

# Impact of Workplace Burden Due to COVID-19 Pandemic on Employee Performance

L. D. L. Perera

Dept. of Industrial Management  
University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka  
dinashaperera995@gmail.com

A. N. Wijayanayake\*

Dept. of Industrial Management  
University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka  
anni@kln.ac.lk

A. Withanaarachchi

Dept. of Industrial Management  
University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka  
amilaw@kln.ac.lk

**Abstract** - The Sri Lankan apparel industry accounts for 7% of the country's GDP and employs 15% of its workforce. Frightening levels of the spread of Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) have captured the attention of the apparel industry not only locally but globally. During this epidemic crisis, identifying the factors that affect the employees' workplace burden in the apparel industry is vital to the GDP of a country like Sri Lanka, as the economy of the country relies on growth in the Sri Lankan apparel sector. Each workplace burden has a distinct impact on employees' job performance. The objective of this study is to determine how the intensity of the COVID-19 epidemic affects employees' workplace burden and performance. Thereby assisting policymakers in responding to how to overcome the workplace burdens of the employees during this epidemic crisis. A mixed research approach, with both qualitative and quantitative data analysis, was used in the research. Considering the past literature and the industry experts' opinions, factors related to workforce burden due to COVID-19 were identified and categorised into four categories. Partial Least Square (PLS) was used to analyse the relationship between the workforce burden factors and employee performance during the COVID-19 pandemic period. As the ultimate findings under the data analysis, exposure to COVID-19 and workplace preparation and work-related relationships have a significant positive impact on employees' performance. The workload has a significant negative impact on the behaviour and results-based employees' performance that has no significant impact on trait-based performance. Job-related uncertainty in the future has no significant impact on employees' performance. Improving workplace safety regulations, developing online employee interactions, and increasing immediate management attention to employees are some of the suggestions to mitigate identified workplace burdens. The findings of this study related to the factors affecting workplace burdens must be addressed promptly by policymakers or employers in the Sri Lankan apparel sector to improve employees' performance and, ultimately, industry performance. The outcome of this research would be useful in the future when a pandemic situation arises.

**Keywords** - apparel sector employees, COVID-19 pandemic, workplace burden

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka's apparel and textile industry was the leading exporter of products in 2019, with USD 5.3 billion in exports, primarily to the United States and the European Union. For more than three decades, Sri Lanka has been a world-class garment manufacturer, providing global powerhouse brands. The garment industry in Sri Lanka is dedicated to the well-being of its employees by safeguarding workers' rights. The apparel industry provides direct employment opportunities to over 300,000 to 600,000 employees, which include a substantial number of women in Sri Lanka and an untold number of auxiliary service employees [1].

COVID-19 is a newly discovered infectious and severe disease caused by coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). According to World Bank projections, due to the pandemic, it is predicted that the global GDP will drop by 5.2% by 2022, marking the greatest per capita income contraction since 1870 [1]. Disruptions in the global supply chain and the emerging health crisis have led to the imposition of national restrictions on both people and economic activities [2].

In Sri Lanka, positive COVID-19 cases were discovered in February 2021 at many Apparel industry-based companies; a second virus wave was also developed around an apparel sector company in November 2020 [1] News story in November 2020 claimed that before the infections occurred, there was no social distancing and employees were wearing masks of poor quality. This incident demonstrates that the factory management has been disobeying coronavirus preventive recommendations and seems unconcerned about the well-being of the employees.

In the early pandemic situation, apparel sector employees have been mostly working on-site, but due to COVID-19 prevention restrictions, the mode of working has changed to working from home (WFH), working on-site, and hybrid working conditions (both WFH and on-site). Within the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, both WFH and on-site workers in the apparel sector have been put under psychological strain since some of them had to be locked down at homework stations while others had to go to work premises with a greater risk of viral infection. Reduction of bonus payments and reducing employee salaries by 5% to 60% were some of the strategies taken by the Sri Lankan apparel industry sector to face the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic situation. [1]. Many studies claim that in the current situation, both on-site workers' and WFH workers' psychological burden has increased other than the early pandemic situation [3]. According to the findings of several studies, psychological stress level has a detrimental effect on worker productivity in the textile sector, resulting in lower industrial production as the ultimate disadvantage [4].

The results of the study [2] highlight how crucial it has been for all companies in Sri Lanka's garment sector to develop short-term, medium-term, and long-term strategies to deal with the situation brought on by Covid-19 on apparel sector employees. Determine the effect of workplace burden factors on employees' performance during the COVID-19 pandemic and identify mitigation strategies [1]. The results of this study can be taken into consideration by the human resources department and policymakers in terms of developing the right set of strategies to reduce employees' workplace burden, the long-lasting impact of the pandemic,