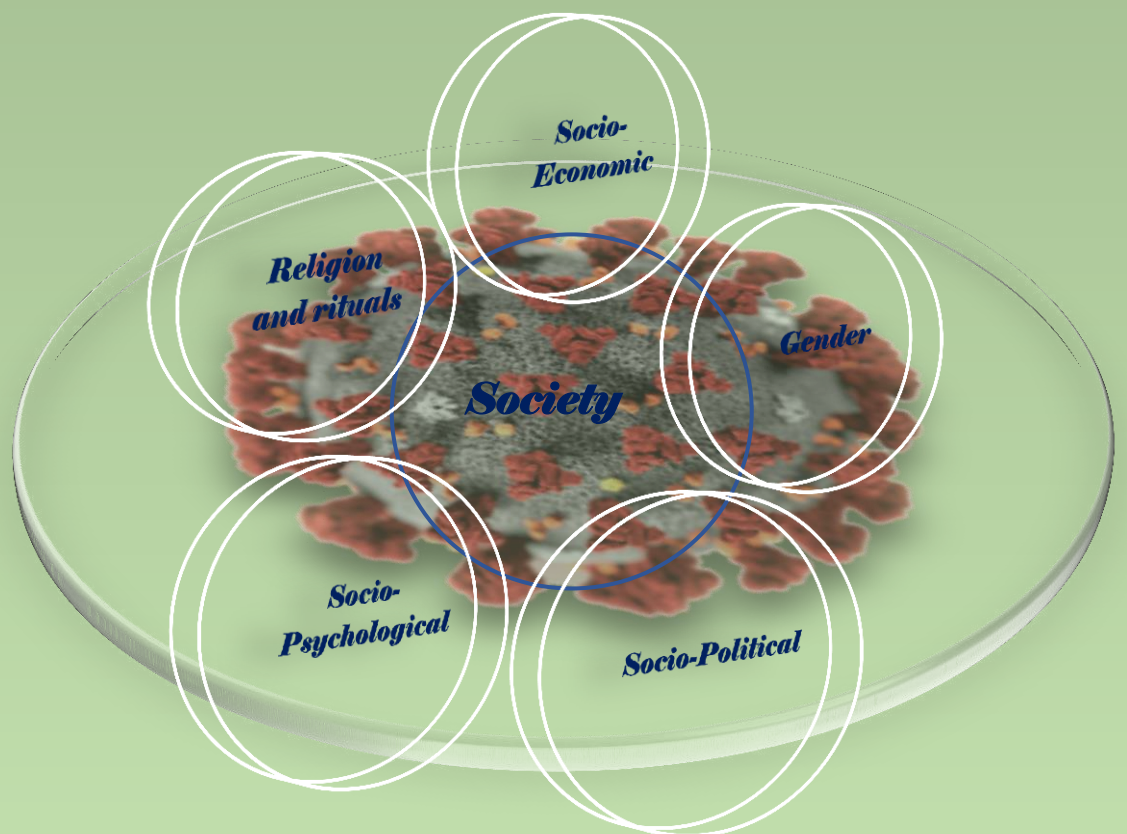
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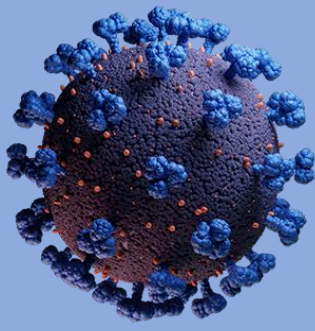




## CHAPTER III

# **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND LESSONS LEARNT FROM SRI LANKA COVID-19: RESEARCH RESULTS AND FINDINGS**





# **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND LESSONS LEARNT FROM SRI LANKA: COVID 19 RESEARCH RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

## **Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the research carried out by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna, under the topic 'Social Impact of COVID-19 on Sri Lanka'. It is divided into seven (7) different sections under seven different sub-themes, which roughly represent seven aspects of the Sri Lankan society identified as affected by the New Coronavirus: 1) spatial behaviour; 2) socio-political behaviour; 3) socio-economic behaviour; 4) media behaviour; 5) psychological behaviour; 6) religious and cultural behaviour; and 7) gender behaviour.

## **SECTION 3.1**

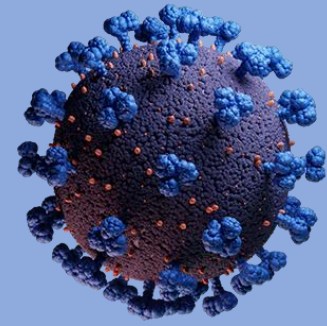
### **COVID-19 Impact on Geo-Spatial Behaviour**

#### **3.1.1 Introduction**

This section examines how the human geo-space of Sri Lanka has been changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is organized under two sub-sections. First, it analyzes the variation in the human geographical space in Sri Lanka. Since the human geospatial 'space' is shaped by the influence of socio-economic and cultural factors, political geo-spatial criteria and boundaries do not play an important role in determining human geographical space. However, multiple physical environmental factors, as well as various human

Since the human geospatial 'space' is shaped by the influence of socio-economic and cultural factors, political geo-spatial criteria and boundaries do not play an important role in determining human geographical space.





geographical factors, contribute to the determination of human geographical space. For example, in the case of a fishing village, the physical geographical location and the social context of the area determine the nature of the human geo-space (Stedman, 2003).

Secondly, this section examines how COVID-19 differentiated Sri Lankan's perception of distance and time variables. The human perception of 'time and distance' is not the same as actual 'time and distance'. Let's consider two individuals who travel approximately the same physical distance in two different geographical locations;

Person A lives in an urban core of the world and travels 500 kms in two hours every day from home to work.

Person B lives in Matara, in Southern Sri Lanka, and travels 500 kms to Jaffna, in northern Sri Lanka, in twelve hours.

There is a difference between 'the actual time and distance' and 'the time distance perceived' by A and B. Therefore, 'the actual distance and time' and 'the perceived distance and time' are not universal. According to distance decay functional module, distance influences cultural or spatial interactions and the interaction between two locales declines as the distance between them increases (Fouberg & Murphy, 2020). Moreover, as Oke (2009) shows that the development of technology and mode of transportation has changed the perception of time and the globalization process has disproportionately compressed the perception of distance and time in human geography.

### 3.1.2 Variation in the human geo-space

Globalization has expanded the behavioural landscape of the humans and COVID-19 has broken that trend by limiting the movement of people to the minimum. The individual behavioural landscape was minimized by the practice of maintaining physical distance between individuals. The eminent philosopher Francis Fukuyama comments on this situation as follows:

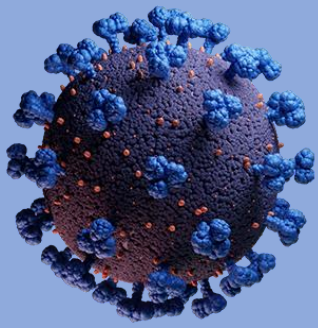
**“Li:** *A lot of people say they feel the human geo-boundary between work and life has been blurred. Do you feel that way?*

**Fukuyama:** *Sure. I think also there is probably going to be a permanent change, because people are seeing they can actually do*

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Globalization has expanded the behavioural landscape of the humans and COVID-19 has broken that trend by limiting the movement of people to the minimum.

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*things in a different way. For example, I was constantly on airplanes in my previous life, and I haven't flown since early March now, and I think one thing people may realize is, it's really not necessary to spend all that time on airplanes. We can actually accomplish the same things over the internet. So we'll have to see how things go back to normal. I suspect they never will" (Li, 2020).*

The situation in question is relevant to Sri Lanka. Yet the impact of COVID-19 on the human geo-spaces varies across the rich and poor divide in society on the basis of residential areas the individuals are destined to live in as determined by their economic status. For example, the human geo-space of the poor residing in urban slums has shrunk due to the pandemic situation.

#### The urban poor on the limitation of human geo-space

*"Due to curfew declared by the police, we cannot go out. We don't have a yard, and cannot leave home. We have only two perches for the house and the compound both."*

**SSI 01:** Housewife, (41 years, female, living in urban slum area, Pamankada, Colombo). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 11, 13, 14, and 08 and **SQ** 37, 38, 39, 230, 431, 151, 226].

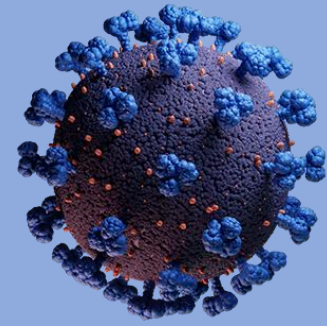
The limitation of human geo-space has adversely affected the urban poor and their economic difficulties as well as their lack of alternatives have become a serious issue. The same impact quite differently has changed the human geo-spatial behaviour of the urban middle-class. They have digitally shifted from their physical geo-space to a virtual geo-space to overcome the issue. Therefore, it is surmised that COVID-19 has also trapped urban human activity into a digital space.

#### The urban middleclass on the limitation of human geo-space

*"I'm watching films and reports on the new coronavirus, reading articles on corona ... moving up and down in my FB site, participating in zoom meetings... that's all life ... going nowhere physically."*

**SSI 28:** Government officer, (52 years, male, middleclass family background, living in an urban area in Ratnapura. [This statement was crosschecked and verified by **SSI** 11, 20, 34 & **SQ** 1, 2, 8, 11, 17, 21, 26, 30, 32].

The human geo-space of the poor residing in urban slums has shrunk due to the pandemic situation.



Transition from a large human geo-space to a digital space limited to a computer screen has been the experience of Fukuyama who represents the American middle-class urban society same as that of the members of the Sri Lankan urban middleclass.

Generally, the human geo-space of the rural communities of Sri Lanka is not spread in a vast area and the impact of COVID-19 on their geospatial behaviour does also remain at a minimum level. This can be considered a unique situation. The reasons for the minimum impact of COVID-19 on the rural areas of Sri Lanka can be identified in terms of less population density, higher dependence on farming, freedom to engage in agriculture, and the lack of knowledge about COVID-19.

#### The rural poor on the limitation of human geo-space

*“We don't have such a problem. We go everywhere. Those who grow tea can go to their farmland. So, we can walk around in the village without any trouble.”*

**SSI 19:** Rural villager, (46 years old, male, living in a rural wet zone area, low income family, Neluwa, Galle district). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 20, 23, 24].

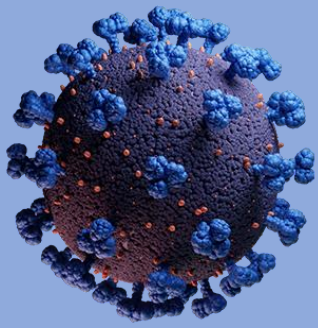
The question, *“Do you think whether COVID-19 has influenced your social relation intimacy?”* was answered negatively by 54% of respondents. It is surmised that the reason for such a negative response is that the majority of the participants (students) who represent the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Ruhuna are from rural areas (Fernando, 2005). Moreover, they have also not observed any clear change in their human geospatial behaviour as a result of COVID-19.

### 3.1.3 Impact on spatio-temporal perception

The globalization process linked with increasing new knowledge and technology caused the people's innate perception of distance and time to change under the concept of 'Global village'. However, COVID-19 caused a regression in it as confirmed by Francis Fukuyama.

*‘I'm actually just as busy as I was before this shutdown happened, except that I just go from one online meeting to another. It's hard to*

The globalization process linked with increasing new knowledge and technology caused the people's innate perception of distance and time to change under the concept of 'Global village'.



*keep track what day of the week it is because every day seems the same as the day before. It's not been that bad, because actually teaching is one of the things that, it turns out, isn't hard to do online, and it's been interesting trying to adapt to it. I've been working and trying to move my teaching materials to an online format anyhow, and this has been a good excuse to try it out.'* (Li, 2020).

What did Fukuyama mean by his statement? Perception of distance and time differs when people associate with each other in the digital space, unlike in the physical space in their day-to-day activities. While moving within the physical space, consciousness about distance and time is formulated in terms of speed units. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of 'time' does not make sense within the human mind, because there is no diversity in the digital space as in the physical space. This situation has created many impacts on the middle-class populace of Sri Lanka, especially, government officers, university teachers, higher education students, and those who were compelled to adapt to a requirement to work from home or office without physical contact with any people. They were subjected to a complex mind set inspired by both anxiety and happiness in a world without time and distance.

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of 'time' does not make sense within the human mind, because there is no diversity in the digital space as in the physical space.

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#### The urban middleclass on the limitation of human geo-space

*"COVID-19 has created a problematic lifestyle for us, but we are enjoying it. I'm not doing anything other than reading, watching movies, and eating my meals, drinking tea, doing all my office work by the computer. I do not want to meet any people.... I have plenty of freedom... but again I feel some kind of shock. I cannot go anywhere. But why do I want to travel? ... What the hell?"*

**SSI 28:** Government officer, (52 years old, male, living in an urban area, middleclass family background, Ratnapura. [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 06, 12, 17].

It is reported that COVID-19 impact has not affected the rural agricultural community of Sri Lanka, whose time-distance behaviour is significantly narrow. The travel distances of the rural community are limited to the space within the boundaries of their villages and marketplaces. Phenomena outside their villages do not affect them

much since the process of globalization is not linked up with their spatial behaviour.

#### The rural middleclass on the limitation of human geo-space

*“Most of the inhabitants of our village are farmers. During the COVID-19 curfew periods also they were permitted by the police to move about in their village as they had to attend on their cultivations. So, COVID-19 did not cause any change in their geo-space.”*

**SSI 18:** Young villager, (24 years old, male, living in a rural agricultural area, lower middle class family background, Bandarawela). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 21].

The COVID-19 has created serious negative impacts on a large segment of the middle and upper-class community of Sri Lanka, who have built their economic and social life based on a contraction process of time and space variables. For example, those who work in the tourism industry, have to travel long distances in national and international geographical areas for trade, employment, and education; those who operate in capacities such as doctors as well as military officers cannot shift from physical spaces to digital spaces in their work. Hence, such cases were compelled to face a lot of problems of stress.

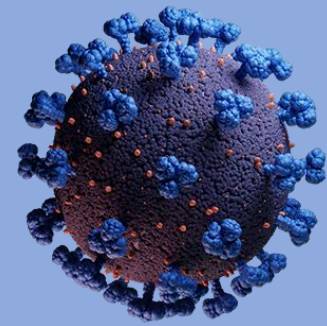
#### Challenges faced by professionals on duty

**Question:** *Your brother is a doctor, right?*

**Answer:** *Yes, he is working at the Ragama hospital. His wife is also doctor and she is working at the Karapitiya hospital in Galle.*

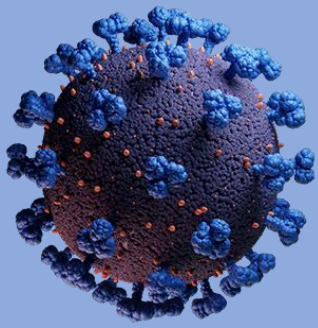
**Question:** *So what has happened to their lives due to COVID-19?*

**Answer:** *There are a lot of problems now. Both my brother and his wife are at a risk. Sometimes they have to deal with the COVID-19 patients who have been reported from both Ragama and Karapitiya. Ragama situation is more dangerous. My brother and his fellow doctors have been provided with meals by the Sri Lanka Navy. As COVID-19 has affected some navy officers who supplied meals to the doctors, there is panic among the doctors. My sister-in-law is currently pregnant, but as a doctor she has report to the hospital for work.*



The COVID-19 has created serious negative impacts on a large segment of the middle and upper-class community of Sri Lanka





*Their children are with us. As a family, they are in disarray.”*

**SSI 23:** Parliament research officer, (40 years old, female, living in an urban area, middle class family background, Battaramulla, Colombo).

#### Impact on Tourism Industry

*“I am a traveler and my business also depending people who are traveling around the world. I didn't think COVID-19 would come to Sri Lanka. All my businesses are based on tourism was over.”*

**SSI 06:** Tourist hotel owner, (58 years old, male, living in urban core area, rich class family background, Colombo).

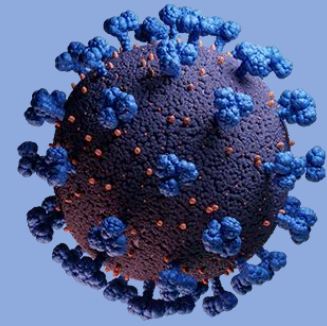
When COVID-19 challenged ‘perception of distance and time’, it became a pleasant and interesting change for them since they have a chance to relax and enjoy life with their family members.

This situation has differently affected the people living in semi-urban areas. As a result of their education, most of them succeed in joining the lower middleclass or the middleclass. However, they have busy and boring lifestyles under the compulsion of maintaining a neo-liberal capitalist lifestyle; most probably both husband and wife working as government employees. Their children are studying in prestigious town schools and they lifestyle is also affected by the morbid atmosphere. Such middleclass people living in semi-urban areas were engaged in a daily struggle to manage time and distance before the pandemic. Thus, when COVID-19 challenged ‘perception of distance and time’, it became a pleasant and interesting change for them since they have a chance to relax and enjoy life with their family members.

#### Enjoying togetherness within the family

*“After a long time, all of us could stay at home with the children, our salaries being paid without any work done by us. Really, it was an enjoyable period for us.”*

**SSI 02:** Female, (47 years old, living in a semi-urban area, lower-middle class family background, Hambanthota).



### 3.1.4 Section summary

Perception of space, time and distance changed to a considerable extent by globalization and neo-liberal capitalism. It has disproportionately affected various social groups living in various geographical areas in Sri Lanka. The COVID-19 pandemic has seriously challenged the ideology of globalization and neo-liberal capitalism and its impact has differently affected different physical and human geographical areas of Sri Lanka. However, the sense of geographical location, time and distance of the rural agrarian community, which is the least involved in the process of the globalization has not changed much. The geospatial behaviour of the urban and semi-urban middle-class has shifted to a digital space. While the geospatial behaviour of the urban upper-middle class that deals with neo-liberal capitalism more actively has changed the stream of globalization has been seriously challenged. Further, the urban underprivileged community, that emerged mostly as a product of neo-liberalism has become the most vulnerable group. However, the lower middle class in the semi-urban areas, which has long been suffering from instabilities of neo-liberal capitalism, is getting some rest. Thus, it is clear that the COVID-19 is breaking ideological values shaped by globalization and neo-liberalism. At the same time, the human perception about space and time and distance based on these ideologies are failing and it has created diverse issues and impacts in diverse geospatial locations.

