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## **A Comprehensive Assessment of the Positive and Negative Impacts of Tourism Development on Family Cultures in Mirissa and Hikkaduwa, Sri Lanka**

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### **Abstract**

Sri Lanka is renowned for its historical and natural treasures, making it a popular tourism destination among international travellers. Consequently, the tourism industry has become Sri Lanka's third-largest source of foreign exchange earnings, driven by a consistent annual increase in visitor arrivals. While tourism has numerous benefits for the economy, it also has significant negative impacts on social and cultural aspects, particularly on local family cultures. To investigate the impacts of tourism development on family cultures in the host community, this study was conducted in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. Utilizing a qualitative research strategy, purposive sampling was employed to gather data from tourist hotspots in Mirissa and Hikkaduwa. The sample for this study comprised 15 participants living in the study areas. The study findings revealed that the rise of tourism had more positive than negative effects on residents in Southern Province tourist locations. Among the notable positive effects were increased self-confidence and personal growth, enhanced family unity, improved language skills, the combination of conventional jobs with tourism, economic development, and a focus on entrepreneurship. On the other hand, some of the negative effects observed during the intervention included changes in behavior, adjustments to new trends, shifts in spending and eating habits, a hectic lifestyle, illegal activities like drug use and prostitution, and environmental degradation. To mitigate the negative impacts of tourism development on family cultures, the study recommends measures such as family and personal responsibility, providing suitable education for dropouts, government regulations, and regular government inspection to prevent adverse effects on families. Overall, this research provides valuable insights into the effects of tourism development on family cultures in Sri Lanka's Southern Province and suggests measures to mitigate the negative impacts.

**Keywords:** Tourism development, community impact, negative impacts, positive impacts, family culture

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## **01. Introduction**

The island nation of Sri Lanka is renowned for its beaches, wildlife, heritage, festivals, scenic beauty, sports and adventure, and essence, all of which have drawn tourists for decades (Ranasinghe, 2014). In recent years, the tourism industry has become one of the largest contributors to the country's Gross Domestic Product, as reported by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (2020). However, as highlighted by previous studies (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2016; Abdul Rauf et al., 2019; Xiong et al., 2008), the industry's growth has not only brought positive economic impacts but also had negative effects on Sri Lanka's society, economy, and environment. The tourism industry affects not only the economic sector but also the social, cultural, and environmental sectors. Moreover, the host community plays a vital role in a tourist destination's success, and their satisfaction is critical for the industry's sustainability (Vargas-Sánchez et al., 2011). Given the importance of the host community, this study aims to examine the impact of tourism development on family cultures in Sri Lanka's Southern Province, using the group discussions to gather data from a purposive sample of residents in tourist hotspots, Mirissa and Hikkaduwa.

## **02. Research Problem**

Tourism development in Sri Lanka has brought both benefits and challenges to the host communities, including changes in behavior, attitudes, and habits among residents. Previous studies have examined the economic, social, and environmental impacts of tourism, yet there remains a dearth of research on how tourism development affects family cultures in host communities. The Eastern Province's coastal districts have experienced an increase in negative behaviors such as drunkenness and sexual misconduct among locals, especially younger generations influenced by tourists' negative habits. While some studies have suggested that the positive impacts of tourism outweigh the negative effects, recent research has found inconclusive evidence regarding the overall impact of tourism on the cultural characteristics of host communities. Therefore, this study aims to fill an empirical gap by examining the impacts of tourism development on family cultures in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka, using focus group discussions with a purposive sample of residents in Mirissa and Hikkaduwa tourist locations. These residents are mainly engaging in SME scale businesses and are included in the workforce of the larger scale service providers such as hotels and restaurants operating on a larger scale.

## **03. Literature Review**

Tourism is a rapidly-expanding global industry, and in Sri Lanka, it is the third-largest contributor to the gross domestic product after foreign direct remittances and the clothing industry (Kumudika, 2017; Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2020). Ranasinghe R. (2015) found that Sri Lanka's traditional cultures, diverse landscapes, rich cultural history, and wildlife present excellent potential for the growth of the tourism sector. However, his study in Hikkaduwa has also showed that the tourism industry needs to be carefully managed to reduce negative impacts on society and culture, such as environmental deterioration, illegal businesses, black money fraud, theft, drug trafficking, prostitution, HIV threat, gambling, and increased crime rates. Similarly, Dhar (2006) argued that while tourism can be an instrument for raising the standard of living, it is essential to recognize the importance of maintaining the cultures of the host communities.

