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Nuwan Herath **Book Review: Vodun: Secrecy and the Search for Divine Power by Timothy R. Landry**

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## **Human Resource Management Practises Amidst the Crisis: A Study of the Hospitality and Tourism Industry in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka**

*By K.N.N. SILVA<sup>1</sup> & T.M.A.C. THENNAKOON<sup>2</sup>*

The hospitality and tourism industry in Sri Lanka has traditionally played a significant role in the country's economy, serving as a major source of foreign exchange earnings. However, due to various crisis situations such as the Easter Sunday attack, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the current economic crisis, the industry has experienced a decline in performance. This study aims to investigate the impact of crises on the hospitality and tourism industry in the southern province of Sri Lanka, analyse the changes in human resource practises adopted to mitigate the crisis, and explore innovative HR practises to address future crises in the sector. Data was collected through a pre-tested questionnaire survey administered to 40 hotels representing three, four, and five-star categories. Descriptive and non-parametric statistical methods were used for data analysis. The research findings indicate that the recent crisis situations have had a significant impact on various performance indicators of the hospitality and tourism industry, including total bookings, average daily rate, revenue per available room, average length of stay, and occupancy rate. The sector has implemented different managerial strategies in areas such as labour force management, work scheduling, wage and salary plans, and training schedules to mitigate the adverse effects of crises. The study recommends the adoption of crisis preparedness strategies through effective human resource management practises to effectively address challenges during crisis situations in the hospitality and tourism industry.

**KEYWORDS:** Crisis situations, Hospitality and tourism, Human resource practise, Performance

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## INTRODUCTION

The hospitality and tourism industry is a significant sector within the service industry, comprising areas such as food and beverage, travel and tourism, lodging, and recreation. It plays a crucial role in global value creation, as highlighted by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). According to recent figures from WTTC, the industry contributed approximately 8.6 trillion USD to the global economy in 2022, which is just 6.4% below pre-pandemic levels (Silva, 2020).

Crisis management is a vital function across all industries, and its importance has become even more apparent in the tourism and hotel industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Previous studies have emphasized the significant link between conflicts and tourism (Ngoc Su, Luc Tra, Thi Huynh, Nguyen, O'Mahony, 2021). The consequences of a crisis not only pose a threat to the national economy but also jeopardise the existence of many tourist sites. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on crisis management strategies to mitigate undesirable outcomes. Sri Lanka has experienced severe challenges due to the Sunday Easter attack and the ongoing economic crisis in the country.

Human Resource Managers (HRMs) play a crucial role in navigating and managing crises, serving as leaders who oversee all departments within a company (Shil et al., 2020). Crises such as economic downturns and terrorism, both of which are man-made, can have significant impacts on the hospitality and tourism industry. The most recent and severe crisis the world has faced is the COVID-19 pandemic. Economic crises create uncertainty in the economic environment, leading to a decrease in tourism demand and the loss of skilled employees (Okumus et al., 2005). Terrorism, on the other hand, has a profound impact on tourists, and the varying levels of terrorism threats influence their choice of travel destinations.

The hospitality and tourism industry has played a major role in the Sri Lankan economy, serving as a significant source of foreign exchange for the country. However, Sri Lanka has faced unprecedented challenges due to a depletion of foreign reserves, leading to difficulties in importing essential goods. This situation began with the Easter Sunday attack and was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Ranasinghe et al., 2020). These unexpected crises have greatly impacted the tourism and hospitality industry, as tourists have become hesitant to visit the country, leading to a collapse of the sector. Despite the challenges, the industry has implemented various strategies to sustain its operations. It is important to analyse these strategies and examine

how the industry has managed to survive during these difficult times, considering it is one of the most luxurious industries in Sri Lanka.

The focus of this study is the southern province of Sri Lanka, a province where tourism has flourished, which comprises three districts: Galle, Matara, and Hambantota. This region is home to several tourist attractions, including preserved areas such as Yala, Lunugamwehera, and Bundala national parks, as well as picturesque coastal areas, unique architectural hotels, shops, and restaurants. The study aims to investigate the performance of the hospitality and tourism industry in the southern province of Sri Lanka, analyse the transition in human resource practises and initiatives adopted to cope with the crisis impact, and explore innovative human resource practises and suggestions to mitigate future crises in the industry.