## SECTION 3.2

### COVID-19 Impact on Socio-Political Behaviour

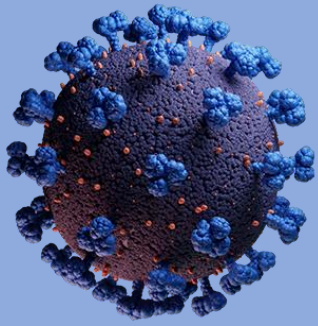
#### 3.2.1 Introduction

While the pandemic started undermining the strength of the political structures around the world and creating unusual types of political crises, both domestically and internationally, the government of Sri Lanka saw it as a positive factor in its rise to power. Political decisions became crucial in the national-level effort to manage the social spreading of the pandemic. While certain states had to reschedule their elections, the democratic rights of the

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The COVID-19 pandemic has seriously challenged the ideology of globalization and neo-liberal capitalism and its impact has differently affected different physical and human geographical areas of Sri Lanka.

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people were being undermined globally by the stringent rules the governments were compelled to adopt in the fight against the plague.

In this research the participants' responses to the socio-political impact of COVID-19 Sri Lanka revealed their dissatisfaction with certain politicians' behaviour during the distribution of aids among the citizens. Their opportunistic behaviour caused many discrepancies in the donation programs, causing the deserving to forego the donations and undeserving to benefit. Many participants showed dislike and insecurity about holding the general election as had been planned before the crisis, while some were desperate to have elections. Some used their political influence to attract undue amounts of subsidies such as the LKR 5000 grant. Even though there were criticisms, the majority liked the way in which President Gotabhaya Rajapakse managed the situation with the support of a contingency of services formed of the Sri Lanka national security forces, the national medical personnel, the national health personnel, and the government administrative bodies. A considerable number of the participants showed their dislike for the prevailing parliamentary system and the seemingly democratic proceedings, and many of them appreciated the military taking control of the situation. People seemed to have lost confidence in the current parliament and the findings are explained in detail below under the different themes.

### **3.2.2 Ineffectiveness of the government aid distribution**

Sri Lankan government decided to distribute an LKR 5000 worth subsidy to be granted to every deserving citizen identified as a victim of COVID-19 (Jayasekara, 2020). As stated by SSI 41, the government's bias and ineffectiveness in disbursement of subsidies was revealed in the politicians' interference throughout this process. The *Samurdhi* regulators as well as politicians engaged in distributing subsidies and they supported their allies and loyalists. Ultimately, it appeared as a venture to seek political gains in a tragic situation. However, some participants did not get directly impacted or did not have any personal experience of the scenario.

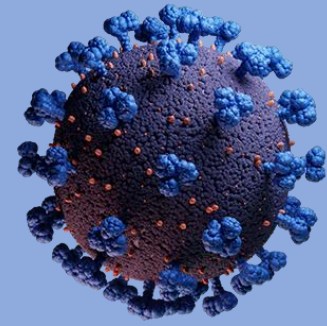
The participants in this research reflected on how the public servants were manipulated by political propaganda. Subsidies which

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The participants in this research reflected on how the public servants were manipulated by political propaganda.

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were supposed to be delivered to the COVID-19 victims were used for election campaigns of certain local politicians. Further, it reflected that the benefits were not distributed based on a pragmatically formulated selection procedure.

#### Negative opinion about the state

*“Whatever the government, they do those things to cheat people. In one hand, we cannot say it’s cheating. They must do it to reach their political ends. They give some amount of money and just cool down (calm) people.”*

**SSI41:** National tourist guide, (43 years old, Kaluwamodara, Aluthgama). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 34, 15, 06, 01, 03, 05].

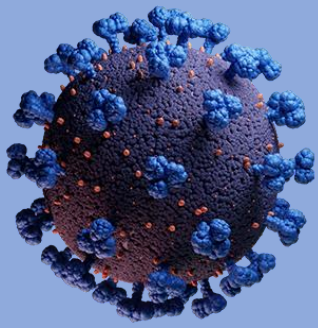
The above statement reflects incidents of nepotism and favouritism taking place to repulse the people’s trust in democracy in governance. Some respondents highlighted corruption as a prominent feature of politics, even though it is not always right.

#### Beneficiary of Moratorium

*“After Lockdown they say no need of paying the loan until six months, they say to sell the dhal LKR 65 which was sold before more than hundred. Salmon can sell at 200 Rupees but later we had to sell for LKR 100. Did government do proper investigation before saying these things? Businessmen have already bought the goods at higher price. Can do they sell those goods to lower price as the government say to do so? It is a huge loss for them. Later those decisions were revised. The control price disappeared. We cannot work for this kind of political purposes.”*

**SSI06:** Hotel entrepreneur, (58 years old, Postgraduate qualification, Colombo 07). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 34, 01, 08, 12, 13].

*“The control price disappeared. We cannot work for this kind of political purposes” - Hotel entrepreneur*



Some respondents pointed out several shortcomings in the welfare policies and political decisions taken in the face of COVID-19. They were critical of the government's decision to provide subsidies to the COVID-19 affected people at the rate of LKR 5000 per head. As they pointed out, every family is eligible to receive an LKR 5000 allowance if they are direct victims of the pandemic. However, as some respondents said, the government had no proper definition of a "family", and distributed the funds in a shelter-based pattern. Some families that shared only one shelter did not receive the LKR 5000 allowance.

### 3.2.3 Market decisions affecting traders

The trade community alleged that the government's decision to reduce the prices of the essential commodities in order to grant concessions was detrimental to their businesses. They complained that they incurred a huge loss through the incidental sales of high-priced dry foods such as salmon and lentils.

### 3.2.4 Less interest in politics among women

According to research discussions, many female research participants were not interested in commenting on the political events that transpired during the COVID-19 pandemic period. They were not sure whether the voice of the people was strong enough to influence the government.

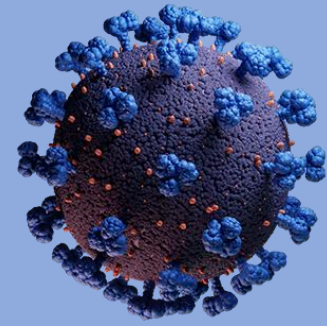
#### Affected by a sense of helplessness

*"If they are from the government, we listen what they say. We listen to the news. I am not into politics. My husband makes different comments. I just say that we cannot do like that. We can't talk to them unless we talk inside the house. We cannot fight with the president or the prime minister, even we give our comments to a local minister, and they use police to control us."*

SSI01: Housewife, (41 years old, studied until 4<sup>th</sup> grade, lives in slums, Pamankada, Wellawatta Colombo). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 39].

This reflects that most females of the urban poor, who have only received their primary education, were not interested in the

The trade community alleged that the government's decision to reduce the prices of the essential commodities in order to grant concessions was detrimental to their businesses.



activities directly linked with politics and the government. Even though the male participants criticized the government and involved in political discussions, female participant expressed that they did not have any influence on the government. The experiences they had were of no value for a public opinion.

### 3.2.5 Politicization of the public services

#### Comments on the distribution of subsidies

*“How is the distribution of LKR 5000 subsidies in your area?”*

*“There are some discriminations against the opposite party UNP (United National Party). It’s not a new thing though. In the other hand the people who are dying for the LKR 5000, they really don’t have a necessity. Machan (buddy) I live in a village. Villagers still didn’t feel the impact of the pandemic. The seriousness of this is people who work.”*

**SSI21:** Jailor, (42 years old, A/L passed, Galle). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 01, 03, 05, 06, 12, 13, 14, 38].

As many government agencies and security forces were strict in their behaviour, the people’s trust in the public institutions was beginning to diminish.

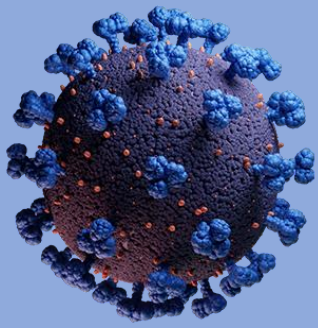
The above research participants said that some people did not receive the subsidies even while they were eligible and speculated that the government subsidies were given to those who were politically affiliated rather than those who were eligible to receive them.

#### Criticisms on administrative authorities

*“Divisional Secretary is really a Donkey. He is doing foolish things, he just made confuse everything. I don’t mind even you say this. He is really a bull. He is too much. He is working like a buffalo. We will give him return after the Corona. Our boss also fed up with him (Boss is a former Parliament Minister).”*

**SSI23:** Samurdhi officer, (43 years old, Baddegama). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 01, 03, 04, 06, 12, 13, 15, 26].

*“Villagers still didn’t feel the impact of the pandemic. The seriousness of this is people who work.” - Jailor*



This shows how the public servants were threatened by politicians. Public servants had the fear that they would be transferred to rural areas if they did not listen to politicians. In addition, the above-mentioned conversation shows how verbal threats were made via telephone. There were some incidents reported by the research participants where politicians influenced the government officials in distributing subsidies.

#### About the subsidies

*“What do people say about the LKR 5000 distribution?”*

*“We don’t have a problem actually, but people are criticizing and accusing local ministers, government servants everywhere. I feel there is a huge confusion.”*

SSI26: Navy officer, (38 years old, male, Galle). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 01, 03, 05, 06, 12, 13, 14, 38].

The COVID-19 virus made a huge challenge to the political participation and electoral behaviour of the ordinary people.

### 3.2.6 Misleading people through false information

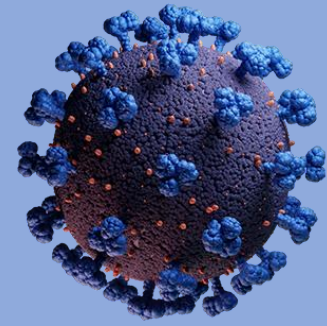
#### On political propaganda

*“Politicians are the one who give false information and mislead people.”*

SSI05: Apparel sector worker, (51 years old, female, Piliyandala). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 15, 06].

The politicians were accused of misusing the epidemic as a cover to reach their political ends. The people allege that due to the proximity of an election, disaster management was used by politicians for their political campaigns.

The COVID-19 virus made a huge challenge to the political participation and electoral behaviour of the ordinary people. According to the findings, all respondents were aware of the present political situation in Sri Lanka.



### 3.2.7 View on dissolving the Parliament

The President dissolved the Parliament early in March on the earliest date constitutionally acceptable, six months before the end of the Parliament's term. The election was supposed to be held in April, but the Election Commission postponed it. As there were dates suggested by the Commissioner of Elections participants had different views on holding the Parliamentary election on the suggested date in June 2020. Some participants expressed fear about going to vote. In fact, the respondents presented three main ideas.

The first respondent: *"This is not a correct time to call an election. This time the government should think to wipe-out the COVID-19 from the country. Then we can think about the election."*

The second respondent: *"If an immediate election is called, the COVID-19 outbreak will further spread."*

The third respondent: *"The government wants to get two third majority in the parliament they not think about ordinary people."*

It is clear that, this situation badly influenced the political culture as well as the democracy of the country. It is important to note that some respondents did not consider the election, and paid attention to their economic recovery only.

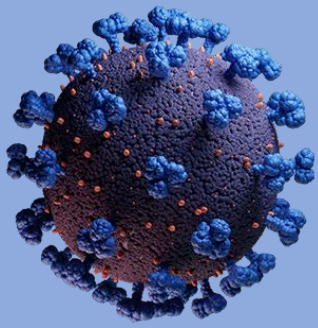
Some participants claimed that the ruling political party took the pandemic as an opportunity to earn credit from the public with regard to the upcoming election, like it used the war against LTTE in Sri Lanka in 2009 for the 2010 presidential election. As the Election Commissions have not issued the candidate's preferential numbers, the nominees could not involve in any form of political campaigns<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, they were not playing an active political role in COVID-19 related welfare activities or media campaigns. The government ministers and the president were present in the media and could solely enjoy the credit for managing the COVID-19 crisis. It seems, the pandemic control process has given an enormous power to the president for taking decisions as the parliament had been dissolved. It was identified that the pandemic situation had vested an unlimited amount of decision-making power in the president and it

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It is important to note that some respondents did not consider the election, and paid attention to their economic recovery only.

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<sup>1</sup> This report deals with period before the General Elections 2020 were held.



has recognized dark period for the democracy (Hanel, 2020). Many states have postponed their elections due to the pandemic and health issues. As Sri Lankan president has many executive powers and the pandemic situation has given him more powers he could manage the situation single-handedly as he wanted, and it became successful (Kohona, 2020).

### 3.2.8 Opinion on parliamentary elections

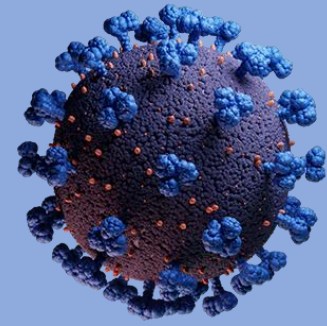
Some research participants also mentioned about the possibility of using digital technology in elections. However, as most Sri Lankans live in rural areas such an alternative was considered unfeasible. Another option a research informant mentioned was that the candidates could carry out their political campaigns only on the state television channels while many research proponents mentioned that voting has a health risk. Some accused the government as they did not take decisions early to prevent the virus entering the country. Further, earlier decisions regarding this health issue were taken as political decisions without proper knowledge of the science. Some participants accused the government of failing to provide the real information about the dangers of the virus and not making rational decisions then and there, e.g., for political purposes at times the government declared that Sri Lanka would not be affected by the virus.

### 3.2.9 People's views on democracy and Parliament

Ninety percent (90%) of the research participants did not believe in democracy and its importance. The main reason for it was their lack of confidence in the application of democratic concepts into practice in managing Sri Lanka. They criticized the importance of electing people's representatives to the Parliament under democratic political principles. This is because all governments that came to power after the independence used their power for the benefit of their families and their personal interests. As explained by SSI 43, if the state functioned without a Parliament, what was the need of having a Parliament? Some informants mentioned that Sri Lanka did not need a Parliament, the cabinet alone was sufficient. Some people claimed that the current government was doing better compared to the failures of the previous government. For an

Ninety percent (90%) of the research participants did not believe in democracy and its importance.





example, the previous government failed to prevent the Islamic terrorist attack on Easter Sunday in 2019. Further, some informants argued that the incumbent government could end the civil war which everyone considered impossible. Likewise, some participants claimed that the current government was better in crisis management and keeping the security of the state. Most of the research participants came across as a total disillusionment with the political system in Sri Lanka. According to them, it is normal to use disaster and tragedy situations for narrow purposes.

#### Public opinion on social gatherings

*“People don’t want to attend physical meetings in political campaigns. The government has to ban holding meetings for all the candidates. If it is not possible, they can allocate equal time for each person from the national television channel. There are plenty of alternatives. Even we can hold meetings online.”*

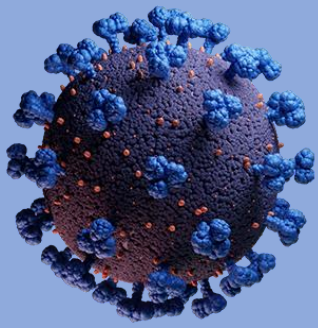
**SSI06:** Hotel entrepreneur, (58 years old, Postgraduate qualification, Colombo 07). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 15, 06 ].

#### Criticisms on the parliament

*“The majority of the MPs in the Parliament are idiots and do not have proper education. Many are drug dealers and illegal sand excavators. They cannot take rational decisions. They think only about their own betterment. It’s useless to have such a bunch of people. If government servants can run the government, I think we don’t want a Parliament. I think this is an outdated concept to have a Parliament.”*

**SSI:** National tourist guide, (43 years old, Kaluwamodara). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI].

Most of the research participants came across as a total disillusionment with the political system in Sri Lanka. According to them, it is normal to use disaster and tragedy situations for narrow purposes.



Most research participants had a negative opinion about the opening of liquor stores. According to them, many people in the rural areas of Sri Lanka were addicted to drugs. They stated that the procedures on the issuance of liquor licences were relaxed with the intention of winning the popular support. Further, the participants stressed that it was easier for politicians to stay in power if the citizens were irrational and intoxicated.

#### Comment on the people's political awareness

*"The majority of the citizens don't take rational decisions. They take decisions like buffalos. People give votes based on very small incidents like opening a road. People will give vote for the government based on the reopening liquor bars. I think that the government try to cover their failures by doing this. If they don't take these kind of actions people will make troubles. The existence of people like us (like participant) will be a trouble for the government."*

SSI41: National tourist guide, (43 years old, Kaluwamodara, Aluthgama). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 22, 20, 06, 34].

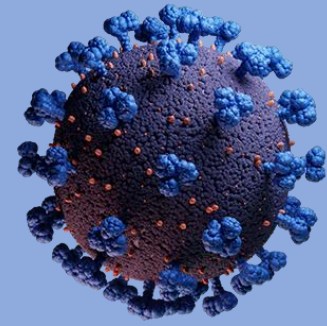
**"The majority of the citizens don't take rational decisions." - National tourist guide**

Research participants stated that the government had taken a dictatorial role in disaster management policy making and decision-making. They also said that the private sector should be used for the disaster management to ensure that work was efficient and productive. Effective disaster management should involve different stakeholders at different levels and the current government of Sri Lanka failed to involve them in the first step.

### 3.2.10 Politicians

As the Parliament was dissolved, the Election Commission ordered not to engage with any kind of political campaign such as promoting their political parties. But some former ministers worked for the people spending their own money. Some participants appreciated that a few politicians who worked and blamed on others as they were opportunistic to seek votes when it was near to the elections.





### 3.2.11 Involvement of security services

Most of the respondents had an optimistic view about the involvement of the security services to wipe out COVID-19. They also highly appreciated their perseverance in the prevention of COVID-19 and establishment of a quarantine process. Meanwhile, they expressed their sympathy to the Navy officers who became victims of COVID-19.

Some research participants were of the view that the government should be more aware of the behaviour of the people when making curfew decisions. However, the majority of the research participants appreciated the interventions and their role in the security services.

#### Comments on the government's misconception about the people's views

*Ninety nine percent (99%) people are not response“ I think as a government they have to know the behaviour of people. Actually this is something done by the rulers from their common sense. I feel all the people have common behaviour. Even, don't have enough knowledge, no much needs.”*

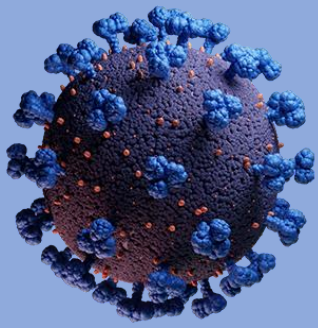
**SSI41:** National tourist guide, (43 years old, Kaluwamodara, Aluthgama). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 56, 52, 34].

**Ninety nine percent (99%) people are not response“ I think as a government they have to know the behaviour of people. Actually this is something done by the rulers from their common sense. I feel all the people have common behaviour. - National tourist guide**

The Army Commander heads the National Operation Centre for Prevention of the COVID-19 Outbreak, along with other security services personnel holding prominent positions (Sooka, 2020). Two secretary positions to the government ministries were given to two senior military officers; Secretary of the Health Ministry and the Secretary of the Mahaweli (Ranawana, 2020). Even though some participants praised the involvement of the security services, there were a few who criticized the Sri Lankan security services receiving more powers even though pandemic management should give the priority to health workers.