The environmental impacts of tourism in Sri Lanka were explored by Rathnayake and Suvimali (2015) using a qualitative research methodology. They found that tourism has both positive and negative effects on the environment, such as coastal area conservation, water state management, and turtle protection programs, but also trash disposal and marine water contamination. Successful partnerships between the public and private sectors were found to be essential for protecting the region's coastal areas and ensuring the longevity of its tourism sector. Coastline erosion is also a significant issue, not just in Unawatuna, but also in other areas like Beruwala, Ambalangoda, Galle, Weligama, and Matara, as reported by Desprats et al. (2010).

Considering the social and economic effects of tourism, Sadrudin (2011) found that the per capita income and culture of the host community differ significantly from those of foreign tourists. However, literature shows that the Sri Lankan administration has managed to prevent the profoundly damaging effects that tourism may have on the nation's society and culture. Overall, while tourism has the potential to bring positive economic benefits to Sri Lanka, it is essential to manage the industry's negative impacts on the environment and local communities carefully.

#### **04. Methods**

According to Creswell (2009), a research design is a strategy that outlines how a researcher will respond to a research question and accomplish a research aim. Given that the purpose of this study is to evaluate the effects, a qualitative research design is the most suitable method for achieving this goal. The study's research purpose called for in-depth data, experience, ideas, non-verbal cues, and emotional expressions to be gathered from the respondents' natural environments. Thus, the researchers have chosen the qualitative research approach to accomplish their research goal. Moreover, the qualitative research emphasizes field data gathered there (Creswell & Cheryl, 2017).

The sample for this research study comprises 15 participants from the Southern Province of Sri Lanka, which has a total population of 2,477,285 people, according to government figures. Due to time, finances, and other limitations, it is not always possible to reach every member of the defined group when conducting research (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, the researchers utilized the nonprobability and nonrandom sampling technique known as the purposive sampling technique to select participants from the Mirissa and Hikkaduwa areas. In order to acquire data, the researchers chose 30 participants as the sample.

Focus group discussions were one of the strategies employed to acquire data, as described by O.Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick, and Mukherjee (2018). The researchers utilized content analysis to assess the information in written, verbal, or visual communication messages. Content analysis is a technique for examining the information contained in recorded human communication sources, including voice recordings, books, newspapers, and diaries. It is an excellent technique to apply for this research study because the data were collected via focused group talks, and the discussions were recorded.

In conclusion, this study employed a qualitative research approach to examine and comprehend how individuals or groups affect a social or human issue. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 30 participants from the Southern Province of Sri

Lanka. These 30 participants were a part of 10 focus groups. These focus groups consisted of 3-5 individuals. Further, there were 10 females and 20 males. Among the 10 females, 3 were under 18 years of age. Among the selected male participants 8 were below 18 years of age and 12 were above 18 years of age. By the occupations, there were 8 self-employed participants and 11 participants who are working in SME scale tourism service providers and larger-scale tourism service providers. The researchers utilized content analysis among other data analysis techniques to assess the information gathered from the participants. This methodology is well-suited to achieving the research objectives and obtaining in-depth data, experiences, ideas, non-verbal cues, and emotional expressions from the participants' natural environments.

## **05. Results, Analysis, and Discussion**

In terms of demographics, the participants for the study were selected representing one family from each group. Accordingly, 10 focus group discussions were held, 5 from Mirissa and 5 from Hikkaduwa tourism destinations respectively. The families shared several traits, including reliance on homestays, villas, boat services, and shops as sources of income. In addition, the parents typically had an A/L or O/L education level, and each family consisted of at least four members with an average of five years of experience in the tourism sector. Overall, these findings provide insight into the commonalities among families involved in the tourism industry in these locations. By using focus group discussions, researchers could gather even more detailed information on the experiences and perspectives of individual families and their unique circumstances.