Previous studies have examined the strategic role of HRM during crises in various industries. Vardarli (2016) explored the role of HRM in the crisis management process and its impact on human capital. He, Mao, Morrison, and Coca-Stefaniak (2021) investigated the fear and uncertainty experienced by employees during the COVID-19 pandemic and how HRM helps manage their concerns about job security. A similar study was conducted in the Sri Lankan context by Adikaram, Naotunna and Priyankara (2021), involving 26 Sri Lankan companies. While the hospitality and tourism industry have been directly affected by the crisis situations faced by Sri Lanka in recent years, there is a lack of studies specifically targeting HRM practises in the industry to manage the impact on employees and the sector. Therefore, this research study aims to examine the HRM activities adopted by the hospitality and tourism industries, with a focus on the southern province, given its significance in the Sri Lankan tourism sector.

The main objective of this study is to investigate human resource management practises during crises. The specific objectives include identifying the impact of crisis situations on the performance of the hospitality and tourism industries in the southern province, analysing the transition in human resource practises and initiatives undertaken to mitigate the crisis impact, and exploring innovative HR practises and suggestions to mitigate future crises in the industry.



## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **HRM Practises under different crisis situations**

The concept of a crisis has been defined differently in the literature. Doern, Williams, and Vorley (2021) describe a crisis as an extreme, unexpected, or unpredictable situation that demands a quick response from organisations. Cater and Beal (2014) define a crisis as a low-probability situation with significant consequences for the organisation, characterised by a high degree of uncertainty. Regardless of the specific crisis, organisations commonly experience surprise, threat, and a need for quick response. The literature has explored various types of crises that pose challenges to organisational performance, including natural disasters, terrorist attacks, economic crises, scandals, bribery, and sexual harassment. In the context of these crises, the role of HRM approaches has been discussed. Two approaches, namely the "soft" and "hard" models, have been identified (Edvardsson & Durst, 2021). These models discuss strategies for motivating employees during a crisis while minimising labour-related costs for organisations.

Among all organisational activities, human resource management (HRM) is considered crucial as it focuses on managing a unique resource that is distinct from other resources. HRM involves the efficient and effective utilisation of human resources to achieve organisational goals and objectives (Gamage, 2016). It encompasses various tasks such as job design, job analysis, human resource planning, recruitment, onboarding, training and development, rewards management, and health and safety management. With the COVID-19 pandemic, HRM has an increased responsibility to ensure the health and well-being of employees. Promoting workplace safety and health measures has become even more critical in the current global crisis. Given that workplaces attract a large number of people, enterprises and employers have a significant role in maintaining workplace safety to minimise the spread of the disease, as emphasised by the Epidemiology Unit: Ministry of Health and Indigenous Medical Services in Sri Lanka. Therefore, HRM plays a significant role in managing employee well-being while carrying out other HRM tasks and implementing innovative practises in this new environment (Nizamidou, 2018).

The HR department now has additional responsibility for crisis management, requiring them to become strategic partners within every organization's crisis management team (CMT). While the role of HRD (Human Resource Development) in organising, preparing for, and handling organisational crises

has been emphasised by experts and thinkers in crisis management and HR management, there has been limited research on HRD's role in managing and assisting organisations in recovering from a crisis (Stone and Deadrick, 2015).

### **Hospitality and Tourism industry in global and Sri Lankan contexts**

The tourism industry is considered the world's largest industry and plays a significant role in local, national, and international economies. It contributes to nearly 10% of the global Gross National Product (GNP) and accounts for approximately 6-7% of all exports of products and services (Srinivasan, Kumar, & Ganesh, 2013). The industry has been recognised for its potential contribution to economic growth, and it generates employment opportunities across various sectors. Tourism also drives infrastructure development in many destinations, including improvements in transportation networks, telecommunication services, and public amenities, benefiting both tourists and local residents. Additionally, tourism significantly impacts a country's GDP, with a substantial portion of gross receipts coming from foreign exchange earnings. Hence, in many regions, tourism is a key driver for economic development (Palliyaguruge & Chandralal, 2010).