### 3.2.12 Section summary

The role of the political sector is vital in an emergency. Decisions are made through a mechanism of politics that affects the entire state in



the event of an emergency. In particular, the role of the Cabinet, including the President, is prominent. Given the powers vested in the President of Sri Lanka, he has the power to make decisions in the case of any emergency. As such, his responsibility to manage a disastrous situation is too great. The Sri Lankan government's efforts to curb the spread of the novel Coronavirus have been applauded globally.

According to the findings, the majority praised the government's involvement collaborated with the security services and state officials, but criticized the actions and political interventions locally. Many of the research participants expressed their displeasure with democracy and the role of the current Parliament Members, emphasized the ability to function the government and the state even in the absence of the Parliament. There were criticisms of the date of the general election, and the majority doubted whether it was safe to holds polls. The respondents, however, were divided on this matter. Nevertheless, both positive and negative aspects on the political activities were visible from the data collected during the research.

## SECTION 3.3

### COVID-19 Impact on Socio-Economic Behaviour

#### 3.3.1 Introduction

“The COVID-19 Pandemic is far more than a health crisis: it is affecting societies and economies at their core” (UNDP, 2020). In this context, the pandemic has severely affected the economy of Sri Lanka, as a developing country, causing many social problems, such as income inequality, unemployment, economic frustration and uncertainty. But this research also revealed positive developments in the economy as well. These include the introduction of new products to the market, initiation of new ventures in the local industries, optimal utilization of domestic resources, technology, and business strategy planning, and maximizing the use of communication technology among employers and employees. It is clear that the daily wages earners were severely affected due to the

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The pandemic has severely affected the economy of Sri Lanka, as a developing country, causing many social problems, such as income inequality, unemployment, economic frustration and uncertainty.

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lack of income or loss of their jobs. Employment insecurity in the private sector and the unconfirmed employees' status have led some people hard to survival struggles.

### 3.3.2 Threat to survival

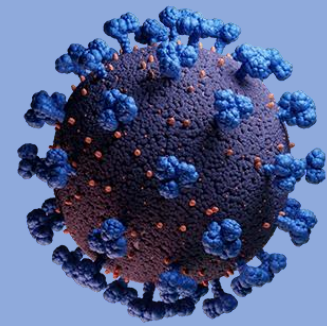
#### An uncertain businessman

*“When it’s about to close the airport, it just started to affect our business. As a person who is doing business, I was afraid about my business and not about the virus. After they close the airport, we will not receive guests. How can we run our business without tourists? Then I was thinking how I can pay salaries to my staff and how to manage the business without allowing it to bankrupt. We don’t know when the economy will come back to normal. I didn’t even think about that I will get this virus, just feel the economic impact. Even now I am thinking how to pay back my loan. Then we got to know that paying loans got postponed for 6 months.”*

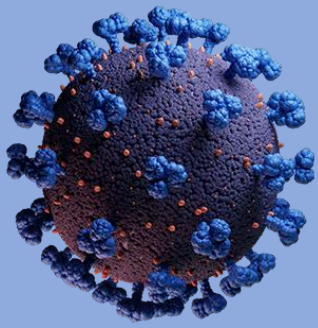
**SSI06:** Hotel entrepreneur, (58 years old, Postgraduate qualification, Colombo 7). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI03, 51, 41].

In the COVID-19 scenario, the people became more afraid of negative issues that developed in their economy than anything else as it used to threaten their survival.

According to respondent SSI06, the biggest fear he got from the new coronavirus was the likely collapse of his business. Since people’s lives depend on their economy, as the above informant reported, he is more afraid about his economy than his life. One basic element in a consumer society they highlight is the competition in the market. In such an economic environment, the new coronavirus created a major obstacle to people's daily lives.



*“When it’s about to close the airport, it just started to affect our business. As a person who is doing business, I was afraid about my business and not about the virus.” - Hotel entrepreneur*



### 3.3.3 Employer-employee relationships

#### Technology in organisational communication

*“With this incident, I have created a WhatsApp group with my employees. We need to be as a family in this situation. My ambition is to this situation is, whenever we start, we need to be at least one employees of the previous employees. This has been really a useful”*

**SSI03:** Entrepreneur, (50 years old Post graduate qualification. Nawala). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 06].

Technology has been used more intensively than usual as a tool to motivate employees and do strategic planning for the COVID-19 situation. Employer-employee relationships became physically remote, and thanks to the technology, it enabled them to interact with each other in generating new ideas, and discussing how environmental and health risks impact their business plans. Some employers used WhatsApp group chats for this.

This shows the use of communication technology employers found in motivating and looking to their wellbeing of the employees, in order to increase their confidence about the organizations.

### 3.3.4 Economic Concessions

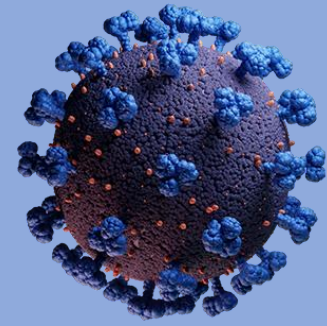
#### Beneficiary of loan pay relief

*“Financially, we had a miserable happiness because the government has given us 6 month extension to repay the loan. We have already invested the money we got from the loan. I have already built a building; May be I must pay back the money after one year. At that time, price of the Rupee will be depressed. Meanwhile, the price of dollar will increase. I think this situation is a blessing for me in that sense”.*

**SSI06:** Hotel entrepreneur, (58 years old, Postgraduate qualification, Colombo 7). [This statement was cross checked and verified by SSI03, 08]

As per the government directives, banks and other financial institutions extended a six-month concession in loan repayments. It

Technology has been used more intensively than usual as a tool to motivate employees and do strategic planning for the COVID-19 situation.



became advantageous to large-scale businessmen as it extended the repayment period by six months from the date of issue. This would have had a positive impact on the economy if the facility had been granted in a scientific manner.

### 3.3.5 New employment opportunities

There has been an increasing demand in the market for mobile applications. Some businessmen who have adopted the situation and used their creativity to make a considerable profit from software development. Businessmen are interested in adapting to the changing environment, using creativity as a business strategy.

#### Software developer

*“Other than my main business, I have a business in software developing. It is something I am doing using internet. Many Sri Lankans used to do online purchasing and online system with the pandemic. Therefore, we received high demand for software. We have very good business in that. We are doing those things at home. However, I didn’t get any negative effect for that but its positive. I think the pandemic is a blessing and it’s my view”.*

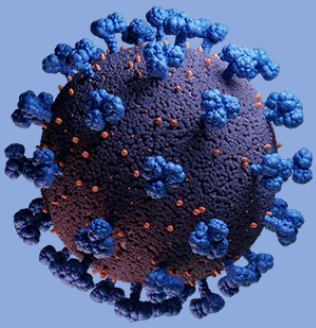
SSI06: Hotel entrepreneur/ Software developer, (58 Years old, Postgraduate qualification, Colombo 7). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI03]

Businessmen are interested in adapting to the changing environment, using creativity as a business strategy.

Large-scale businessmen point out that the agricultural economy is less affected by the pandemic than others. Although agri-businessmen were barred from selling their produce due to curfew they recovered lately. Yet the impact for the large-scale businesses based on international trade has affected in long-term.

#### A large scale businessman

*“I think that COVID-19 has affected the business class like us. Poor people didn’t get negative affect from this. A person who lives in a small house or slum, they go to the work in the morning and spend all the money for food and alcohol. When we reopen the country, they will go back to the work. Because the labourers can find their daily wage job easily. He will receive LKR 2000at the end of the day. His income will remain the same nothing will change. He will start his life*



*where he stopped. We (business class) cannot do that. It will take months to return to the economical level where we were before the pandemic”*

SSI06: Hotel entrepreneur, (58 years old, Postgraduate qualification, Colombo 7). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 03, 22, 21, 40].

This statement reflects the long-term impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector and the uncertainty of the Sri Lankan tourism trade due to the pandemic. Urban people who are involved in import trades and tourism trade are severely affected by this situation. However, the respondents stated that this situation had a minimal impact on the villages.

### 3.3.6 Distribution of subsidies

Some participants mentioned that giving subsidies to everyone, irrespective of their economic status, led to a confusion in the economy. They suggested that if the amount of LKR 5000 was given to the people as a loan instead of subsidy it would be not a burden to the government. The participant's social and family background and his business perspective reflect in the quote below. Further it highlights the irrationality in selecting the target group.

#### Response to subsidies

*“I do not appreciate the subsidies money which has been given by the government without a repayment plan. It is useless to give money like that. One minister come and say that we are giving LKR 5000 from tomorrow onwards. How can someone do like that? To whom they are going to give? There is no any scientific method. It is just they wanted to get political benefits. After that decision, next day morning people were in ques to get that. It caused the situation more confused and chaotic. The minister just said it in a television channel.”*

SSI06: Hotel entrepreneur, (58 Years old, Postgraduate qualification, Colombo 7). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 01, 03, 04, 05].

Urban people who are involved in import trades and tourism trade are severely affected by this situation.



**Illegal trades**

*“Locally there is a mind-set to grow food domestically and consume that. There I suggest another addition for that. ‘cultivate locally and brew liquor locally and live’. People have that mind-set and it is not good. It will affect to the Sri Lankan workforce latterly. It will become a problem.”*

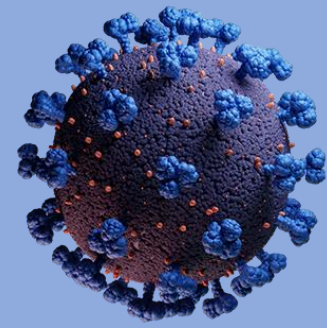
**SSI07:** Community officer, (36 years old, Magistrate's Court). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 19, 28].

Participants mentioned the absence of any scientific method to select the target group and the involvement of politicians in the distribution of relief. Although the distribution of subsidies is characteristic of a welfare state, corruption, fraud and the abuse of public funds under subsidies for self-promotion for political purposes is a common phenomenon in Sri Lankan politics.

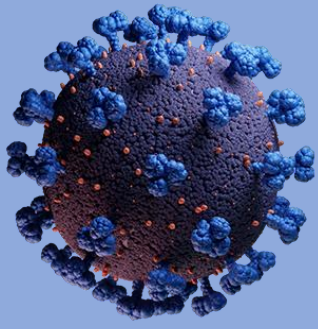
**3.3.8 Illegal money making ventures**

It was reported that people who had got used to making money in unlawful ways, during the new coronavirus period, switched on to new ways but again unlawful. For example, an illegal trader of Wallapatta (*Gyrinops walla*) who lost his job due to the pandemic started brewing illicit liquor. He found it very profitable and easy because he had a considerable market for his goods. It was found that, regionally, that type of liquor business had a growing demand all over the country.

The economic pressure generated by the pandemic situation could remove people from their usual illegal trade activities, but unfortunately it pushed them into new ventures still illegal and harmful. It shows that the new coronavirus could not change the mentality of the individuals concerned although it changed their trades.



The distribution of subsidies is characteristic of a welfare state, corruption, fraud and the abuse of public funds under subsidies for self-promotion for political purposes is a common phenomenon in Sri Lankan politics.



### 3.3.9 Shopping confined neighbourhood

During the curfew, the government advised to go to the nearest store for domestic purchases, thus increasing sales in village shops as a practical solution to control the spreading of COVID-19.

#### Local shop keeper

*“After the government announced curfew, my village people could not go outside the village to buy goods. They had to come to my shop, and it increased my business.”*

SSI09: Businessmen, (40 years old, Kalipitiya).

#### Innovative products in the market

*“I saw there were some new products in the supermarket called Coriander drink. It is a nice way of introducing healthy things to the society.”*

SSI 06: Entrepreneur, (58 years old, Colombo 07).

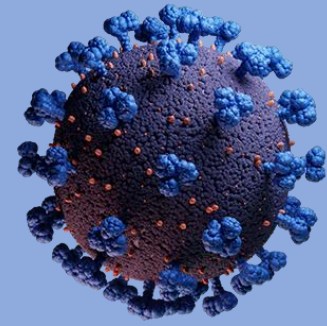
With changing social needs, the market was seeing new products coming in the form of Sri Lankan indigenous medicines such as coriander as an effective health drink to boost the immunity system. It has been promoted by the *Ayurveda* doctors as well as by the western medicine doctors to boost the immune capacity of the people against COVID-19. This can be seen as a positive aspect of the pandemic which has given an opportunity for the innovative and creative entrepreneurs to supply goods according to the demands of the society.

### 3.3.10 Threat to Moonlighting

Moonlighting is an economical concept where someone takes a second or third job apart from his or her main job (Robinson, 2009). With a heavy economic burden people tend to find ‘part time jobs’. It was revealed that major job wages became inadequate for most people who had to forego part-time jobs in terms of conducting of individual or group tuition classes, keeping small shops, hiring vehicles, etc. due to COVID-19.

During the curfew, the government advised to go to the nearest store for domestic purchases, thus increasing sales in village shops as a practical solution to control the spreading of COVID-19.





#### Side-business loser

*“I had a car for hire apart from running my shop. I had to stop all these businesses. I got airport hires but couldn’t take them. Drivers did not like to go on hires. I have cancelled five airport hires like that.”*

**SSI09:** Businessmen, (40 years old, Puttalam). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 02, 03, 06, 08, 12, 14, 15].

Some people do part time jobs because their income from their main job is not sufficient to maintain their economy. The pandemic situation affected many of such part time job holders.

### 3.3.11 Changing jobs

#### Tourist guide who changed over to agriculture

*“I think the government is so silly to give a number one priority to tourism in the national economic plan. I have no trust or hope the things will be back to normal. I am heading to agro-business like cultivating vanilla and pepper. I know there are more people like me thinking of changing their professions. This is really a threat to the tourism industry.”*

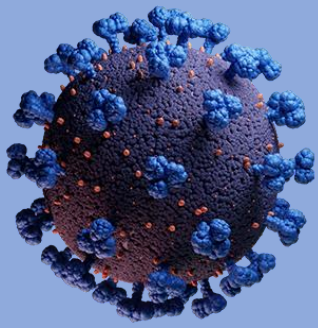
**SSI41:** National tourist guide, (42 years old, Kaluwamodara). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 02, 03, 06, 08, 12, 14, 15].

Research findings highlighted that many people had less reliability on their jobs in the tourism sector. The tourism industry was constantly at a risk due to natural disasters and the separatist war. However, it was clear from the comments of the respondents that the employees in the tourism industry in Sri Lanka were compelled to change their profession once due to the Easter attack in 2019 and later due to the pandemic in 2020 which led them to lose their hopes. That was supposed to have impacted the economy negatively.

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The pandemic situation affected many of such part time job holders.

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### 3.3.12 Frustration over losing jobs

The research data revealed that the young people, who were unemployed and were awaiting jobs became one of the most vulnerable groups in society.

### 3.3.13 Issues in health economy

According to some respondents, the cost for following the health instructions such as keeping distance in the public transport, using hand sanitizers, wearing face masks are not feasible for everyone in society as low-income people cannot afford them. Therefore, less economic capacity became a barrier to protect oneself from the disease.

#### Discrepancies in loan

*“If we think about loans, even the government says they give capital loans, it will not work like that. It will not be easy to receive what they promise of it has a process and a circle. My loan was rejected in the first round, based on whatever reason. May be my business is education related or whatever. So the people who are customers of the state’s banks are lucky but the people who were with the state banks are unlucky. All the people who passed and got approvals for their loans, they have some personal contacts. There are different discriminations. I face these kind of different questions. Frankly, if you don’t have a political connection, I am not sure if I will get the loan, this is the real situation.”*

**SSI58:** Businesswomen, (43 years old, female, Owns an educational institute). [This statement was crosschecked and was verified by SSI 07, 03].

### 3.3.14 Security of the public sector

Concerning security in the public sector services during the emergencies, it was found that being a customer of a state bank became more secure than being a customer of a private sector bank. Even though the public sector is secure, research findings revealed that politicians used to interfere and affect the decisions made by the public sector bank authorities. It was revealed that nepotisms and political interventions influenced the process of passing loans.

Less economic capacity became a barrier to protect oneself from the disease.

Although any financial support should be given to the neediest people, the practical situation was such that it influenced the decision-making process of the public sector in granting loans.

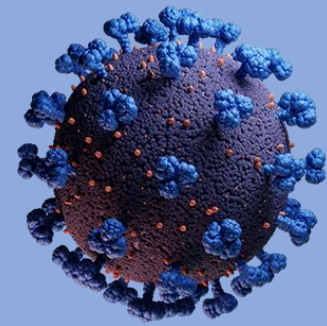
### 3.3.15 Section summary

The analysis of the responses clearly shows that COVID-19 had a direct impact on the household economy of the Sri Lankan society, adversely affecting the national economy. In many households, the breadwinner's income is the main source of income of the family. The COVID-19 pandemic created a difficult situation to the family members. Urban dwellers, businessmen, self-employers, unconfirmed hands, and temporary contract employees, all were affected worse than government employees, and daily-waged labourers in the semi-urban and village areas. However, irrespective of their urban-rural divide, their social classes, their rich and poor gap, people got affected by the pandemic either directly or indirectly. But some respondents claimed to have gained advantages from the pandemic situation from an increase in the demand for their products in the software industry, innovative products in the market, got benefits from the postponing loan payback instalments. Low economic status and stress increased the illegal drug usage as well. Even though there were some benefits, it was visible that there were severe long-term effects on the major income generating sectors in the Sri Lankan economy such as tourism.

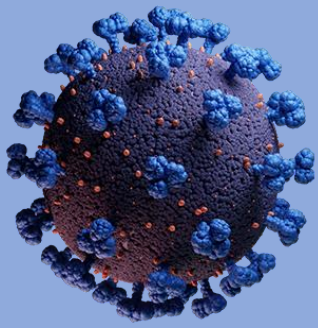
#### Health practices getting exorbitant

*"Some health advices are not practical. Health sanitisers and masks are expensive. Many people are doing this without knowledge and real meaning. They just do that as they are afraid of the government and police."*

SSI41: National tourist guide, (42 years old, Kaluwamodara). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI52, 51. 03, 06].



The COVID-19 pandemic created a difficult situation to the family members. Urban dwellers, businessmen, self-employers, unconfirmed hands, and temporary contract employees

**Unemployed youth**

*“Young people who got vocational training were expecting to do a job soon and realize their dreams. The pandemic disappointed them. Many young people in rural areas are addicted to local alcohol and drugs more than ever”.*

**SSI09:** Businessmen, (40 years old, Puttalam) [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 41, 05, 07, 52, 13].