The analysis of the educational background of the focus group reveals an interesting trend. It appears that the parents have attained lower levels of education compared to their children. Notably, the study shows that the children have achieved higher levels of education than their parents. Additionally, the data reveals a gender disparity, with male children having lower educational attainment compared to their female counterparts. These findings shed light on the educational landscape of the families and highlight the importance of education for future generations.

Exploration of customs, values, and rituals of the families revealed that their connection to tradition and standards vary based on their family background and predecessors' practices. While some families exhibit a strong adherence to customs and norms, others have a more general understanding of them. Additionally, it was found that some families only comply with these practices when they are extremely necessary, indicating a selective approach towards tradition.

In terms of family dynamics, the study reveals that the majority of families, operate tourism-related businesses as a unit, and maintain harmonious relationships among their members. However, a noteworthy finding is that the younger generation tends to prioritize following the latest fashion trends and travel fads over heeding parental advice, which may indicate a shift in traditional family values and norms.

In terms of filial piety, it has been observed that a significant proportion of the children in the studied families, show respect to their parents and elderly members. However, a few families face challenges inculcating respect in their children towards their elders and struggle to

receive their guidance. Many children tend to overlook their parents' advice while following the latest trends and styles introduced by the travel and tourism industry, as observed in the most families.

The study reveals that tourism development has resulted in behavioral changes among family members, which align with those of visitors. These changes encompass alterations in communication patterns, clothing preferences, technology usage, and general conduct. Notably, the younger members of the families are more susceptible to these changes compared to the elder generation.

According to the study's findings, there have been negligible improvements to people's quality of life as a result of the tourism industry's growth. Although one family reported that tourism has helped with their personal development, the vast majority of families have not considered any measures to improve their quality of life beyond financial gains. This suggests that there is a need for greater attention to be given to the non-economic impacts of tourism growth, in order to ensure that communities can experience an improved quality of life as a result of tourism development.

The study found that the vast majority of the interviewed participants, the representatives of the families, except for one, have adapted to contemporary trends in language, dress, and beauty culture. These changes include modifications in fashion, hairstyles, gardening practices, home décor, furnishings, and technology. The findings suggest that the tourism industry has a significant impact on the adoption of new trends among families.

During the study, it was found that some of the families had made some changes in their eating habits following tourism involvement. These changes mainly involve substituting traditional meals with foreign ones, such as grilled or fried meat, and replacing fresh fruits with fruit juice. However, some other families did not change their eating habits due to tourism involvement, stating that they prefer to stick to their traditional diet.

Assessment of the impact of tourism on the health status of families showed that all ten families reported no significant differences in their health status due to tourism involvement. However, some family members had pre-existing conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure. While the families acknowledged that tourism growth may have little effect on such health conditions, there was no evidence that tourism had exacerbated their health issues.

According to the study, when considering the impact of tourism on the personality and self-confidence of family members, all families had a positive experience and saw a potential for growth in terms of personality and self-confidence through involvement in tourism. They also noted an improvement in their language skills. Participants mentioned that interacting with tourists provided an excellent opportunity to enhance their language abilities, develop their personalities, and build self-confidence. Children's language abilities were particularly noteworthy, with participants noting that they were superior to those of other children and were not hesitant to communicate in other languages.

Discussing the impact of tourism on family spending habits, according to the discussions, the majority of the families reported changes in their expenditure due to their involvement in

tourism. These changes include adjustments in clothing choices, adoption of new fashion trends, and some alterations in home décor.

Discussing the impact of tourism on traditional occupations of families, the research indicates that only a small percentage of families have abandoned their traditional occupations due to tourism involvement. Five additional families are engaged in both their conventional work and the tourism industry, mainly due to the uncertain income from tourism, particularly during off-seasons and sudden declines such as the Easter bombing and the Covid-19 pandemic. These families have to balance both their regular jobs and their tourism-related work to make ends meet. For three families, their customary occupation has been passed down from their grandparents and parents. One family started working in tourism after a member retired from their traditional occupation.

When discussing the employment opportunities in the tourism industry based on qualifications, half of the interviewed respondents stated that they currently do not have any job openings that match the required qualifications. The other half mentioned that there are employment opportunities available for individuals who possess the necessary qualifications.

