

Employee Drawbacks During the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Case Study, Seethawaka Export Processing Zone in Avissawella.

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Abstract: Covid- 19 is known as a pandemic, affects the global economy. This study mainly focused on the effects of manufacturing employees in Seethawaka Export Processing Zone, and to examine the challenges which are faced by the employees, who are depend on the manufacturing process of the factories in the zone. The relevant information has been collected through primary data collection methods of Survey, Observation, and Interview from the employees as well as, internet sources, books, reports and public records are used as secondary data collection methods. This study has found that, the employees are mostly affected due to this pandemic disease. The management committee couldn't pay salary for the employees in a proper way. And due to the factory closure, most of the employees were jobless. As well as working environment wasn't flexible during the critical situation. So, the employees faced more economic and social impacts during the pandemic period in the particular industrial zone. So, the organization of the company and the government should take lots of financial and social support to pay the wages to the employees and increased the satisfaction of the employees with layout of working environment. A proper policy strategy is indeed an emergency to support the destitute workplace during the covid-19 as well as, this study will be supportive to learn the impacts of employees and make the necessary adjustment for the future betterment.

Key words: Covid-19, Challenges, Industrial zone, Textile

1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, export processing zone have become popular instruments of trade policy offering enterprises located in them free trade conditions and a liberal regulatory environment. This export promotion as an important policy for economic growth in developing countries. In recent years, the concept of EPZs has gained noticeable significance.

EPZs provide customs- free and tax- exempt, export- oriented manufacturing facilities, investment incentives and streamlined administration cheap utilities, and better infrastructure. In Sri Lanka, EPZs activities include good production and assembly to services, including information processing, telecommunications, business process outsourcing (BPO), hotels,

power generation etc. As in most countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the largest share of investment was absorbed by the textile and garment sector.

The export processing zone increasing foreign exchange earnings by exporting new products and finding new markets, improving the quality of exportable items and marketing technologies, and providing a shop window, thereby establishing a reputation for the goods of the home country as whole. And also providing jobs, mainly for the educated unemployed and supplementing the incomes of the families, thereby raising their standards of living.

The Companies in EPZs in Sri Lanka are expected to boost export earnings since they, together with licensed enterprises, export no less than 90% of their production. Companies in the zones must bring in the necessary working capital from the foreign sources and all export earnings must be brought into Sri Lanka within 180 days of the date export (Sri Lanka Gazette Extra Ordinary, 1978). The aim is to increase foreign capital inflows and enhance the country's balance of trade.

The manufacturing sectors in the export processing zones are doing a huge change in the socio-economic process in Sri Lanka. So, according to the research area of Seethawaka export processing zone in Avissawella is one of a main company in Sri Lanka, to manufacturing and export the products to foreign countries. This zone is covered by so many opportunities, such as well infrastructure, and service facilities, including road facilities, power supply, telecommunication, waste disposal, land for new investment projects as well as the machinery, plastic, and other electronic items etc. And also, the textile export is one of a main process done by this zone.

In this zone, there are many companies which are interrelated with each another and they are influence in the economy of Sri Lanka and mainly they influence in socio- economic sector of employees. Therefore, due to the infectious disease of Covid-19 (2019) in Sri Lanka the economic condition was declined in huge level. Through this situation, in Sri Lanka, the industrial zone of Seethawaka export zone also affected. When examined the situation of employees, their lifecycle has faced more struggles and challenges due to this problem.

This study is mainly focused on the challenges and struggles which are facing by the employees in the particular zone and some recommendations are discussed for mitigate their struggles.

1.1 Study Area

Sri Lanka is one of a resourceful country in all over the world. So, the study area of Seethawaka export processing zone is located at Avissawella in the Colombo district in the western province of Sri Lanka. The area which is surrounded by, Colombo district in North and Sabaragamuwa district in east. There are number of companies located in this industrial zone. For an example, there are seven leading manufacture and export textile companies in this zone. Those are, Jay Jay Mills, Hirdaramani, Mas holding, Concord, Orit, Tee Jay and Brandix. The location of the industrial zone is about 6.9672 latitude and 80.2102 longitude.