**SECTION 3.4****COVID-19 Impact on Media Behaviour****3.4.1 Introduction**

This section draws attention to changes the role of media underwent during COVID-19. Because of the tremendous increase in the number of media institutions over the last two decades more ethical issues related to media behaviour emerged. Mainly when the media deal with a disaster or a pandemic scenario, it has to be concerned about accurate media reporting on the realities and applying the information for the management of the situation by educating the community its consequences. Hence, media has to collect and transmit accurate information to the community through their channels of communication.

In this research, there are semi-structured interviews employed to gather the qualitative data from 66 respondents on the social impact of COVID-19. They represent different geographical and social borders almost all their responses based on the knowledge of facts and figures issued by the media.

They have associated with different media to gain knowledge about COVID-19. The fact justifies by Table 01 that the data was collected from a questionnaire. As mentioned in the methodological section, the researchers gathered data from the students of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Ruhuna, Matara. The main medium that made the respondents aware of the COVID-19 pandemic was television. Apart from television, social media played a prominent role in the communication of pandemic related information. Table 01 summarizes the relevant findings.

Mainly when the media deal with a disaster or a pandemic scenario, it has to be concerned about accurate media reporting on the realities and applying the information for the management of the situation by educating the community its consequences.

**Table 01: The main media that educated the public against COVID-19**

	Television	Television, Social Media, Family Members	Television, Social Media	Social Media, Family Members	Social Media	Television, Family Members	Total
Number of Responses	187	94	107	2	52	4	446
Percentage	41.92	21.07	23.99	0.44	11.65	0.89	100

Source: COVID 19 Social Impact Survey 2020

According to Table 01, all respondents were aware of the situation. A considerable number of respondents got information regarding COVID-19 through electronic and social media.

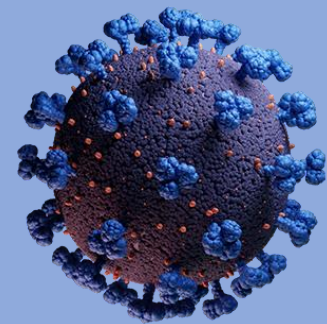
Moving beyond analyses of the source of information, we asked the respondents about the coverage of COVID-19 in the media. One Grama Niladari from Monaragala District pointed out the consequences of the pandemic, and the effectiveness of media in the communication of COVID-19 information:

As a public servant, he believes that both state and private media equally played an efficient role during the catastrophic situation. When the media deal with other different social political and cultural affairs, they rarely receive equal appreciations. A 58 year old chef, who is residing in Nittabuwa, has identified the value of both mainstream media and social media.

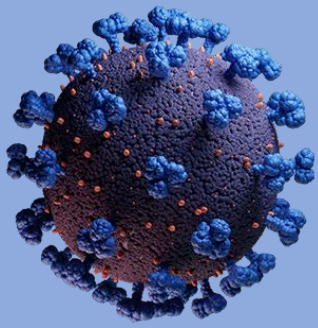
#### About social media

*"There are advantages and disadvantages of Social media and other media. The main imperative factor of the media is "we knew everything regarding COVID-19 from media". Media give us instruction that how should we behave and what kind of habits should we follow to protect from virus. Mostly advertisements were used for this purpose.*

*As an example, Lifebuoy Hand Wash advertisement makes us aware how to wash our hands properly to protect*



A considerable number of respondents got information regarding COVID-19 through electronic and social media.



*ourselves from germs. How to maintain social distancing is informed by Banks advertisements. That is a good trend. Within five to ten minutes, we are aware. From my point of view, the media play a crucial role under the COVID-19 pandemic. "*

**SSI 11:** Chef, (58 years, male, Nittambuwa). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 02, 11, 14, 17, 22, 25, 31, 42, 57, 51, 54].

The point of view of the above respondent was that media could play both negative and positive roles in critical situations. Mostly they were positive. Media can educate on how people need to behave in the epidemic environment. At the same time media tactfully used the epidemic condition to make profits.

According to the opinion of a 58 year-old employer, who works in the hotel industry in Colombo, the mainstream media mainly practise disaster marketization and orientation during the emergency condition of the society.

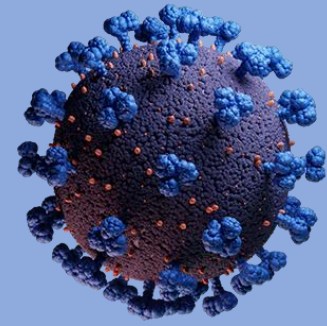
#### Media use for self-promotion

*"Media means a self-marketing process. The Army Commander and other high-ranking officials of the government are interviewed from various perspectives by various T.V. Channels. This is a competition. It is not necessary. Awareness of people is enough. I have doubt whether these people have time to do their official duty when they give this kind of interview for various T.V. channels. If they want to address the public, they can invite every media channel and address them at once. But they give separate time to separate T.V. channels. This is a real drama of electronic media. "*

**SSI 06:** Hotel Entrepreneur, (58 year, male, Colombo). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 04, 14, 12, 13, 21, 30, 33, 39, 40, 42, 47, 51, 53]

Media can educate on how people need to behave in the epidemic environment. At the same time media tactfully used the epidemic condition to make profits.





Following this view, media involvement in the crisis was debatable because different media institutions had their respective agendas. Their top priority was to make more profit competing with others. This kind of attempts create a threat to disaster sensitive media practices.

As per the views of a 32-year-old respondent, who works as a lecturer in one of the state educational institutions, the situation is very critical.

#### Warnings on negative media behaviour

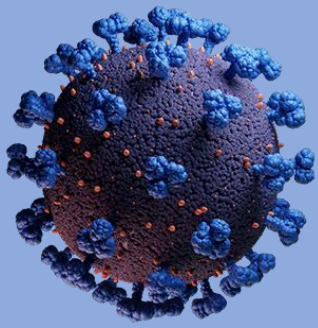
*"Media do some unethical activities. Some activities violated media ethics. They spread wrong and faulty information under this situation. Especially social media do this. Because there is no proper mechanism to monitor these activities on social media, and it is a very independent media platform. This condition may pave the way for an awful situation. We have previous experience as well".*

**SSI 32:** Lecturer, (32 years, female, Galle). This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 04, 15, 18, 22, 33, 35, 42, 43, 47, 51, 52, 54).

Social media is now one of the primary sources to get information regarding any current social affair.

Social media is now one of the primary sources to get information regarding any current social affair. Anyone can report and analyse a situation in his or her own ways. It seems good in the sense that it challenges the monopoly of the mainstream media. The mainstream media have their agendas and monopoly of information. Even though the mainstream media were challenged by the social media, they still make false information. The false information can spread like a virus if it is not controlled by the authorities concerned. This scenario leads to polarizing among societal groups. At the beginning of COVID-19, the first accusation for the spread of the virus went to foreign Sri Lankan workers and then to the Muslim ethnic group. They were considered a virus spreading group. Later on, the false propaganda of social media focused on members of the Navy. The role of Social Media is controversial during any emergencies in our society. This happened due to the lack of information literacy in





society. People who use these media platforms are eager to spread this unverifiable information around them as rumours. The main issue here is that there is no proper mechanism to cope with these media interventions. As a result, media create an unhealthy atmosphere in society. According to responses regarding the role of media during the COVID-19 situation, interviews SSI18 and SSI22 revealed the same idea.

Not only Social Media but also mainstream media behave in the same manner. The same respondents' views reveal this reality. Most of the respondents identified examples of weak and unethical media reporting. However, one had been mainly dissatisfied with the way some of the personal information of the patients had been reported:

The above ideas are closely linked with disaster sensitive media reporting and also media ethics which the media personnel need to follow. These kinds of media practices impact efforts of disaster management process negatively. The affected individuals and their family members were being exposed to society. Only medical health officers and other relevant parties should be aware of their health conditions, not the whole country. This kind of media practices can develop panic situation throughout the country. On the other hand, this kind of attempts may create ground for individuals who are affected by the virus to conceal the reality. Because they think if they are exposed to society, it can be a stigma to them.

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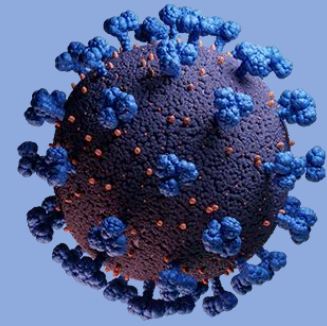
The affected individuals and their family members were being exposed to society. Only medical health officers and other relevant parties should be aware of their health conditions, not the whole country.

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#### Disclosure of patient details

*"Another unethical activity is revealing personal information of patients who are infected by Coronavirus. Some media channels go with the public inspector of health and other officials to the particular patient and telecast their news. Social stigmatization can be immersed in this situation. Because of this reason, people who are infected the virus, hide their real position. Under this situation, people maintain distance from closest. It is hard to repair a broken relationship. There is a psychological impact behind this. "*

**SSI 25:** Teacher, (45 years, male, Akuressa). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 02, 07, 10, 13, 14, 19, 20, 23, 33, 42, 49, 50, 51]



Some other respondents are of the view that during the pandemic time the media role was politicized. Following quotations express that stance. A 61 year-old housewife, who lives in Muruthalawa, Kurunagala area, expressed her attitudes on media behaviours during the pandemic time.

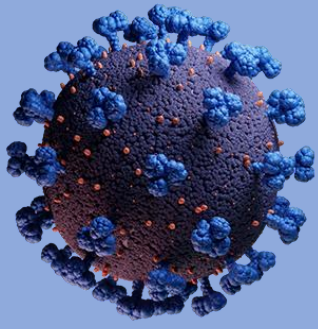
#### Media contest at the expense of the pandemic

*"We have no satisfaction with the role of media. It is not limited for COVID-19 reporting. Media become politicized. Not only other media but also Social Media also play this role. Personal political objectives of politicians are fulfilled by the media. It is similar to seeing around wearing colour spectacles. People who wear glasses, see the world as they want. Media also show the same behaviour. As an example, media who follow the idea of the United National Party, criticize the COVID-19 movement and media who support Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna, admire and appreciate the programme. In this situation, people are unable to identify the real position of the programme, and then people can be misled (In-depth-interview no 43)."*

**SSI 43:** House wife, 36 years, Female, Kurunegala). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 01, 04, 08, 09, 11, 14, 17, 19, 24, 30, 40, 44, 53]

The above statement reveals the nature of politicized media institutions in the normal situation as well as the pandemic situation. But during the emergency, if media played the politicized role that may usher negative consequences to the society. The biased media practices ultimately created a complex environment for the community. According to this statement, it could be seen that media was playing this politicized role to the tune of the authoritative and authoritarian politicians of the country (See Interview Nos 03, 10, and 15).

**"We have no satisfaction with the role of media. It is not limited for COVID-19 reporting. Media become politicized." - House wife**



### 3.4.2 Findings

Respondents in our study had different views about the general behaviour of media ethics in Sri Lanka as well as the transformations it underwent in the specific context of COVID-19. The findings reveal that media became a political tool even under the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Though media played a crucial role during this situation, it also acted as a tool of party politics and created another political arena. According to the respondents, almost all electronic media rendered their services partially to either the government or the opposition, that were represented by political parties of ideologies very hard to get reconciled under any circumstance.

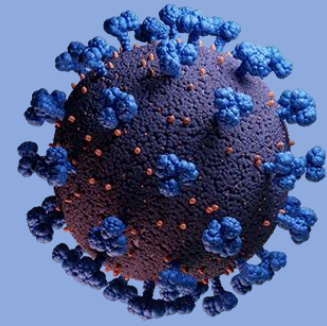
### 3.4.3 Section summary

The media, public or private, functioned in several forms such as print, electronic, and digital, played a crucial role to make people aware of the pandemic situation in Sri Lanka. The versatility of the print media disappeared during the COVID-19 pandemic situation, under the circumstance that government adopted strategies such as curfew, shutdown, and lockdown to control the people's movements, and electronic and social media became more crucial than usual in the absence of the others. In this critical situation, while the electronic media had to consider both disaster mitigation and disaster response, the social media could exercise their potentials to lead to growing participation of the population in strategic planning for relief and recovery activities, e.g., by gathering ideas and opinions of the people who were affected. However, many incidents were reported as to that media ethics were violated by both public and private media organisations as well as social media users. Like in other professions, in the media, most journalists who claimed to be honest and ethical, often acted as if they had been driven by their partiality and journalist popularity. Probably the most significant moral issue in media ethics rose from the public's concern about their right, need, or desire to know the facts and the media's right to report events without overriding the individuals' right to privacy. As it is challenging to draw the line between people's desire and need for privacy and the media's desire or obligation to satisfy the public's curiosity to know what is happening in their personal and private lives, media should adhere to sound ethical principles to ensure accurate news reporting with the highest degree of impartiality possible.

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The findings reveal that media became a political tool even under the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

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## SECTION 3.5

# COVID-19 Impact on Psychological Behaviour

### 3.5.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychological behaviour of the Sri Lankan society. After identifying the highlighted thematic manifestations appearing in the semi-structured interviews, the same are tested with a detailed content analysis. Further, the findings are supported with the information gathered by the survey questionnaire and are compared and contrasted with the available literature on the psychological impact on COVID-19 affected societies.

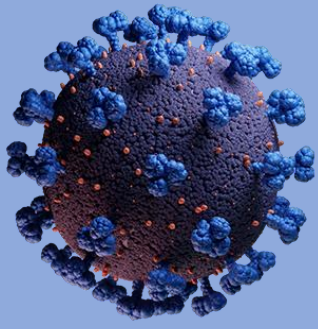
Although the Sri Lankan society has been witnessing uncertain and changing situations for the last few decades, the novel Coronavirus Pandemic outbreak appeared as a stranger that entered home unexpectedly. As one of the respondents said, *“If it is a tsunami or flood we can see it and at least can run fast to save our lives, but this corona... we can’t see it till it comes closer to you”* (SSI 39). An uncertain factor was confirmed by another respondent, a consultant psychiatrist: *“Consider a death of a loved one... then the human mind can gradually understand what has happened... then you can manage with your stress... but the novel Coronavirus is not something like that... we can’t predict the disaster or its end... the average human mind can’t understand this... and it makes the mind imbalanced”* (SSI 22). Moreover, as stated in a statement of the World Health Organization (WHO).

*“In public mental health terms, the main psychological impact to date is elevated rates of stress or anxiety. But as new measures and impacts are introduced – especially quarantine and its effects on many people’s usual activities, routines or livelihoods – levels of loneliness, depression, harmful alcohol and drug use, and self-harm or suicidal behaviour are also expected to rise”* (Mental Health and COVID-19, n.d.).

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Media should adhere to sound ethical principles to ensure accurate news reporting with the highest degree of impartiality possible.

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In addition, research conducted in the countries affected by the deadly virus has proved that the pandemic outbreak caused numerous psychological problems. A study in China reported that 53.8% of respondents rated the psychological impact of the outbreak as moderate or severe; 16.5%, moderate to severe depressive symptoms; 28.8% , moderate to severe anxiety symptoms; and 8.1%, moderate to severe stress levels (Wang, et al., 2020) while a study from Iran highlighted the an emergence of some negative psychological developments such as unpredictability, uncertainty, fear of the seriousness of the disease, misinformation and social isolation contributing to stress and mental morbidity (Zandifar & Badrfam, 2020). Similarly, a paper from Canada discussed an issue of health anxiety” in the pandemic outbreak (Asmundson & Tylor, 2020). As the authors argue “*during an outbreak of infectious disease, particularly in the presence of inaccurate or exaggerated information from the media, health anxiety can become excessive. At an individual level, this can manifest as maladaptive behaviours (repeated medical consultations, avoiding health care even if genuinely ill, hoarding particular items); at a broader societal level, it can lead to mistrust of public authorities and scapegoating of particular populations or groups*” (Asmundson & Tylor, 2020, p. 1).

Furthermore, two reports from India highlighted the factors of fear of mass destruction and casualty, which resulted in a case of suicide termed as *Coronaphobia* (Goyal, Chauhan, Chhikara, Gupta, & Singh, 2020; Sharma, Sharma, & Singh, 2020). As evident in the literature, psychological effects were manifested as changes of perceptions of both the self and the other, resulting in changes in the behavioural patterns. It is obvious that psychological imbalance affect human relations in a society. In addition, the pandemic situation introduced a new set of health instructions and safety measures which definitely impacted self/”other relationship, changing the behavioural patterns ranging from over-protective measures to total negligence. As such, this section discusses the psychological impact of the new coronavirus pandemic within a broader framework of changes in behavioural patterns, worldviews, social relations, and attitudes.

Research conducted in the countries affected by the deadly virus has proved that the pandemic outbreak caused numerous psychological problems.

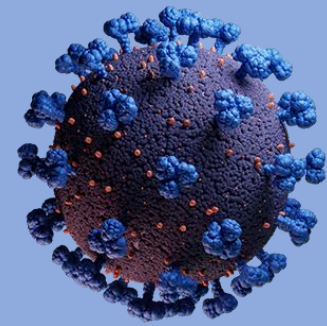


### 3.5.2 Home sweet home

In contrast with the prevailing literature on the negative impacts of COVID-19 on mental health (Cao, et al., 2020; Ornell, Schuch, Sordi, & Kessle, 2020; Cullen, Gulati, & Kelley, 2020; Moccia, et al., 2020), the current study reveals that it also had a positive impact on the mental health of a certain fraction of society. According to a majority of the respondents, the COVID-19 situation was an opportunity to bring all the family members together and get them to spend more time with each other, which definitely had a positive impact on their mental health. Especially, the female respondents emphasized the same experience (SSI 02, SSI 03, SSI 04, SSI 24, SSI 30, SSI 56). There are evidences that support the idea that the pandemic situation strengthened the family bonds giving an opportunity for better understanding among the family members. For example, a male respondent said *“When we are at home we are reminded of our duties to the family. If I don’t stay at home, I never see the duties my wife does. For the last few months, when staying at home, I saw what a lot of work she does from early morning to late night daily. When you are served with a plate of rice you just eat but you don’t see all the hard and subtle work starting from peeling onions. This situation gave an opportunity to understand these things”*. Another male respondent confirmed the same; *“I started helping my wife in preparing food”* (SSI 14). Furthermore, an unmarried railway station master and a lawyer respectively stated that they started helping their mothers in kitchen work (SSI 15). A female executive officer said, *“As our housemaid had left, my husband started helping me in daily chores of the house”* (SSI 17). A government auditor reported that she witnessed a change in the assumed gender roles (SSI 34). Another male respondent said, *“I started thinking about my wife and kids in a new way. I helped my wife in cooking food”* (SSI 38).