The hospitality and tourism industry's economic contribution has been steadily growing over the years. In 2019, the sector's GDP outpaced global economic growth, and it supported around 330 million jobs, accounting for about 25% of job growth over the previous five years. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe negative impact on the industry, leading to a significant decline in economic output (Fatima & Elbanna, 2020). In Sri Lanka, the tourism industry faced a major setback starting with the Easter Sunday attack, which marked the beginning of its downfall. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the situation, causing the HTI sector in Sri Lanka to lose its leading position in the global economy (Silva, 2020). The tourism industry in Sri Lanka has faced multiple challenges, including the devastating 2004 Tsunami, which caused significant damage to coastal communities where many hotels are located (Srinivasan, Kumar, & Ganesh, 2013).

Recent crisis situations, such as the Easter Sunday attack, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, have severely impacted the HTI sector. These crises have led to instability in the tourism industry, resulting in a decline in tourist arrivals and revenue. However, the human resource personnel in hotels have played a crucial role in finding solutions to mitigate the effects of these crises on the industry (Baum, 2020). In fact, the

role of human resource management in the HTI sector during crisis situations is vital for adapting to changing circumstances, ensuring employee well-being, and implementing strategies to cope with the challenges faced by the industry. The specific HRM practises and initiatives undertaken in the HTI sector in response to these crises need to be examined to understand their impact and identify innovative practises that can help mitigate future crises in the industry.

### **The impact of Easter Sunday attack on HIT sector in Sri Lanka**

The Easter Sunday attack in Sri Lanka had a significant impact on the HTI (Hospitality and Tourism Industry) sector in the country. On April 21, a series of coordinated terrorist bombings occurred, targeting several locations including prominent hotels and Catholic churches where people had gathered for Easter service (Samarathunga & Kodithuwakku, 2020). The attack resulted in a considerable loss of life, with an estimated 250 civilians killed and significant damage to the buildings where the bombings took place. The tourism industry in Sri Lanka, which was one of the country's flourishing sectors, was severely affected by the Easter Sunday attack. The incident created a sense of fear and uncertainty among tourists, leading to a sharp decline in tourist arrivals and a negative impact on the HTI sector and related industries (Nagendrakumar, Gunawardana, & Kodikara, 2021). Tourist arrivals dropped by around 70%, and hotels faced a significant decrease in occupancy rates. In May 2019, only 37,802 foreign visitors arrived in Sri Lanka, representing a substantial decline compared to the same month in the previous year, and this downward trend continued throughout the year (Silva, 2020). The Easter attack became a major setback for the HTI sector in the Sri Lankan context.

### **Covid 19 pandemic and hospitality industry in the country**

This circumstance was abruptly followed by the Corona pandemic— another unexpected occurrence. The Easter Sunday attack in 2019 halted the sector's rapid expansion, costing the industry \$1.5 billion in tourism revenue. Shortly afterwards the first COVID-19 patient was discovered in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, and since then, the COVID-19 pandemic has spread indiscriminately among nations with sophisticated economies and those without, bringing suffering to people everywhere. 2020 TA plummeted by 17.7 percent during February after falling by 6.5 percent in January. To slow the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sri Lankan tourism industry-imposed restrictions on foreign visitor arrivals beginning in mid-March 2020 and suspended all international travel authorizations (TA) from all nations

beginning on March 19, 2020. (Nagendrakumar, Gunawardana and Kodikara, 2021)

Firms related to tourism and other businesses have had a serious negative impact due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The bulk of those employed in the tourism sector were rendered unemployed because of the closure of hotels, airlines, travel agencies, and other enterprises. It is challenging to get tourists to the sector due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a substantial influence on Sri Lankan tourism. However, it gave rise to a chance to reconsider tourism policies and restructure Sri Lankan tourism. Additionally, the study seeks to assess how the Easter Sunday attack and COVID-19 have affected the TA by employing (Shil et al., 2020).

As a spreading disease all around the world, COVID-19 severely restricts the money flow in the global economy. With the time and higher dedication of all the health organisations, they finally controlled the global pandemic with trillions of dollars. The world still has some consequences from the disease, but at present, COVID-19 is well under control.

### **The impact of the economic crisis on Sri Lanka's HTI sector**

The term "economic crisis" is used to describe a severe recession in the economy, where production and services in the economy (GDP) shrink in real terms for two consecutive quarters in more than one industry (Abberger and Nierhaus, 2008). The most common impacts of economic crises on organisations are rising unemployment, changes in labour markets and changes in HRM practises such as wage reductions to redundancies, short term work, reductions in training programmes etc.