The impact of tourism development on families was discussed by all respondents, with economic development being a common theme. In addition to this, families also mentioned the availability of job opportunities, the importance of learning foreign languages such as English, a growing emphasis on entrepreneurship, the decline of traditional occupations, the overall increase in financial stability, the potential for personal growth, and the busyness of life.

Families are facing various difficulties due to the growth of tourism. One of the major issues is the lack of an effective waste management system. Additionally, there are problems related to illegal drug usage, seasonality of employment, prostitution, and unruly behavior of visitors. These issues have a negative impact on the younger generation's adaptation to unfavorable tourist behaviors.

## **06. Conclusion**

In addition to the findings of Abdul Rauf, Jahfer, Ameer, and Lebbe (2019), other studies have also identified the negative impacts of tourism on the host community's culture and society. For example, according to Singh and Singh (2018), tourism development in India has led to the commodification of culture, which has resulted in the loss of authenticity and uniqueness of traditional cultures. Similarly, Kaur and Kaur (2019) have identified that tourism development in the Himalayas has resulted in the loss of traditional knowledge and practices. On the positive side, studies have also shown that tourism can have significant benefits for the host community. For instance, according to Gursoy, Chi, and Lu (2013), tourism development can lead to the creation of employment opportunities, income generation, and economic growth. Furthermore, Wang, Xie, and Chen (2019) have identified that tourism development can lead to the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of cultural exchange. It is clear that the impacts of tourism on the host community's culture and society are complex and multifaceted. While there are certainly negative impacts, the positive impacts cannot be ignored. To manage the negative impacts and maximize the positive impacts, it is essential to adopt a sustainable tourism development approach that

takes into account the concerns of the host community and the need for environmental conservation. By doing so, the tourism sector can continue to help the host community and nature in the Southern Coastal Areas of Sri Lanka.

The promotion of local community values and traditions to tourists has been suggested in several studies as a way to maintain the cultural identity of the host community (Gursoy, Jurowski & Uysal, 2002; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010). However, it is important to balance this with the need for economic development through tourism. Achieving social cohesion and altering attitudes towards tourism is also crucial, as highlighted by previous research (Buckley, 2012; Sharpley & Telfer, 2015). The importance of educating the younger generation on the preservation of their cultural traditions has also been emphasized in literature (Gursoy et al., 2002). The negative effects of tourism on traditional occupations and local cultures can be addressed by changing attitudes and perceptions toward these cultural practices (Sharpley & Telfer, 2015). In addition, the maintenance and improvement of the coastal environment have been identified as crucial factors in the development of the tourism industry (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010). This is particularly important for the Southern Province's coastline belt, which has been found to be severely polluted by waste products and plastics from visiting tourists. Furthermore, the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism industry has been recognized as a key factor in the economic growth of host communities (Hall & Page, 2006). However, lack of funding remains a major challenge for SMEs in the sector, and microfinance options have been suggested as a means of supporting these enterprises (Dunford & Covic, 2016). In conclusion, while the tourism sector can have both positive and negative impacts on the host community, the negative effects can be addressed through proactive measures such as promoting local values and traditions, altering attitudes towards tourism, educating the younger generation, and improving environmental management. Supporting SMEs through microfinance options can also contribute to the economic development of the community.

While this study provides valuable insights into the impacts of tourism on the society and culture of Sri Lanka's Southern Province, there is a growing body of literature on this topic that supports our findings. For instance, a study by Sigera and Abeyrathna (2019) found that tourism can have both positive and negative impacts on local communities, which is consistent with our results. Another study by Fernando and Siriwardena (2020) highlighted the importance of promoting cultural values and traditions to tourists while balancing the need for economic growth. This study adds to this literature by providing specific insights into the impacts on family culture and identifying potential solutions for managing negative impacts.

In terms of policy implications, this study aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). The SDGs emphasize the importance of sustainable tourism that supports local communities and promotes environmental sustainability. The findings of this study can inform policy development that supports these goals while promoting the growth of the tourism sector.

In conclusion, this study provides important insights into the impacts of tourism on the society and the culture of Sri Lanka's Southern Province. By promoting sustainable tourism practices and balancing the positive and negative impacts on local communities, the tourism sector can contribute to economic growth while preserving cultural identities and protecting

the environment. This study adds to the existing literature on this topic and can inform policy development that supports the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

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