#### Consolation of being with the family

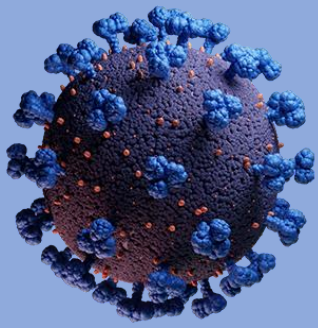
*“Because of COVID-19 life changed drastically. We all, husband, daughter, son, were together at home. So we enjoyed the freedom we got to the fullest. We cooked good food and ate well. And also we started planting different vegetables in our garden. Actually this is the best time I got in my life after getting married. I think this is the best vacation I got in my whole life time.”*




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Current study reveals that it also had a positive impact on the mental health of a certain fraction of society.

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SSI 02: Housewife, (47 years, female, GCE (O/L), Angunakolapelessa). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 03, 04, 08, 09, 20, 24, 30, 32, 34, 37, 38, 49, 50, 55, 56, 57 & SQ 1, 6, 9, 10, 13].

As described by another respondent, earlier the children did not even have time to talk to their parents leisurely as they were submerged in the competitive educational system but the virus outbreak provided them an opportunity for achieving confabulation and affability among family members (SSI 50). *“Even for a short time, children have got the beautiful days that we had in the past”* was a confirming response from one of the interviewees (SSI 07). Describing his experience with children during the curfew, a 42-year old government officer from Kalpitiya said *“Children have got time for playing; we also join them and play like kids”* (SSI 08). Furthermore, an interviewee from Kesbewa, Colombo, a Management Assistant and a father of a single child, shared his experience and said, *“I observed that children became more creative in this time. Earlier they had been confined to education competition. Children who often got sick earlier, were healthy during this period”* (SSI 37). Revealing another positive side of the home-bound during the curfew, a 46-year old entrepreneur from Dehiwala stated that earlier his family used to have food bought from outside but now they prefer homemade food (SSI 40). The same was repeated by a 43-year old female school teacher from Homagama who said, *“We have totally stopped eating outside food”* (SSI 60).

However, it was evident that mostly the respondents who were not less affected or not medically or economically affected at all had the privilege of making it a holiday season or a family get-together.

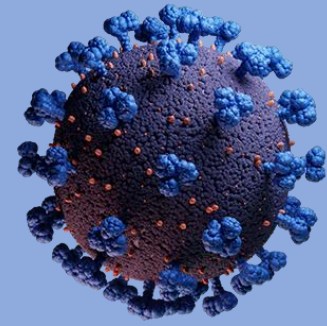
Respondents who had lost their source of income due to the pandemic had reported the cases of mental imbalance or stress. For example, a female worker of a garment factory, who had lost her income, said that she had sleepless nights because of the mental stress she was undergoing (SSI 05). Similarly, the respondents who were infected with the virus or were in quarantine had stories of their own. For example, a 59-year old infected female from Bandaranaike Mawatha, Colombo 12, an area where a high number of COVID-19 patients were reported and was declared a high risk zone, described her experience of mental imbalance during the

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*“Even for a short time, children have got the beautiful days that we had in the past” - interviewees*

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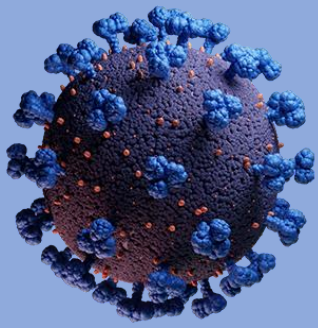
course of time of the discovery of the illness and afterwards [SSI 63]. More than getting infected with the disease, what had stressed her up was the confusion caused by the situation and the responses from the community: *“I had only a problem in my abdomen... but they found the virus in me...then they brought my whole family here... Our pictures were posted on Facebook... naming us as virus carriers”* [SSI 63]. In fact, it was reported that the fear of getting labelled as “an infected” was more of a concern: *“If you had just talked with a patient then they will say that you have got Coronavirus... or else you will be quarantined. There is a house there in ..... side like that. People even go passing that house with fear. Even look at them like they were murderers. I think that it is better to die getting the disease than getting that sort of responses from the people,”* said a female respondent from Galle (SSI 39). A Navy officer, who was under quarantine at the time the interview was conducted, complained that when he contacted the *Grama Niladhari* of the division in which his parental house was situated to stay there for 14 days of further quarantine, he was discouraged (SSI 64). A 54-year-old resident of Bandaranaike Mawatha, Colombo 12, who has returned from a quarantine centre, reported his bitter experience of being side-lined; *“even when a pregnant woman goes to the hospital and when they get to know that she is from this place people get scared”* [SSI 65]. The survey, which consisted of island-wide respondents, nonetheless, depicted that 87% of the respondents or their family members had not had any psychological complications due to the pandemic outbreak.

However, employees in the healthcare sector, who felt themselves being in the high risk category, reported the continuous fear of being infected with the virus. A female medical laboratory technician from Karapitiya, Galle, shared her views of the situation and said, *“due to the slightest mistake even we can get infected with the virus... I feel unsafe all the time”* (SSI 25). Similarly, another respondent shared her brother’s experience and said *“he is a doctor at Ragama hospital, where COVID-19 patients were found. His wife is pregnant and he has stopped coming home as he is afraid of spreading the virus to his wife. My sister-in-law is so upset now”* (SSI 24). Similarly, a matron of one of the Colombo Municipal Council maternal and child care clinics, who had worked with the residents of one of the locked-down places, complained of *“stress unbearable”* and said *“whenever I come back from community visits, I feel myself infected*

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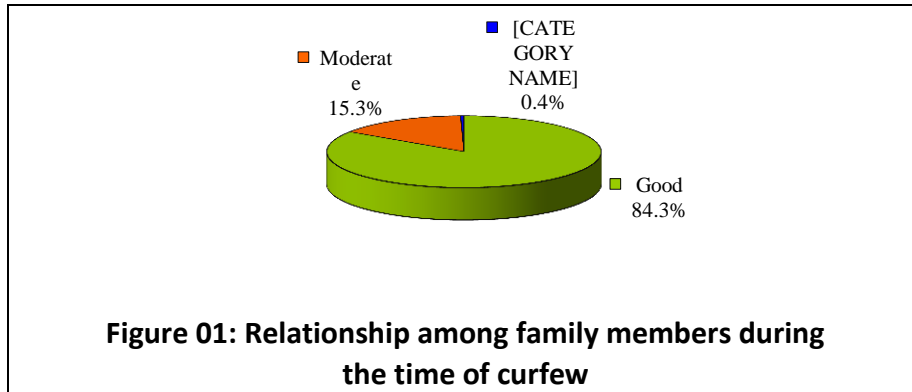
*“I had only a problem in my abdomen... but they found the virus in me...then they brought my whole family here... Our pictures were posted on Facebook... naming us as virus carriers”*  
[SSI 63].

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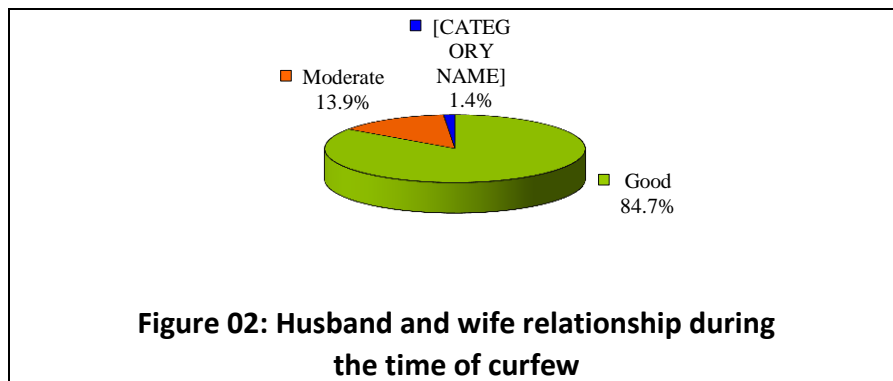
with the virus... I feel as if I have a sore throat and a cold... I know all these are psychological...there had been days I bathe more than three times a day” (SSI66). As such, in line with the findings in other countries affected by the new Coronavirus ( Cai, et al., 2020; Rana\*, Mukhtar, & Mukhtar, 2020; Zaka, Shamloo, Fiorente, & Tafuri, 2020), in Sri Lanka also, medical staff directly working with infected or suspected persons could be identified as one the most vulnerable groups for psychological imbalances.

In Sri Lanka also, medical staff directly working with infected or suspected persons could be identified as one the most vulnerable groups for psychological imbalances.



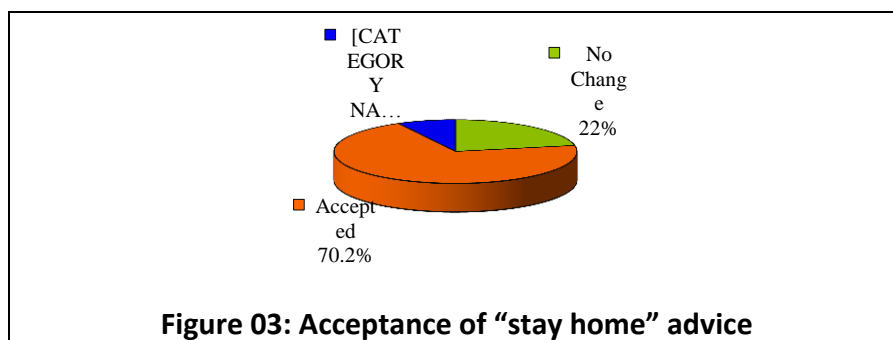
**Figure 01: Relationship among family members during the time of curfew**

Source: COVID 19 Social Impact Survey 2020



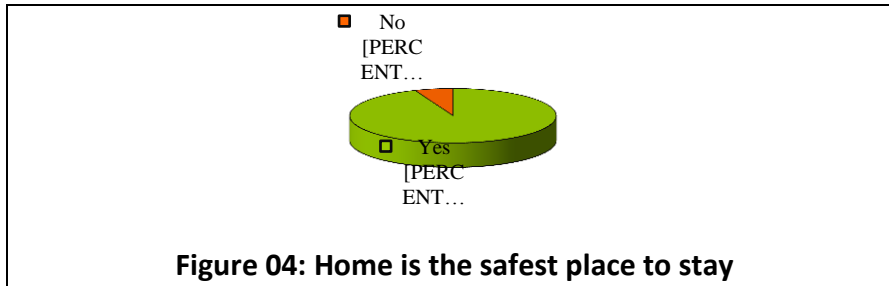
**Figure 02: Husband and wife relationship during the time of curfew**

Source: COVID 19 Social Impact Survey 2020



**Figure 03: Acceptance of “stay home” advice**

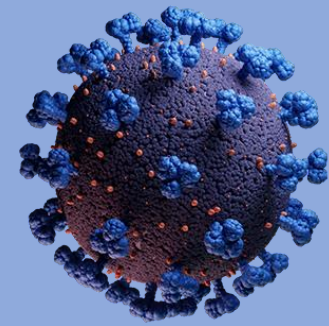
Source: COVID 19 Social Impact Survey 2020



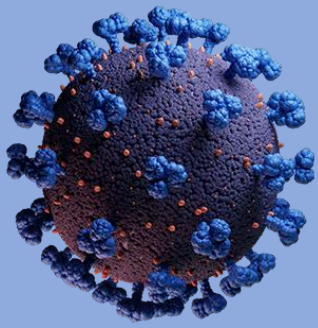
**Figure 04: Home is the safest place to stay**

Source: COVID 19 Social Impact Survey 2020

Contrary to the respondents who made positive responses of bringing family together, only a few had negative responses on the same. For example, a house wife complained “*when the men are at home it is the women who go mad*” (SSI 39), indicating the increased level of her mental imbalance. However, in response to the question on the condition of relationships among family members during the curfew time, 84.3% was recorded as good, 15.3% as moderate, and only 0.4% as with problems (Figure 01). Similarly, 84.7% stated that the husband-wife relations remained well during the curfew season (Figure 02). As such, it can be concluded that the motto of the pandemic time “stay home” was welcomed in Sri Lanka warmly. This factor was confirmed by the survey results too, in which, in response to the question regarding their opinion on “stay home” medical advice, 70.2% said that they accepted it with pleasure while 22% said that it made no difference to them and only 7.8% said that they had no pleasure about it (Figure 03). As such, it is a sound argument to make that the safety-net that prevented Sri Lankan society from falling victim to a mass psychological crisis was the family at home. In fact, this was proved as 94% respondents of the survey said that, according to their experience, “home is the safest place” (Figure 04), which was justified on the claims: “love and care of the family members” (SQ68, 72, 84, 119, 177, 186,), “the rural setting in which the house was situated” (SQ6, 39, 48, 53, 149, 157, 161, 169, 174, 204, 212, 230, 264, 265, 268, 341, 348, 446), “cleanliness of the house” (SQ14, 31, 89, 105, 116, 117, 166, 188, 202, 210, 357, 373, 379, 428), “bond among family members” (SQ62, 68), “protection of parents and elders” (SQ109, 113, 124, 126,), “calm and relaxing environment” (SQ44, 190, 224, 422) “mutual understanding” (SQ303, and “not feeling any risk” (SQ445) among others. The point was made crystal clear by one respondent: “because it is home” (SQ 364). The findings, as such, were in clear contrast to the findings of some other societies, which had highlighted the negative impact of



**Eighty four percent (84.7%) stated that the husband-wife relations remained well during the curfew season**



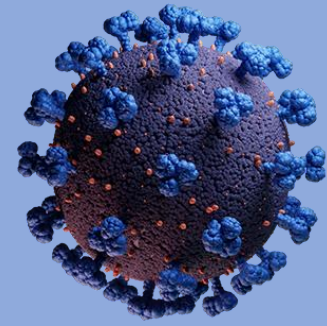
the lockdown on mental health (Karnon, 2020; Cellini, Canale, Mion, & Costa, 2020; Mucci, Mmucci, & Diolaiuti, 2020).

Although some respondents reported that they felt a bit claustrophobic because of the curfew (SSI 17, SSI 30, SSI 61), there were responses that supported the argument that the curfew and other restrictions resulted in developing better relations even at the close community level. One respondent said, *“neighbours have made it a habit to share food with others. The relations have got stronger. There is no social distancing”* (SSI05). *“We shared food with our neighbours”* confirmed other respondents (SSI13, SSI 40). A mother of two children, who was a teacher by profession, said that the virus taught her a lesson not to be egoistic and to help others (SSI 30). *“Time was insufficient earlier even to talk to our neighbours as we were all busy, now we’ve got time to talk with each other and become friends,”* one respondent reported (SSI 05).

### 3.5.3 From fearing to daring the virus

The respondents reported the fear and panic they underwent when they had to face the “strange” virus at the beginning. However, it was revealed that the panic and fear that were evident in society at the initial stage of the pandemic had a gradual decline in the course of time. Many respondents reported that though they were frightened when they first heard about the deadly virus, later on they felt relieved as they felt confident as the virus was not spreading and the death toll was not increasing like in many other countries. Two respondents said, *“now we have got adapted to this”* (SSI 32, SSI56) while another said, *“I’m confident that I can protect myself from this”* (SSI 06). At the extreme end, one was brave enough to declare, *“I am not afraid of getting infected with the virus. What I am really afraid of is spreading the virus to the others if I get the disease. Sir, this is a mere sickness. I think many get cured themselves”* (SSI 26). As a whole, the respondents were prepared to accept that the virus would not disappear soon but would live with us for long, assuming a period ranging from six months to two years. *“I understand this will take a longer time to disappear”* (SSI 04), *“it will take at least one more year”* (SSI 57), *“it will drag on for some time”* (SSI 21), were some responses received in confirmation of the above fact.

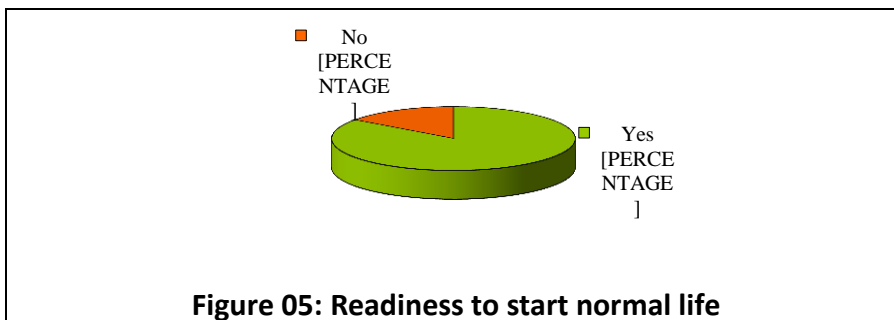
The respondents reported the fear and panic they underwent when they had to face the “strange” virus at the beginning.



### Personal feelings about the fear of the pandemic

*“At first, I was frightened a lot seen the situation in some other countries. I thought that a great disaster would happen. But, later on, as the situation here was getting better, I felt less frightened. Now I only have about ten percent of the initial fear.”*

**SSI 13:** Development Officer, (35 years, male, graduate, Weligama).  
[This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 04, 12, 16, 25, 34, 35, 37, 56, 58, 59, 61].



Source: COVID 19 Social Impact Survey 2020

The fact that Sri Lankan society did not end up in a mass psychological crisis due to the pandemic situation is further supported by the confidence shown by the respondents in resuming public life, accepting the virus as a reality and facing the truth. *“I’m ready to restart work. A country can’t go ahead like this”*, a 40 year old school teacher from Anuradhapura affirmed (SSI 12). In response to the question whether they are ready to start normal life, facing the reality of the virus, 85% responded in the affirmative (Figure 05).

### 3.5.4 Roadside Corona philosophies

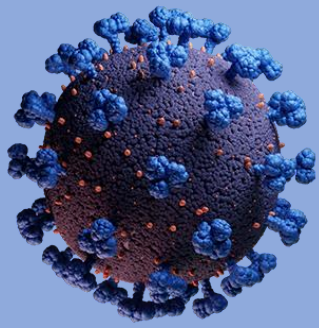
#### Hierarchies changing in a pandemic atmosphere

*“This virus has made the world upside down! See... I saw one day a cop taught a doctor how to wear a face mask. Actors are farming... Farmers are acting... utter enjoyment! See... another thing... doctors have got frightened of the disease... patients are not... they go everywhere but not to the hospital.”*

**SSI 28:** Government executive officer, (52 years, male, Graduate)

Sri Lankan society did not end up in a mass psychological crisis due to the pandemic situation





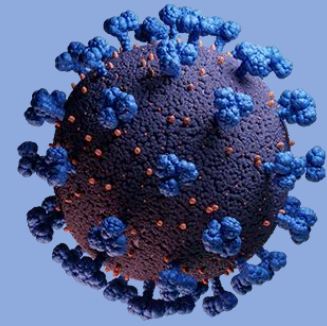
Not only the great minds but also common people started philosophizing phenomena they encounter. Especially, in a traumatic situation, in which people are unable to fully understand what is really happening, one way of coping with it, is to take a detour to make meaning of it through stories, narratives, anecdotes, and philosophies. From the conspiracy theories on the emergence of the new coronavirus to the narratives that scapegoated it to the racial other, and from “scientific explanations” to the cyber folklore spread through Social Media are evidences of those type of detours. The present study reveals that going beyond the level of stories and narratives, people attempted to philosophize the traumatic situation. Interestingly, most of the time they started getting connected to religio-cultural belief systems, emphasizing the value of a simple lifestyle (SSI 05, SSI 32, SSI41 SSI 42, SSI 49), contemplating the impermanence of life (SSI 04, SSI 07, SSI 34, SSI 41), destiny or *Karma* (SSI 60), need for getting rid of unnecessary addictions (SSI 05, SSI 34, SSI 42, SSI 49), and not being dejected at the *eight worldly conditions* (SSI 57). In addition, some had “environmental philosophies” which described the pandemic as a “natural occurrence that happened to keep the balance in nature as well as in human behaviour has caused an imbalance in nature” (SSI 01, SSI 07, SSI 09).