The current crisis in Sri Lanka is the worst to hit the nation in many years. The summer of 2022 in the tiny island nation saw thousands of protestors rush to the capital city of Colombo and seize the presidential palace. President Gotabaya Rajapakse was forced to escape and later resign by the protestors, who were fed up with the state of Sri Lanka's economy at the time. His exit on July 14 put an end to the family's nearly 20-year political hegemony. The political unrest and energy problems have their roots in previous regimes' years of economic mismanagement.

## **METHODOLOGY**

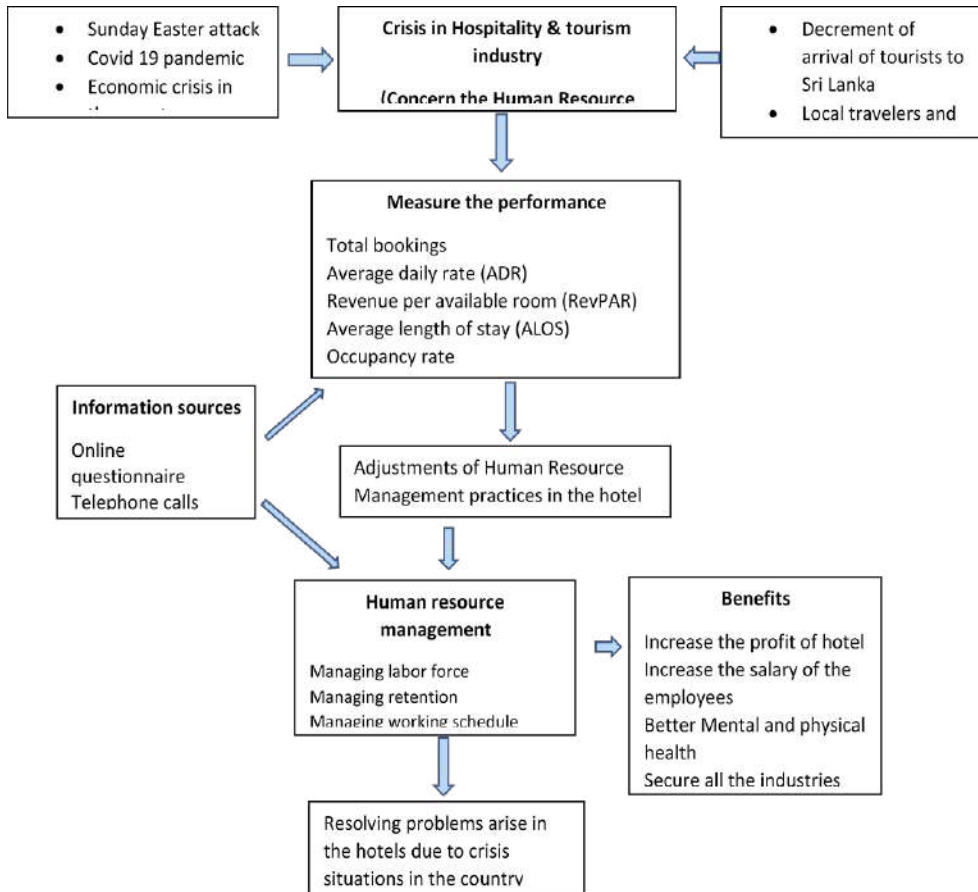
The research is carried out to analyse the impact of crisis situations on the performances of the HTI industries in Southern Sri Lanka and to identify the role of HRM in coping with these crises and managing their labour force.

This study is mainly associated with the hospitality industry, which is one of the leading contributors to the Sri Lankan economy. Among the nine provinces, the Southern Province is one of the main tourism attraction points. HTI industries in Galle and Matara districts were selected as the sample for the study.

There are 1382 different types of hotels in the Southern Province. According to the information provided by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, there are around 350 registered hotels. The total sample size of the study was 40 hotels, including twenty-four 3-star hotels, eleven 4-star hotels, and five 5-star hotels. In these hotels, a responsible person or the human resources department were involved in answering the survey questionnaire. The sample selected was chosen to represent the three-star category of hotels. As the sampling technique, the purposive sampling technique was used as the sampling procedure of the study.