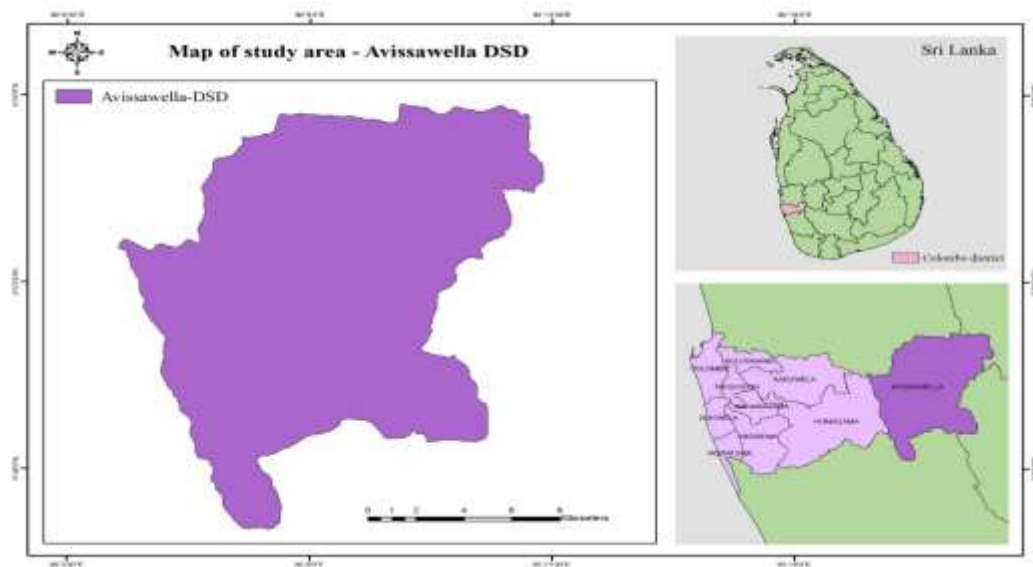


Fig 1: Study Area

1.2 Objectives

There are three objectives of the study which are the root for this research,

- To identify the challenges of employees' in Seethawaka export processing zone.
- To examine the challenges, which are faced by the employees who are depend on the manufacturing process of the factories in the zone.
- To propose suggestions to mitigate the challenges.

2. Literature Review

In Sri Lanka and all over the world, there are so many researches have been conducted to identify the impacts covid- 19 in the world. Some identified studies are found related to this research and they have focused on various aspects and done the justification.

In Sri Lanka, after 2019 the covid-19 pandemic was spread over the regions in the country. So, because of this situation the economic condition was declined in a huge way. As well as the industrial sector in Sri Lanka is highly effected due to this critical condition. So, one of the most famous industrial zones named Seethawaka export processing zone also affected by this infectious disease of covid-19. According to these things, some other studies reported similar finding to the related topic.

The majority of workers in the zones were young, unmarried women who were either secondary- school graduates or drop-outs. They generally came from low- income families. They pre- dominated in the semi- skilled production jobs, while employers showed a preference for recruiting men to fill managerial and technical positions, and they concerned with these finding of the research paper, that vulnerability of production workers, particularly women was reflected in their conditions of employment, excessively long working hours, wage disparities, lack of protection from exploitation and poor living conditions near the workplace (Jayaweera, 2001).

According to the study of “The effect of covid-19 to apparel sector in Sri Lanka”, it revealed that, the effect of covid-19 has led many countries to implement lockdowns and social distancing due to the serious spreading. So, according to this situation, caused a disruption to the consumer habits of shopping at the pandemic heavily influenced to the global market. Through the finding of this research, the apparel sector faced more detrimental effects which will ultimately lead both the apparel industry and the economy to collapse as it is the highest export income generator to the Sri Lankan economy (Bolonne, 2020).

Poora, (2020), covid-19 has taken its toll Sri Lanka clothing sector. He revealed that, due to the lockdown for the covid-19. It hit both the supply of materials and export orders. As well as the lockdown’s easing has been ad- hoc instead of being gradual.

3. Methods and Materials

3.1 Primary Data collection (Questionnaire Survey)

For the effective finding of the research, the researcher produced and distributed the questionnaire to an opportunistic sample around the textile sector of industrial zone of Seethawaka. The researcher selected the employees for the survey, and found that, there are seven textile companies in this zone. In addition. through the seven textile export companies, more than 10,000 employees are have worked in here. So, the researcher has decided to use the

random sampling method to select 100 employees from each of the seven companies. (100*7= 700) Through the 700 employees, researcher was decided to examine the 20% of the people who are affected in socio- economically after the covid-19.

So, randomly the researcher selected 140 employees for the questionnaire survey. Firstly, the researcher wanted to find the employee satisfaction in the above seven textile sectors which were indicated in the study area. Through the finding of the questionnaire survey, half of the employees dissatisfied with the working condition in the particular sectors. Because, in the covid-19 pandemic, they didn't have work days regularly. And mainly in this period of time the zone had been closed. So, the employees sector faced more struggles in their daily life. To identify the challenges and struggles of the employees due to covid-19, 08 Male employees and 12 Female employees have been interviewed. Here unstructured interview carried out among the selected employees.