In justifying this point, one respondent described that the higher death tolls reported in some of the developed countries were results of higher damage they had done to the environment; “*they get in return what they have done*” he added (SSI 41). A 40-year old retail shop owner from Kalpitiya put this idea as, “*I think that the nature is the highest god of all gods. What we have been doing so far is going against nature. Nature has knocked a clout on our head and has said that what we have done to it can be returned in one second; that it can change us*” (SSI 09). The same idea was repeated by a young male respondent: “*it is only the nature ruling the whole world now*” (SSI 48). A 23-year old female university student from Galenbindunuwewa was confident that the day the environment recovers from the damage the virus will disappear from the world (SSI 44). One respondent said, “*we should rethink the concept of development*” (SSI38) while another predicted “*a possible change in capitalist life styles in the future*” (SSI 51). In confirmation of the prediction, one respondent said that this was an opportunity to distinguish between the basic needs and the false desires, which

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“This virus has made the world upside down! See... I saw one day a cop taught a doctor how to wear a face mask. Actors are farming... Farmers are acting... utter enjoyment!” -  
*Government executive officer*

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would help us live a better life in the future (SSI 42). A 57-year old female health worker opined that this is a blessing in disguise, *“nature has given an opportunity to understand what humanity is”* (SSI 66), she added. According to another respondent, *“this was a dystopia we all have been wanting. We all have been wanting a break to this boring life style. Now people have started living their lives”* (SSI 28). Further, elaborating on his idea seasoned with a little bit of existentialism, he added *“in the time of the Coronavirus people are laughing while crying”* (SSI 28). Similarly, a female garment factory worker almost unknowingly quoted Shakespeare and said, *“I think that what we all are doing is acting a fake role on a stage”* (SSI 05). In contrast, some had totally pragmatic approaches to the issue and saw the situation as an opportunity to venture on (SSI 06, SSI 11, SSI 58). *“We should prepare to face the future imagining the worst scenario”*, a 58-year old entrepreneur in the hotel industry from Colombo 07 expressed his visionary view.

### 3.5.5 Section summary

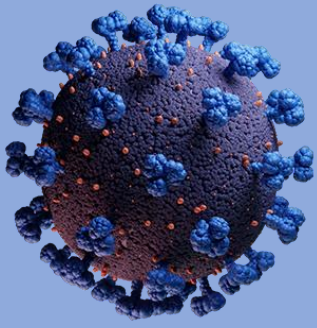
Except the fear and panic witnessed at its initial stages, the virus pandemic has not made a serious psychological impact on the Sri Lankan society. In particular, it has not reached a level of mass mental imbalance prevalent in society at large. In fact, at least on a fraction of the society, it has made positive impacts in terms of mental health, as the curfew and lockdown provided them an opportunity to “stay home”, and spend more time with the family members, and, in some instances, to strengthen the bond even with the close community. Concerning family and the close community both, many people managed to prevent a mass-scale psychological imbalance in the society. However, the employees of the health sector, especially those who had to work with the virus-infected patients and suspected persons, reported psychological imbalances. Similarly, the COVID-19 patients and the suspected persons reported mental imbalances, not directly due to the disease, but mainly because of the responses from the others. Likewise, those who had lost their source of income had worries over the rising issues of uncertainty. As a whole, the society has not been mentally unfit and remains confident over restarting public life as usual. Other than the family, as it had been revealed, religious, cultural, and “philosophical” roots, which enabled people to make sense out of

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*“Nature has given an opportunity to understand what humanity is” (SSI 66)*

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the ‘nonsensical’ virus by taking a meaning-making detour, also helped them have mental relief during the time of the pandemic.

## SECTION 3.6

### COVID-19 Impact on Cultural and Religious Behaviour

#### 3.6.1 Introduction

In this section of the research our concentration was focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the cultural and religious behaviour of the people of Sri Lanka. During our survey, it was noticed that some significant changes had occurred in the cultural and religious behaviour of all communities in Sri Lanka.

Traditional indigenous knowledge took over many aspects of life leaving behind many practices that evolved in a spirit of becoming modern. In the absence of an effective treatment procedure to be followed against COVID-19 the practitioners of local forms of medicine made out of a mixture of indigenous medical knowledge, *ayurveda*, *yunani*, traditional healing methods, rituals, observances, and so on gained prominence in the villages. Accordingly, consumption of medicinal herbal drinks, wearing pieces of asafoetida (*perumkayan*) as a traditional disinfectant, adding asafoetida (*perumkayan*) and turmeric (*kaha*) to foods, became common in society irrespective of their exposure to modern trends of life.

Unlike before the pandemic, the people following all four major religions in Sri Lanka – Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims – became more devoted to the practice of rituals and offerings as well as customs and manners. Visitation to the religious places and participation in annual festivals and processions were restricted by a Government order made under the COVID-19 regulations and that did not separate the communities from their religiousness. People enhanced their daily worship at home with the support of the media. All TV stations in Sri Lanka broadcast sermons, chants, prayers, discussions, documentaries, song recitals, stage plays and movies carrying religious themes. So the people who were destined to remain confined to their domestic settings were enabled to

Except the fear and panic witnessed at its initial stages, the virus pandemic has not made a serious psychological impact on the Sri Lankan society.

sustain their spiritual values, despite the curtailment of their movements between home and places of worship.

### 3.6.2. Indigenous knowledge attracting prominence

Although Sri Lanka is an upcoming modern society, the people still heavily rely on their indigenous knowledge and related practices. During the pandemic period, the health sector and the relevant *key* stake holders urged the public to apply certain remedies which our ancestors had practiced for generations.

### 3.6.3. Use of herbs and spices

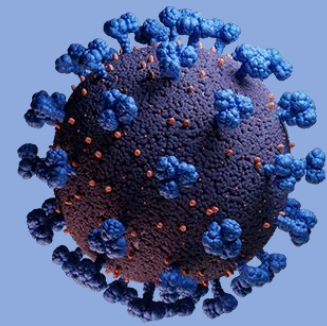
Many people believe that indigenous medicines can help prevent the spread of the novel Coronavirus. So they started drinking coriander (*koththamalli*) false calumba (*weniwel*), *cassi quriculata* (*ranawara*), *aerva javanica* (*polpala*) as antibiotics and steaming themselves with boiling water spiced with neem leaves (*Kohomba leaves*) and leman leaves (*dehi* leaves). They believed that the frequency in their tendency to fall sick decreased because of the indigenous health practices they adopted (SSI 05) that were focused on strengthening the immune system (SSI 10). But if we start treatment for COVID-19 patients under indigenous medicine the process would take much time, and there will be a real challenge in promoting it in a society that is has been used to western medicine for several decades. Therefore, they liked to get treatments through western medicine (SSI 02).

It is revealed by a male restaurant chef aged 58 at Nittambuwa in the Gampaha District that the Sinhalese kitchen in the past used antiseptics as remedies to overcome any sort of epidemics in their households. Moreover, if a person caught a cold or was under an attack of fever he/ she would be given boiled cumin seeds (*suduru*).

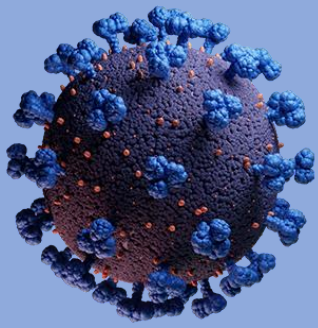
#### Sustaining immunity with local medicinal herbs

*“Since the foreigners are attracted to surf all the time we used to give them boiled cumin seeds (suduru) drink every evening so as to avoid catching a cold, and they enjoy it.”*

SSI 11: Male Restaurant Chef, (Age 58, Nittambuwa, Gampaha District)



Consumption of medicinal herbal drinks, wearing pieces of asafoetida (*perumkayan*) as a traditional disinfectant, adding asafoetida (*perumkayan*) and turmeric (*kaha*) to foods, became common in society irrespective of their exposure to modern trends of life.



This shows even the foreigners who are used to western medicine have been enjoying the blend of Sinhalese household remedies with respect.

### 3.6.4. Towards traditional medicine and remedies

Usage of traditional plants (medicinal) and remedies has increased among the people, as stated by a woman (SSI 01) below:

#### Trust in herbal and Ayurveda medicines

*“We all believe these are pandemics, more rely on the Aurvedic treatments, as we cannot go for western medicines will try our herbs and other remedies.”*

SSI 01: House wife in a urban slum, (Age 41, Wallawatha, Colombo District). [This statement was crosschecked and verified by SSI 09, 13].

They believe that western medicine has its own limitations and their ancestors for generations had for ever practiced traditional indigenous medicines and remedies which they found more reliable than anything else. On the question of the use of traditional and indigenous medical knowledge, 89% respondents were positive (Figure 06). It was found that comparatively people far more educated and urbanized than many have also been practicing the long-standing traditional treatment procedures.

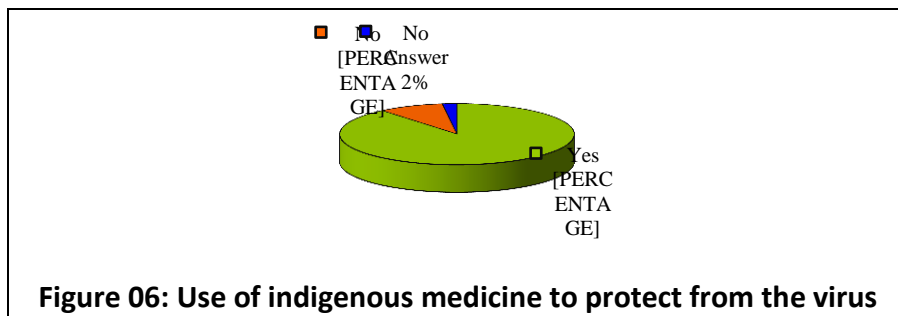


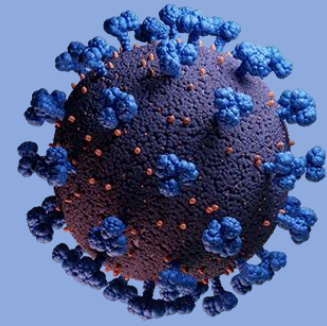
Figure 06: Use of indigenous medicine to protect from the virus

Source: COVID 19 Social Impact Survey 2020

### 3.6.5. Indigenous rituals and practices

Using neem leaves (*kohomba kola*) to create a barrier against infections is a traditional practice in Sri Lanka. It gathered prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic. The neem branch hanging from the vault at an entrance is a signal for the members of the household as well as the outsiders to follow as to that a patient

The Sinhalese kitchen in the past used antiseptics as remedies to overcome any sort of epidemics in their households. Moreover, if a person caught a cold or was under an attack of fever he/ she would be given boiled cumin seeds (suduru).



infected with a contagious disease is present. Folklore researchers studying indigenous practices say if the disease is not contained and more households in a village get affected, then neem branches are piled on access roads to the village issuing a warning to visitors about the possibility of a community level infestation. This research has shown even by today that medicinal properties especially the antiseptic qualities of neem, turmeric and lime are acknowledged by the Ayurveda system and now well-accepted by modern medical science.

#### Ritual significance of Neem

*“As our mothers have been saying, during a situation like this we used to hang a neem branch to indicate that no one should enter or go outside the house. We know that this is a disease of the god and we must be quarantined not to spread it to the outsiders.”*

**SSI 08:** Serving as a Clark, Divisional Secretariat Office, (Age 42, male, Kalpitiya, Puttalam district)

It is remarkable that our Sri Lankan folk communities practiced these rituals, based on their traditional knowledge.

This custom is mainly practiced to contain the spread of infectious diseases referred in Sinhalese as *“deiyange leda”* (diseases of the gods) to viral diseases like chickenpox, measles, mumps and smallpox.

### 3.6.6 Changes in the practice of religion

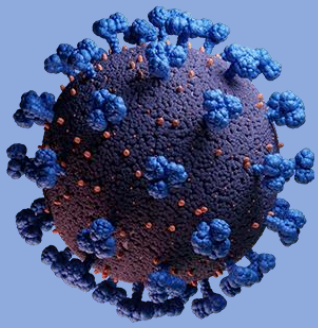
Large-scale religious festivities, rituals, and processions were curtailed by a Government order passed under the campaign against COVID-19. Nevertheless, the people’s devotion and engagement in the practice of religion and the cultivation of spirituality was sustained by a strong media intervention that kept the respective communities active while adhering to the requirement of staying at home (SSI 40).

It was observed that most people who spent a consideration period of time every day in engagement with religious observances within their places of worship were compensated by religious broadcasts

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Using neem leaves (*kohomba kola*) to create a barrier against infections is a traditional practice in Sri Lanka.

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that helped to sustain their meditation practices, spiritual developmental activities, etc.

Some religious places paid attention to limit the religious affairs for the devotees considering the Government regulations on social distancing, and sanitation. The donors of some temples performed almsgivings events while maintaining the national directives on precautionary health measures.

In this research, it was noticed that those who needed benediction, could have it over the phone through priests who had offered their service in that respect though their mobile phones. They changed the ways of performing religious rituals under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic (SSI 01). It was also reported elsewhere (among the Sri Lankan Buddhist communities in the US, for example), that religious activities such as *Pirith* chanting were performed using the zoom application (Bohingamuwa pers.com). These practices may indicate that the people's trust in religious blessings became even stronger in every society in the times of uncertainty such as COVID-19 (Adikaram, 1999).

### 3.6. 7. Changes in religious and moral values

It was noticed that some of those who were physically and mentally stressed by the dint of frequent engagement in the ritual and festive activities conducted in religious places, were relieved of the stress and were consoled by the possibility they enjoyed to engage in the same at their homes as an initiative made during this morbid situation.

#### Frustrated with the lack of opportunity to practice worship

*"We don't even have time to get to a temple. Vesak is a greatest holy day for Buddhists. Now we cannot celebrate that either. Would love to visit a temple. But there is no chance for that now. I think this is all a sin we have committed. We have all participated in it. Things like that, people don't make sin."*

SSI 39: House wife, (59 years old, female, living in urban area, Galle).

Large-scale religious festivities, rituals, and processions were curtailed by a Government order passed under the campaign against COVID-19.



As explained by SSI 39 and SSI 46, it can be mentioned that some people have inclined to do the religious rituals and offerings as well as observe customs and manners while staying at home with the help of the electronic media.

It can be especially noticed that during this period of time the practices of listening to *Dhamma* sermons and chanting protective *Pirith*, gathered prominence over the others.

#### Inclination to spirituality and religiousness

*“People are becoming more religious thinking than ever before. Pirith chanting are being used in almost every household because of the use of formulas to eliminate the plague. The temples are not going away because of the curfew. If we don't have that much impact, it would be dangerous if this spread.”*

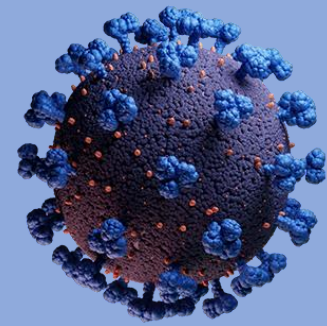
SSI 46: Student, (24 year old, female, living in Village area, Mahawawa, Puttalam).

Even though scholars debate on secularization, there was no evidence to prove it in Sri Lanka, with reference to the data that collected all over the country. Many have engaged in religious activities more seriously than before during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While there are many modern definitions of the *Buddha Dhamma* as a secular practice of spirituality, and the term ‘secularization’ is defined as “the process of removing the influence or power that religion has over something” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2007), in Sri Lanka, the majority of the population being Buddhist, no religious order had any influence or power over their followers, and the people could be easily excused from their obligations to visit their places of worship, where their presence used to be mandatory.

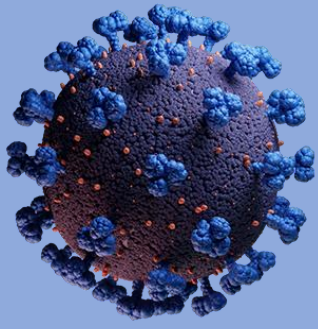
### 3.6.8 Changes in religion-nature connection

No religion is above nature. If we spend our day to day life protecting our nature no natural disaster will appear in the world. We should try to understand the rhythm of nature (SSI 07/ SSI 09). A religious interpretation gained ground that nature shows its power and punishes our bad behaviour. As a result of the lockdown or curfew, nature acquired a refreshing spectacular look, all over the



It can be especially noticed that during this period of time the practices of listening to *Dhamma* sermons and chanting protective *Pirith*, gathered prominence over the others.





world. World news broadcasts showed how distant places appeared after the disappearance of thick smoke clouds. Various types of pollutants - soil, water, air and sound - got reduced in various levels in the whole world. Also the ozone layer of the earth recovered from its damage during the last few months. In relation to that, the new corona outbreak has been viewed by many critics as the best gift nature had ever had.

### 3.6.9 Changes over religious rituals

People, who believe the supernatural powers in the universe, imagine getting some kind of consolation through the religious rituals. What they believed in that respect was that the new corona pandemic came from the universe to show anger over human activities that destroy nature.

#### Interpreting the pandemic in mythological terms

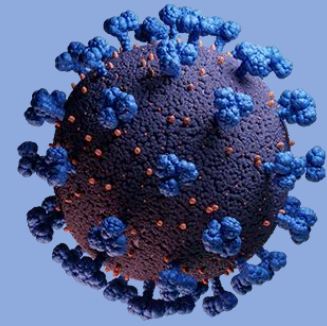
*"This disease is global pandemic. It came out from the universe. It shows their anger."*

**SSI 01:** House wife (41 years old, female, living in urban slum area, Pamankada, Colombo).

It was discovered that some people paid more and more attention to chanting or listening to prayers or benedictory chants prescribed for daily use, in their religions. For the use of Buddhists, there are some *Pirith sutras* (protective discourses), such as *Rathana*, *Girimananda*, and *Bojjhanga* which are supposed to help people recover from illnesses. So the Buddhists engage in that type of religious rituals in the belief that the "one who safeguards the *dhamma*, will be safeguarded by *dhamma itself*" (*Dhammo have rakkhati dhammacāriṃ, dhammo suciṇṇo sukhamāvahāti*) (Jataka Pali I, Maha Dhammapala Jataka).