A survey was conducted using a pretested questionnaire to collect the primary data. The questionnaire was sent via e-mail and WhatsApp to the respondents, and at times the questionnaire was filled out by asking the questions in person. Secondary data that was related to the study was obtained through journals, articles, reports, books, research articles, web pages, and the Internet.

**FIGURE 01: Conceptual framework of the study**



Source: Authors' own data, 2022

The total process that followed in the study has been described in the conceptual framework. Due to the Easter Sunday attack, COVID-19 pandemic, and economic crisis, HTI started to fall. By getting the information through the methods mentioned in the conceptual framework, changes in the performance of the hotel and changes in human resource management practises were identified. From there, benefits are added to the hotel, and it makes it easier to resolve problems that arise in the hotels due to crisis situations in the country.

**Hypothesis development**

The findings of Ngoc Su et al. (2021), Jago and Deery et al. (2002), and L.P.D.S. et al. (2020) evidence that there is a relationship between crisis situations and the performance of the hotel. According to the research

objectives and in order to examine the impact of crisis situations on the performance of hotels and changes in human resource management practises, the following hypotheses were developed. In past studies, researchers have found that crisis situations have a negative effect on the performance of hotels. When the crisis impacts the performance, most of the employees have to face difficulties because of the reduced performance and also because of the cutting of facilities for workers (Einstein, 2020).

H0- There is no significant impact on organisational performance due to the crisis situations.

H1- There is a significant impact on organisational performance due to crisis situations.

Human resource management shifts its activities due to the difficult situations in a country or the economic situation. Transitions in human resource management practises are vital in a crisis (Kimes and Anderson, 2015). HRM directives make up an important dimension of crisis management since organisational HRM policies have a great influence on people adopting more humanistic HRM practises in crisis situations. HRM policies are developed as the crisis plan and include different strategies; labour management, staff retention, rearranging wages and working hours, and altering training plans are some modern approaches to crisis management (Vardarlie, 2016). According to this study, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H0 -There are no significant HR practise transitions that occurred as an impact of the crisis in HTI in the southern province.

H1- There have been significant HR practise transitions as an impact of the crisis in HTI in the southern province.

Human resource personnel in hotels investigate and test innovative HR practises to mitigate the current negative consequences of the crisis and to mitigate future crises (Grillo, 2014).

H0 -There is no significant innovation in HR practises to mitigate the future crisis in the HTI sector.

H1- There is significant innovativeness in HR practises to mitigate the future crisis in the HTI sector

After the data collection, both descriptive and non-parametric statistical analysis were used for the analysis of the data. Since this study was based on a sample drawn through purposive sampling techniques, non-parametric tests were adopted for the analysis. As descriptive analysis, pie charts and bar charts were used, and for non-parametric tests, paired sample t tests and

Wilcoxon signed rank tests were used. To analysis the performance of the HTI sector during crisis situation, Total Bookings (the total number of rooms that book/ reserve), Average Daily Rate (ADR) (used to measure the average revenue that a hotel receives for each occupied guest room per day), Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR) (Is a performance metric in the hotel industry that is calculated by dividing a hotel's total guestroom revenue by the room count and the number of days in the period being measured), Average Length of Stay (ALOS) ( adding the total length of stay for each discharged resident in the month and dividing by the number of discharge residents in a month.), Occupancy Rate ( the percentage of occupied rooms at any given time compared to the total number of available rooms at that time) and Online reviews were selected. Some of these variables are also used by Lai and Wong et al. (2020) and Ranasinghe et al. (2020) in their studies.

#### **Average Daily Rate (ADR)**

$$ADR = \frac{\text{Total room revenue}}{\text{No of sold room}}$$

#### **Revenue Per Available Room**

$$RevPAR = \frac{\text{Total room revenue}}{\text{Total rooms}}$$

#### **Occupancy Rate**

$$OR = \frac{\text{No of sold room}}{\text{Total rooms}}$$

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

#### **The impact of crisis situations in the country on the performance of the hospitality and tourism industry (HTI) in the southern province**

##### **Total bookings**

Table 1 shows the changes in total bookings of HTI industries due to three different crisis situations: the Easter Sunday attack, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the current economic crisis. According to the results of the paired t-test, the p-value of all the criteria was less than the significant level ( $p < 0.05$ ), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that the Sunday Easter attack, COVID-19 and the current economic crisis in the country have had a significant effect on total bookings. Covid -19 directly impacted travel



restrictions, resulting in both local and international guests limiting their hotel bookings. The Easter attack had a severe impact on the entire HTI industry, mainly affecting international guest bookings. The economic crisis primarily influenced local guests due to the high cost of living and inflation in the country. Similarly, Kimes and Anders (2015) found changes in total bookings due to crisis situations.