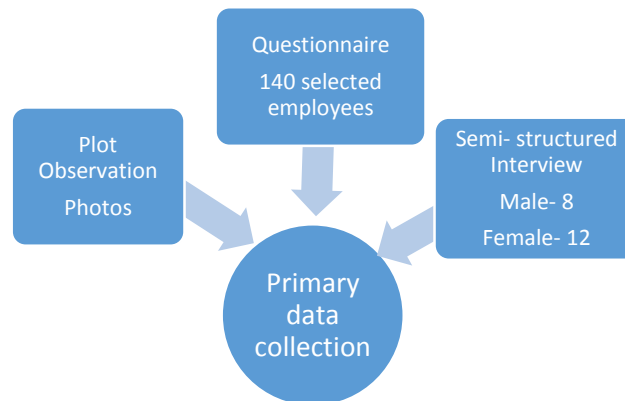


Fig 2: Primary data collection methods

3.2 Secondary data collection methods.

The secondary data methods collected through the published sources in the websites, There are many sources of data used for secondary data analysis. More than that published materials, internet sources, reports, newspapers, journals, articles and books have used as sources of data collection. For the data analysis and manipulation, Excel spreadsheet has been used.

4. Results and discussion

This chapter explain the results of data analysis that the procedures has been reported in the previous chapter.

According to the Primary and Secondary data collection there were so many challenges that could be identified in the employees' sector in the textile sector, these are the identified challenges and issues of the employee sector after the pandemic disease of covid-19 in textile sector of Seethawaka export processing zone.

4.1 The identified challenges could be divided into two parts:

Social impacts

Economic impacts

The data suggest that, when examined the social and economic impacts of the employees after the covid-19 in the textile sector, around the 140 employees, identified for collecting data through the questionnaire survey, only 120 employees were responding to the questions. According to their finding, they employed at the textile factories and had not received the salary in a proper way.

Based on the analyzed data it can be said that, the employees' challenges in the textile sector of the Seethawaka zone. They have significantly affected by the covid-19 pandemic in socio-economically. The impact of the covid-19 on employees has been measured by their social and economic perception of the employees.

They are severely affected by the pandemic and they have dissatisfied with the management of the organization, which is supportive for the employees.

And some of them have disappointed with the guidance from their supervisor during that critical situation, disappointed with the better ventilation of working area, and strongly disagree with the layout of working environment during the pandemic period in the workplace, Inadequacy of preventive work safety actions and the most of the employees, within the age limit of (20-35) have disappointed with the employer's performance.

Most of the employees are disappointed with the current salary level, and the company incrementing salary during the lockdown in the country. And they disagreed with the salary that insufficient to balancing between paid employment and family care. And they revealed that there was a lack of opportunity to issued loans and advance by the company.

Most of the employees were identified as a migrant worker and they stayed in the boarding, near by the industry. So, after the covid-19, the government – imposed curfew and lockdowns all around the country, and the industries have been closed due to this situation. So, the

employees who were in the boarding, unable to go their native places. And due to the lack of income, they were faced struggles to paid the boarding fees, and they couldn't even effort their daily needs. As to discussed about the garment production in Sri Lanka due to the covid-19 pandemic, the country has emphasized the gravity of the situation for garment factories as well as the employees in the garment sector.

Almost the employees reported, they were less productive during the previous three months compared to pre- Covid-19, with men more likely to have reported reduced levels of productivity than women. Conversely, women were more likely to have reported increased productivity than men, women reported the same or an increased level of productivity during Covid-19, compared to just over one- third of men. Some reasons given included being able to better manage work and home responsibilities and the lack of time, and stress involved in travelling to work. Connectivity, in terms of phone and internet connection, was the number one reason cited for lower productivity for both women and men.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

In order to consider about this case study, examining the challenges/ impacts of the employees, it should be a difficult task in their lifecycle. As well as this research known as that recommendations which were provide many opportunities to the employees who are mostly effect by the covid-19 pandemic in the zone.

The paper investigated the impacts of current covid-19 crisis on the socio- economic aspects, health and other impacts of employees in the textile sector of Seethawaka zone. When summarized this concept of the problem. the results of the study are explained that, mostly the employees' sector in the textile factories of (Brandix, Mas holding, Hirdaramani, Concord, Orit, Tee Jay, Jay Jay mills) were affected in socio- economically after the pandemic disease of covid-19 in the country.

To overcome these problems of employees that, companies have to make several decisions such as employee training and development, employee incentives, provide facilities to employees, a supplement of a favorable working environment, and introduce new technology or processes or systems or concepts.

After the covid-19 impacts, the employees have been struggled with their daily route. So, when they arrived to work at that situation, the flexible working arrangement is essential to encourage the employees to work in an organization. Apparel industry workers are mostly women who

are responsible for working in the home, children, parents, and family. They are holding responsibilities at home and in the workplace. Flexible working arrangements create considerable satisfaction and time allocation for employees to manage work-life balance. Therefore, develop flexible working schedules in the apparel companies in the Seethawaka industrial zone and other apparel companies in Sri Lanka is a recommended solution to mitigate the socio- economic impacts of the employees in the workplace.

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