The opponents of chanting *Pirith* claimed that it was not that much meaningful and that if Coronavirus was a virus, it had to be eliminated medically rather than practices such as ritual chanting.

In Sri Lanka, the majority of the population being Buddhist, no religious order had any influence or power over their followers, and the people could be easily excused from their obligations to visit their places of worship, where their presence used to be mandatory.



#### Scepticism about Chanting Pirith

*“Buddha taught theory of causality. If there is no cause no results will arise. Even though we are chanting Pirith, cause of the disease is still there. Cause is virus. Result is death. If it is possible to control the virus then an only we can control the death.”*

SSI 12: Government teacher (40 years old, Anuradhapura)

Some people increase the time that they allocate for religious activities for the two reasons: 1) the COVID-19 was a dangerous pandemic; 2) they had enough time to engage in religious activities. One of the interviewees pointed out that he is listening to the *Dhamma* to have a peaceful mind, to relax himself, and to immune himself against the virus.

#### Trust in the Buddha’s teachings as a way out for problems

*“It is very difficult to sleep these days due to the mental issues have been aroused. Hence, I listen to the Dhamma a lot to be relaxed.”*

SSI 05: Works in a Garment Factory, (51 year old, female, Kesbewa, Piliyandala)

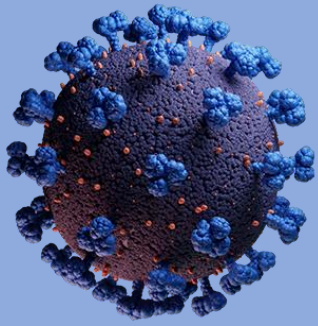
Similarly, some people believe that engaging in religious activities was really good during the corona outbreak; and that religions helped mankind to enhance their spiritual life. They also followed rules and regulations given by the health sector to prevent COVID-19. With reference to interviewee SSI 14, making donations to the needy was as vital as making offerings to the Buddha or any deities.

#### Trust in charity against a sickly environment

*“According to my view, it is better to pay much attention to practice offerings.”*

SSI 14: Library assistant, (35 years old, Imaduwa).

The opponents of chanting *Pirith* claimed that it was not that much meaningful and that if Coronavirus was a virus, it had to be eliminated medically rather than practices such as ritual chanting.



### 3.6.10 Changes in funeral rites

There are four major religious communities in Sri Lanka - Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, and Muslims – have funeral rites particular to them, as developed in the countries where their religions originated. The meaning of all ritual performances was to ensure a comfortable afterlife for the dead. All communities, except the Muslims, use coffins to deposit the corpse and keep it for homage by the loved-ones for a few days, and all rituals connected with it are determined by the family clans or villages at regional levels.

#### Condoning with COVID-19 funeral law

*“Even though there is no dead body, we can do religious activities.”*

**SSI 10:** Government teacher, (41 years old, Buddhist monk, Dikwella, Matara District)

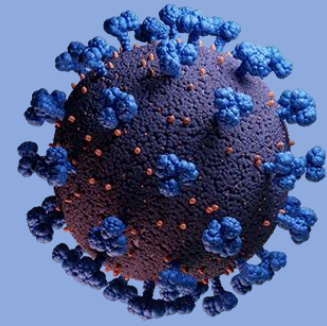
Some people believe that engaging in religious activities was really good during the corona outbreak; and that religions helped mankind to enhance their spiritual life.

The Islamic followers believe that the body resides in the grave until the Day of Judgment. This is a period of trial where angels will question the dead about their beliefs and practices. The grave functions like a paradise for the righteous whereas for the unrighteous it will be a torture chamber. On the Day of Judgment a horn will be blown and the dead will be resurrected to face the final punishment. Hence, cremation is not encouraged (Uzell, 2020). It is stated by the 42-year old Islamic follower working as the chief clerk of the Divisional Secretariat, Puttalam District.

#### Clash between religious beliefs and the COVID-19 funeral law

*“No permission to cremation. Why? We return after the burial. The one who come to bring the soul (angel) of the dead one will come close to the body. Then question the things that he/she did either good or bad in the life. Therefore coffin or dead body should be there. After the cremation no more body”*

**SSI 08:** Chief Clerk, Divisional Secretariat (42 years old, Kalpitiya, Puttalam District).



### 3.6.11 Section summary

The impact of COVID -19 pandemic caused several changes in the application of religious rituals and indigenous knowledge in Sri Lanka. It appeared that some changes occurred in the rituals and offerings as well as customs and manners. The affairs at religious places accomplished by the devotees in general were withheld until further notice. People's lifestyle shows how far they engaged in the religious rituals, offerings and the other affairs which are related life. It is evident that serious changes have occurred to applications of traditional indigenous knowledge due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It became evident that, although the modern society was highly exposed to modern technology and knowledge, it started relying intensively on the indigenous knowledge and practices. Moreover, the health sectors and the relevant key stakeholders urged the public to undergo certain remedies which their ancestors had practiced for generations.

## SECTION 3.7

### COVID-19 Impact on Gender Behaviour

#### 3.7.1 Introduction

The principle objective of this section is to examine gender related issues experienced in Sri Lanka during the COVID-19 outbreak. Generally, males and females both followed the government rules and regulations and worked together to overcome the threat. However, the study revealed that a huge wave of gender unrest emerged during this period in Sri Lanka. The key issues identified were mental stress, economic instability, increasing household work, online instruction for the children's education, domestic worker issues, loss of hope, and sexual issues.

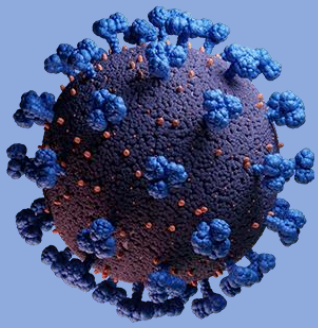
#### 3.7.2 Economic instability and stress

It was found that economic insecurity became the major factor of mental stress among both sexes. The respondents, who had no monthly salary and used to be doing odd jobs, faced severe mental stress during this situation. One female respondent (SSI 1) said that;

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It is evident that serious changes have occurred to applications of traditional indigenous knowledge due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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**Negative impact on family income**

*“My husband is a three-wheeler driver. He does not work nowadays because of curfew. We don’t have any income so we mortgaged jewellery.”*

SSI 1: Housewife, [41 years old, Wellawatte slum area, Colombo District. [This statement cross-checked and verified by SSI 05, 20, 39, 40].

Further, research findings revealed that some men and women lost their jobs and some were at the risk of losing their jobs. It was noted that more women were engaged in temporary, part-time or casual jobs in comparison to men. These jobs often come with low payments, weak legal covers, and complications in the employer-employee contracts.

Women who work in garment factories, beauty salons, small businesses associated with the tourism sector were reported to have become direct victims of the pandemic. Self-employed women have lost their income as well, but still they try to be the breadwinners of their families. Even though men are the main income generators of the family, the pandemic situation caused the loss of their jobs, and reduced the income they used to make.

### 3.7.3 Gender and stressful ambiguity

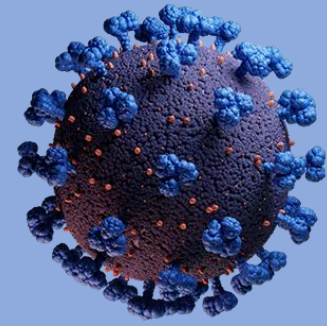
The research findings show gender base stressful ambiguity as a result of COVID-19. It is clear that, males and females equally suffered the situation.

**Helpless with regard to health issues**

*“These days my wife is pregnant. Under that situation difficult to find a doctor for treatment. My mother is also ill. So now I am facing a big stress.”*

SSI 39: University Lecturer, [38 years old, postgraduate level education, Kalutara District. This statement crosschecked and verified by SSI 1, 17, 34].

The study revealed that a huge wave of gender unrest emerged during this period in Sri Lanka.



Research data revealed that the pandemic had a severe impact on all women regardless of their economic capacity. While the lower middle-class women were severely affected by the hit on their economy the upper-class women felt the pressure of losing the lifestyle they had been accustomed to. The novel Coronavirus had a drastic change in the lifestyle of upper middle class and elite women as well. However, the pandemic caused stress for both sexes, but it was also evident that the females were more pressured by it. Many female participants told that they were engaged in panic buying.

### 3.7.4 Gender-based violence

The research findings show that the majority of the Sri Lankan women were consciousness though tolerance of violence against them in the name of family and the children. One obvious reason for a staggering increase in domestic violence is the husbands' addiction to alcohol. Even though women feel it is hard to have a family life with their spouse, due to reasons such as social norms, children's future, they are afraid of getting divorced.

#### Family disputes aggravating due to geo-space limitation

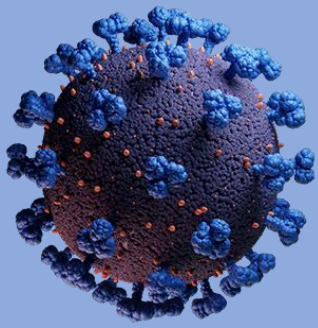
*"We (me and my husband) fought a lot in the beginning of our family life. I have been hit for 9 years. He was so alcoholic. The major reason for his behaviour is suspicion on cheating. It is very hard to live with him even today".*

**SSI39:** Housewife, (41 years old, lives in a slum, Wellawatta, Colombo). This statement was cross-checked and verified by SSI1, 05, 19, 47, 49, 59, 61]

According to research participants from Sri Lankan police department, there was no report on a significant had got increase in domestic violence. This was in contrast with the reported increase of domestic violence in the western states. However, according to the research data, with the spread of the novel Coronavirus, there was an increase in alcohol usage, particularly in the rural areas where many men had got used to alcohol. The research data revealed that young males also tended to use drugs, alcohol, cigarettes during the pandemic, and it became a major reason for the increase in domestic violence.

While the lower middle-class women were severely affected by the hit on their economy the upper-class women felt the pressure of losing the lifestyle they had been accustomed to.





### 3.7.5 Sharing gender roles

#### Enhanced consumption of alcohol

*“The Majority of lower income male people addicted to alcohol, during the pandemic situation it is visible the higher consumption of alcohol.”*

SSI 61: Male, Rikillagaskada, Nuwaraeliya. [This statement cross-checked and verified by SSI 1, 17, 34]

Some husbands have praised their wives for motivating them. Women were more likely to be trapped in their homes due to the pandemic. Some husbands reported helping their wives in cooking, but the majority of the men tended to feel this as a vacation from their busy working lives. Many men who participated in the interviews reported using the pandemic time as a vacation to stay at home. It is important to note that, the research findings show that, during this period, some husbands and wives identified the situation and developed a good collaboration between them in executing the household work.

### 3.7.6 Online work and education

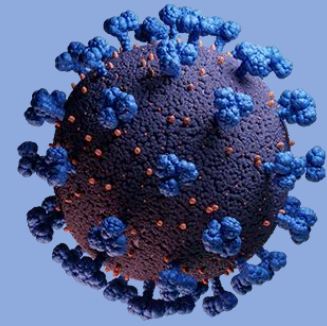
#### Negative impact on the children’s education

*“In the beginning of the school vacation children are playing. Now they receive homework. This is one of the stress to me. Not only that, now are children living in stressful mind.”*

SSI24: Research officer, Sri Lanka Parliament [40 years old, Postgraduate level education, Colombo District]. [This statement cross-checked and verified by SSI, 20 25].

The data show how the home environment got lost due to bringing the office work home, causing conflicts within the family, and how some mothers employed in essential services were depressed, because they were unable to be with their children. It was evident that women were depressed due to the lack of time to devote on caring for their families and focusing on their children’s education while working. Online teaching has given extra burden to the

The research data revealed that young males also tended to use drugs, alcohol, cigarettes during the pandemic, and it became a major reason for the increase in domestic violence.



working moms. It was evident from the data that the sex life of the family was at its lowest during the period of the novel Coronavirus.

### 3.7.7 Political movements

Elections are the major political events of a political system which shape political behaviour in different shapes in long term and short term (Khan et al. 2015). Moreover, according to the Rational Choice Theory, individual has a rational side which is capable of making consistent choices (Vik, 2013). People utilized that particular knowledge to identify changes of the society. The COVID-19 outbreak vastly effected on the political culture of Sri Lanka. The COVID-19 diffusion is the first and the foremost factor to rethink about political participation as well as voting behaviour of the people. In fact, before the COVID-19 spread in Sri Lanka, the Parliament officially dissolved and scheduled the forthcoming election for the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2020. However, on 19<sup>th</sup> March, the Election Commissioner, Mahinda Deshapriya revealed that the election would be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

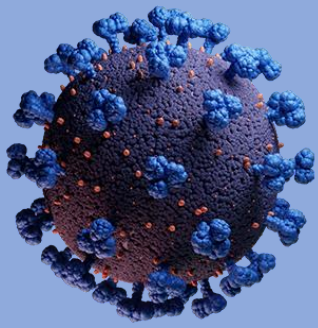
#### Swopping household roles between husband and wife

*“In our house gender roles are mixed. Normally, I do at least some support when she is cooking. We didn’t change our routine because of Corona.”*

SSI 13: Development Officer, (35 years old, Weligama, Matara District). [This statement crosschecked and verified by SSI 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20].

It is clear that the COVID-19 outbreak is the foremost factor to emerge constitutional crisis and the election postpone. By and large, the above complex situation largely affected to change respondents’ minds regarding the election. Although, they know voting is a democratic right, the most respondents did not expect an immediate election. One female respondent (SSI 04) expressed her idea as follows;

Online teaching has given extra burden to the working moms.

**Opinions on the oncoming election**

*“This is not the right time to conduct an election. The election is necessary, but we don’t have facilities for a safe election like in Korea.”*

SSI 04: Housewife, [51 years old, Graduate level education, Colombo District].

The similar idea stress that two male respondents;

**Anti-election views**

*“People need prevention from this pandemic. The government should think about the election after finishing the COVID-19 outbreak.”*

SSI 09: Businessmen, (40 years old, Puttalam District). [This statements cross-checked and verified by SSI 10, 13, 16, 17,37,42,43, 44] 46, 47].

**Wife being disrespected by the husband**

*“One of my friends told me, now she is disappointed with the marriage. Her husband worked online and did not consider about her and she became as a domestic worker in her family.”*

SSI24: Research officer, Sri Lanka Parliament; [40 years old, Postgraduate level education, Colombo district.].

According to Marxist feminists, capitalism is one of the main reasons for women’s subjugation, oppression and second class status in society (Hossain, et al. 2016). Some gender based unrest was shown

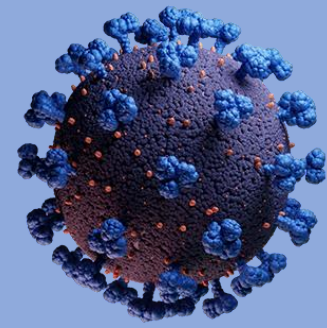
*“In our house gender roles are mixed. Normally, I do at least some support when she is cooking. We didn’t change our routine because of Corona.”*

*- Development Officer*

during the COVID -19 outbreak period. In fact, some female respondents reported individually facing specific issues under that situation. Both men and women who had to work online from home had to face certain conflicts and misunderstandings within the family. The woman feels like she has become a domestic worker. As men have been confined to the work environment for a long time, a housewife may find herself confronted by the lack of understanding and the lack of support from her husband for her work at home.

### 3.7.8 Section summary

COVID-19 is an ongoing menace to the world and it vastly influenced on social and economic structures all over the world. Economic stress on families due to the outbreak shows a high percentage, and measures should be accompanied by support for affected households. It is important to note that, economic stress remains long-term and it may be a major factor to increase greater risks of exploitation, child labour and gender-based violence. Economic challenges during the outbreak pose a serious threat for both men and women. As policies and recovery plans of the government were imperative that long-term targeted economic and gender empowerment strategies are embedded to mitigate the impact of this pandemic and future outbreak. The COVID -19 related gender issues are different from family to family. It is important to note that the respondents who were economically stable used this emergency situation as an opportunity to expand family relationships. They used the situation for relaxation and they had a positive view of the family. Meanwhile, respondents who are from the low income families saw this situation as a dilemma. They do not have recovery plans to manage their future. Moreover, this condition largely affected the maintenance of family and other social relationships. In addition, the children attached to these families had a possibility to show symptoms of unrest as a result of the economic hardships of the family. In future, this sudden mental stress is supposed to considerably influence their school education as well.



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Some gender based unrest was shown during the COVID -19 outbreak period.

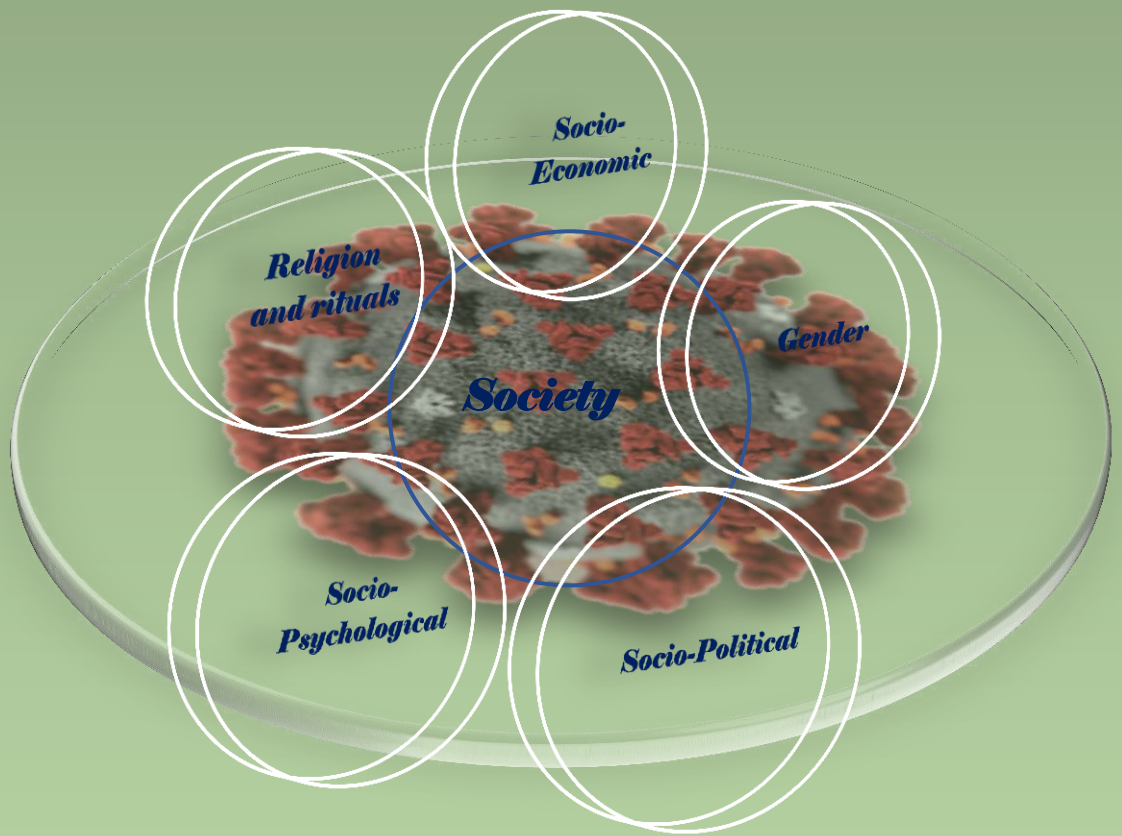
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## CHAPTER IV

# RECOMMENDATIONS



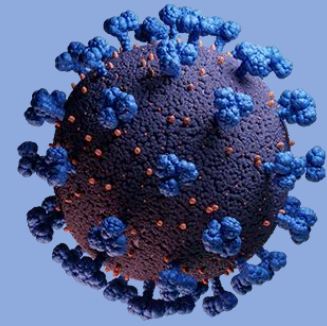


## RECOMMENDATIONS

Here follows a set of recommendations formulated in accordance with the findings from the research carried out under the theme “The Social Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka”. These recommendations do basically address the issues observed in the pandemic scenario and they can be adopted for the establishment and sustenance of decent standards in all social aspects of life in a process of recovery from the damages sustained from its monstrosity that still keeps on threatening the humanity locally and globally.

1. Rural development and social welfare should be planned in an approach ‘localized, contextually rooted, small in scale, flexible, culturally sensitive and environmentally friendly’ (Wallner., Narodslawsky., & Moser, 1996), with emphasis on travel outside and local market reinforcement, in a spirit to enhance the rural agrarian community’s spatiotemporal awareness and critical perception of the process of globalization.
2. Based on the change in the geo-spatial behavior of the urban and semi-urban middleclass in the adoption of a digital space in administration under the circumstance of COVID-19, a platform should be created for a healthy merge between the working physical space and the digital space, with a mechanism to monitor and evaluate the developmental impacts.
3. A space should be created for the industrial and business community to involve and invest in a local production system aimed at the local market.
4. Political interference in public service in all domains of social welfare, including the distribution of subsidies, should be eliminated.
5. An efficient community level disaster management mechanism and a consummate national level emergency plan should be introduced.

A platform should be created for a healthy merge between the working physical space and the digital space, with a mechanism to monitor and evaluate the developmental impacts.

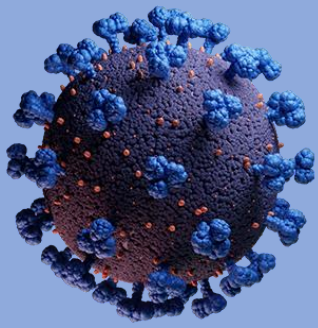


6. Agriculture and local industries should be developed under a strategic plan focused on economic development.
7. A directory of experts should be maintained in order to obtain assistance in emergency situations precipitated by global disasters.
8. A proper stakeholder analysis should be carried out regarding all suggested post-COVID development arrangements.
9. Steps should be taken to boost the local tourism industry by introducing in favour of the deserving cases among the entrepreneurs and employees soft loan schemes operated by state banks and awareness programmes conducted by experts.
10. The traditional cultivations such as spices should be developed to an export level.
11. Whatever financial aids received from foreign donor countries should be managed with transparency.
12. Importation of items possible to be manufactured locally should be discouraged and local industries that have deteriorated should be revamped.
13. Investments should be promoted by giving priority to inventions, innovations, and technology-based industries.
14. The electronic and print media should be streamlined with a focus on achieving quality enhancement in news broadcasts and information services.
15. A special mechanism should be developed to ensure the protection and welfare of the health sector employees.

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A proper stakeholder analysis should be carried out regarding all suggested post-COVID development arrangements.

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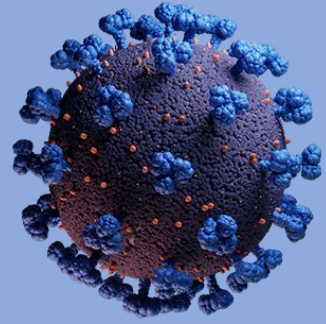
16. Terminological sensitivity should be taken into consideration when referring to COVID-19 cases so as to prevent them getting humiliated and ostracised.
17. An eclectic of all religious, ritual, and spiritual exercises pertaining to all ethnic communities in Sri Lanka, that are supposed to achieve solace, mental health and tolerance, should be promoted in a strong indigenous knowledge-based cultural plan.
18. The virtues and values of all communities in Sri Lanka, whose basis is generally tradition and charity, should be promoted through a mechanism that helps achieve practical intervention of the Ministry of Social Service with an emphasis on building a bridge between the have and the have-not.
19. Long-term and short-term economic and gender empowerment strategies should be implemented in a drive to control the development of negative gender-related issues within the institution of family where the children's healthy upbringing is a primary concern.
20. *Grama Niladari* Division level motivation programmes should be implemented through the intervention of the government to boost the morale of the families that were affected economically and socially due to COVID-19.
21. New alternate livelihood opportunities should be created for those who lost their livelihood as a result of COVID-19.
22. Free counselling services should be established island-wide with a focus on enhancing the mental health of the populace by remedying their symptoms of stressful ambiguity and building capacity among them.
23. Based on the GAD approach (Gender and Development), gender development projects should be established to address gender issues.
24. A norm should be established to define the head householder's role on the basis of the gravity of the responsibilities assigned to it, and gender-based recognition of an individual for that position should be discouraged, and gender-bias in the distribution of grants should be eliminated thereby.

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Free counselling services should be established island-wide with a focus on enhancing the mental health of the populace by remedying their symptoms of stressful ambiguity and building capacity among them.

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25. An on-going awareness program should be launched, through the public institutions of justice, focused on the empowerment of women against domestic violence by ensuring their protection against perpetrators and their familiarity with the legal support available for them.



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# Annexures

## The Questionnaires

### Online Survey

**Survey on the Social Impact of COVID-19, May 2020**

**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**

**University of Ruhuna, Matara**

This survey is conducted to investigate the social impact of COVID 19 pandemic and is thus bound to protect the total confidentiality of the information obtained in that regard.

When answering certain questions set out here, you will need to seek the support of your parents/elders. i.e., to record their perspective on the issue raised in the question.

DO NOT write down your name or registration number.

#### **1.0 Basic Information of the Respondent:**

##### **1.1. Residence:**

Grama Niladhari Division:-

Divisional Secretariat:-

District:-

The village/city where your home is located:-

If you know exactly where you are, its coordinates

Grid X

Grid Y

##### **1.2. Demographic Information:**

1.2.1. Number of family members

1.2.2. Number of members attending school

- 1.2.3. Number of females in the family
- 1.2.4. Number of males in the family
- 1.2.5. Number of aged members in the family, if any
- 1.2.6. Number of persons with special needs, if any
- 1.2.7. The average monthly income of your family before the COVID outbreak, (approximately)
- 1.2.8. Do you receive any government grants? Yes/No
- 1.2.9. If 'Yes', what is the nature of the aid and the amount of money received?
- 1.3. If there is any information with regard to potentially vulnerable members of your family (disabled/sick/aged /dependent) due to COVID-19, please specify here.
- .....

## 2.0. Information on Livelihood and Economic Activities

- 2.1. What was the job / main source of income you/your family had before COVID-19?
- .....
- 2.2. Is the job / main source of income affected due to COVID-19? Yes/No
- 2.3. If 'Yes', explain.
- .....
- 2.4. What measures have you taken to mitigate the impact of COVID 19 ?
- .....
- 2.5. Were you subsidized to meet your daily needs by the government or any other institution/organization Yes/No
- 2.6. If 'Yes', explain.
- .....
- 2.7. if it is money, what is the amount of money you received / receive?
- .....
- 2.8. Are you satisfied with what you receive/ received ? Yes/No

2.9. If 'Not', explain.

.....

### 3.0. Educational Information

3.1. Has COVID-19 had a major impact on the education of family members?

Yes/No

3.2. If 'Yes', give your opinion on it.

.....

3.3. If you have planned a series of activities to minimize the impact, describe it.

.....

3.4. Are you anxious about the future of your children's education? Yes/No

3.5. If you think that as a challenge, do you have any alternative suggestions?

Explain.

3.6. What is your opinion on alternative actions implemented by the government and universities on education?

.....

### 4.0. Family and Social Factors

4.1. During the period of curfew imposed due to COVID-19, the relationships among your family members: good/ average/ conflicting

4.2. Relationship between husband and wife: good/average/conflicting

4.3. Relationship among the brothers and sisters: good/average/conflicting

4.4. If there were any, what measures have you taken to manage conflicting situations in the family? Explain

.....

4.5. Has COVID-19 influenced your close family relationships? Yes/No

4.6. Give reasons for your answer.

.....

4.7. Did you have to perform official duties related to your job from home?

Yes/No

4.8. If yes, did the day-to-day work at home clash with performing official duties?

Yes/No

4.9. If 'Yes' explain.

.....

4.10. If both types of duties and responsibilities did not clash, how did you balance them?

.....

4.11. Has social distancing affected your close relationships with relatives and friends?

Yes/ No

4.12. If yes, what strategies have you followed to minimize that effect?

.....

4.13. The statement "stay home as much as possible" is mentally agonizing/ willingly practiced /no difference

## Semi-Structured Interviews - Guidelines

Guidelines for Semi-Structured Interviews (Based on this, the researcher is free to develop a discussion with the respondent)

Respondent's Personal Information

Residence: Grama Niladhari Division :

Closest City/District

Age:

Occupation:

Family Details:

01. Respondent's Attitudes regarding the COVID-19 pandemic:

The Italian Philosopher Giorgio Agamben writes that the emergency measures for the "supposed epidemic of coronavirus," are "frantic, irrational, and absolutely unwarranted."

- Dangerous nature of the Coronavirus
- The way he/she became aware of the dangerous nature of the Coronavirus
- The way he/she became aware of the Dengue virus and kidney-related diseases
- Ideas regarding the complications the deceased underwent after being infected with the Coronavirus
- Respondent's ideas regarding the complications the people who die from on an average day

02. COVID-19 and Occupation

It is expected to get detailed information here.

Whether one has lost his/her full-time job or whether it is temporarily on hold? If one has lost the main source of income, what sort of work he/she is involved in? Plans regarding creating a source of income or any other related factors to one's occupation.

03. The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Family

The impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on one's family has to be discussed in relation to each family member.

#### 04. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Gender

Gender related special aspects have to be discussed in relation to the respondent's family and the residential area.

#### 05. COVID-19, children, and adolescents

The respondent's observations regarding how the lives of children and adolescents changed due to COVID-19.

#### 06. Respondent's religious beliefs and opinions

Examine how COVID-19 impacted the above. Ask questions accordingly. It is expected to examine the respondent's religious and spiritual aspects of life.

#### 07. COVID-19 and respondent's hygienic condition and social relations

- If the respondent or a family member is sick, discuss the hardships faced in obtaining medicine. Apart from that, if scared of being sick or feel insecure about being chronically ill, discuss them.
- How the virus and the discourse related to that has impacted close relationships and social relations.
- Respondent's opinions and attitudes regarding the health measures imposed such as washing hands and keeping one-meter distance.
- Social distancing, self-quarantine, and the respondent. (It is necessary that the interviewer asks some appropriate questions depending on the flow of answers)
- Who do you keep one-meter distance with?
- Have you limited the intimate relationships like hugging and kissing your children, wife, husband, or any close contacts in the face of COVID-19?
- Have the loved ones complained about these actions of showing love been reduced?
- Do you believe that 'home' is the safest place to stay?
- Do you consider 'stay home' concept as restricting your freedom?

#### 08. Western Medical Science and alternative health practices

- Respondent's tendency to use coriander water, ginger, garlic sort of stuff.
- Did you become sick with cold and fever during the last two months for which you sought cure using ayurvedic medicine?



- Will you agree with the decision of seeking treatment of alternative medical practices like Ayurveda, Homeopathy, ... in case the capacity of treatment of western medicinal practices become overridden?
- Do you believe that the authorities should not depend on a single medical practice and instead seek treatment using alternative medical practices?

09. Discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the education of the respondent's family members. Whether the educational work is on hold, hardships encountered by them in carrying out education in the face of COVID-19. Pay attention to the respondent's opinion regarding introduction of online education as well.

#### 10. COVID-19 and traumatic stress disorders

Respondent's and family members' feelings of fear, insecurity loss of self-confidence and tension.

#### 11. COVID-19 and Time Management.

How the respondent and the family members spend/manage time?

#### 12. Feelings regarding the future

Slavoj Zizek states that normalcy will not return again.

- What do you think of the Post-COVID era?
- Respondent's ideas regarding restoring life to the previous 'normal' situation.
- If that happens, how long does the respondent believe it takes? His/ her belief in imposing curfew and lockdown situations till the country restores to the 'normal' situation.
- Considering the coronavirus as a reality, are you ready to live with it and restart work?
- Respondent's ideas regarding the plans for the future being messed up.

#### 13. Norms and Values regarding social Well-being at a crisis due to the coronavirus

- Will you agree with a situation where patients are prioritized on an index of age, complications he or she has, life expectancy in case there emerges a condition that the capacity of treatment exceeds. What actually happens is, in the face of this kind of situation is that patients with a longer life expectancy will be given priority.
- Do you think that it is a citizen's responsibility to inform the security forces about the infected cases?

- Do you agree with people's behavior towards officers and soldiers of Sri Lanka navy when it was found that one leading navy camp was a COVID-19 cluster, especially in a context where they were once worshipped as war heroes?
- When you have to make a choice between hunger and health measures to prevent from the virus, what will be your choice?

#### 14. COVID-19 and the Responsibility of Media

- Respondent's opinion on media behavior, social media etc.

#### 15. Respondent's ideas regarding "Virus Carriers"

- What is expected here is the respondent's ideas regarding the criticism faced by the Sri Lankan returnees from Italy, Sri Lankans living in Italy, South Korea, Muslims, and navy soldiers.

#### 16. Disaster Management, Government Intervention, and the Intervention of the military.

Respondent's view on the mechanism and process. When interviewing government officials, it is important to note their opinions and attitudes regarding the above-mentioned areas.

#### 17. Victims and welfare packages

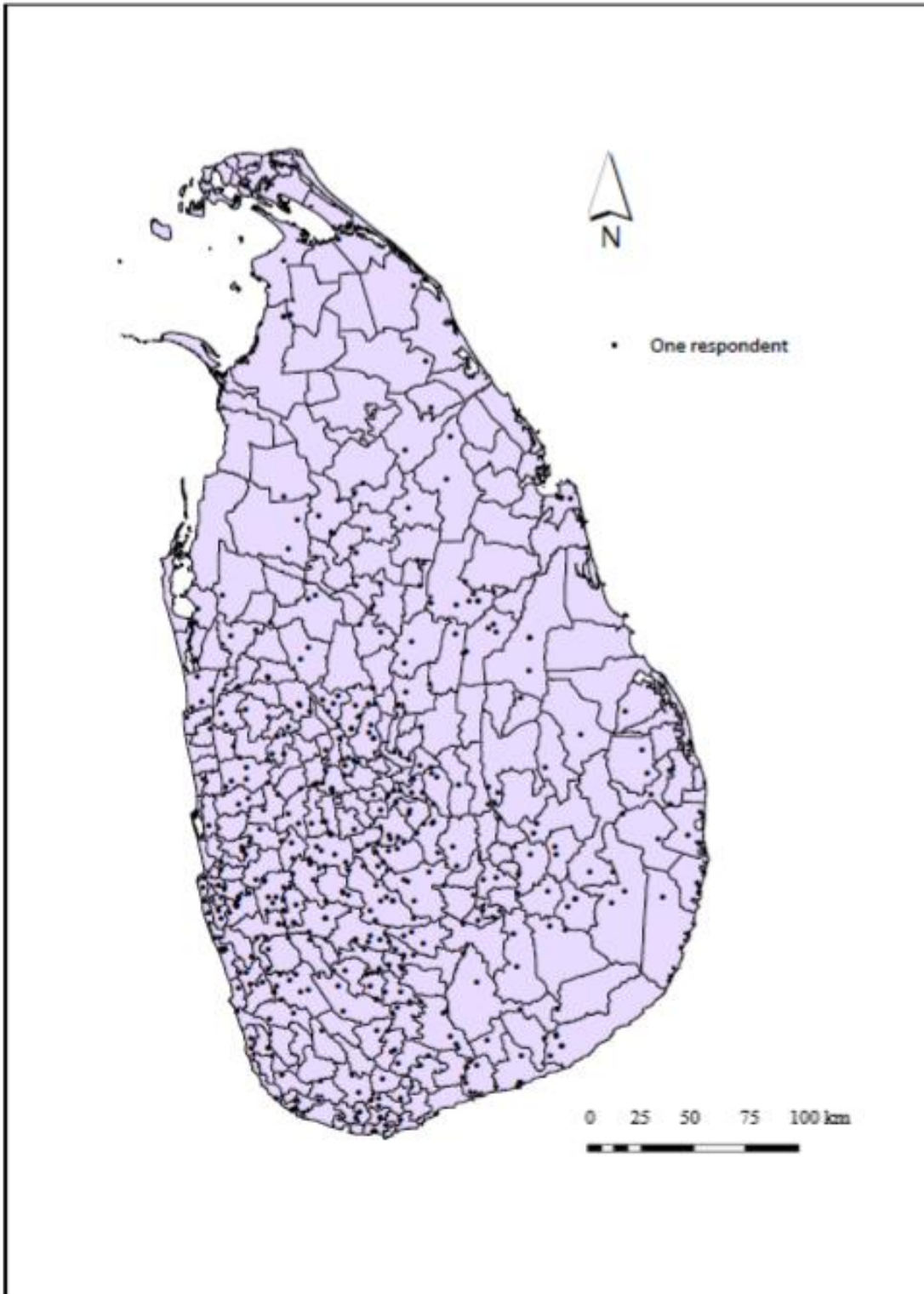
Get information and opinions on welfare activities.

#### 18. COVID-19 and Politics

It is specifically expected to derive information regarding the proposed election in the country, the role of the politicians and the government stance.

#### 19. Let the respondent talk about the COVID-19 Pandemic and related issues at the end of the interview.

## Distribution of Respondents in the Survey on the Social Impact of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka







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