**Table 01: Impact of crises on total booking of HTIs**

Criteria	T value	P value	Decision
Change in Total bookings after Easter attack	3.791	.000	Total booking has an impact due to Easter attack
Change in Total bookings in COVID-19 pandemic	2.443	.017	Total booking has an impact due to COVID-19 pandemic
Change in Total bookings in economic crisis	3.182	.002	Total booking has an impact due to economic crisis

*Source: Survey data, (2022)*

*Significance level = 0.05*

### Average Daily Rate (ADR)

When considering mean values as shown in Table 02, there is only one considerable change. Furthermore, a paired sample t-test was used and interpreted, indicating that the p-value of the first statement ("Change in ADR after Easter attack") was lower than the significant level ( $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting a significant effect from the Easter attack. The other statements had p-values higher than the significant level ( $p > 0.05$ ), indicating that the null hypothesis was not rejected. There was no significant effect on ADR from other two crisis situations. These results can be explained by the fact that the Easter attack had the biggest impact on the HTI sector and mainly targeted the famous Five starts hotels of the country.

**Table 02: Impact of crises on Average Daily Rate of HTIs**

Criteria	T value	P value	Decision
Change in ADR after Easter attack	2.299	.024	ADR has a significant impact due to Easter attack
Change in ADR in COVID-19 pandemic	1.187	.239	ADR has no significant impact due to the COVID -19 pandemic

Change in ADR in economic crisis	1.203	.233	ADR has no significant impact due to economic crisis
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Source: Survey data, (2022)

Significance level: 0.05

### Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR)

The findings by Pasteur and Koch (2020) revealed that crisis situations have an impact on the performance of the HTI industry. Table 03 also shows significant changes in the mean values before and after each crisis, and a paired t-test was conducted for further interpretation. The result of the paired t-test indicates that the p-value for all statements was lower than the significance level ( $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that RevPAR (Revenue per Available Room) was significantly affected by the Easter attack, COVID-19, and the economic crisis. These research findings are evident, as all the aforementioned crises have had a significant impact on the entire country's economy.

**Table 03: Impact of crises on Revenue per Available room of HTIs**

Criteria	T value	P Value	Decision
Change in (RevPAR) after Easter attack	4.466	.000	(RevPAR) has a significant impact due to Easter attack
Change in (RevPAR) in COVID-19 pandemic	2.524	.014	(RevPAR) has a significant impact due to COVID-19 pandemic
Change in (RevPAR) in economic crisis	3.768	.000	(RevPAR) has a significant impact due to economic crisis.

Source: Survey data, (2022)

Significance level: 0.05

### Average Length of Stay (ALOS)

Table 4 presents the various criteria used to measure the performance of the average length of Stay (ALOS). The Mean values for all statements do not exhibit significant differences; however, the p-values for all statements are lower than the significance level ( $p < 0.05$ ). This interpretation suggests a significant effect on ALOS from the three criteria. Based on these findings, it is evident that all crisis situations have impacted the decision-making process

regarding hotel stays, especially due to health concerns related to Covid-19 and increased expenses associated with high inflation.

**Table 04: Impact of crises on Average length of stay of HTIs**

Criteria	T value	P value	Decision
Change in (ALOS) after Easter attack	5.673	.000	(ALOS) has a significant impact due to Easter attack
Change in (ALOS) in COVID-19 pandemic	2.676	.009	(ALOS) has a significant impact due to COVID-19 pandemic
Change in (ALOS) in economic crisis	7.682	.000	(ALOS) has a significant impact due to economic crisis

Source: Survey data, (2022)

Significance level: 0.05

### Occupancy Rate

With the decrease in arrivals to the country, all the performance criteria of the hotel experienced a decline (Ranasinghe *et al.*, 2020). Table 05 displays the results of the paired t-test, where p-values for all the criteria are lower than the significance level ( $p < 0.05$ ), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This indicates that the Easter attack, COVID-19 and the current economic crisis in the country have significantly impacted the occupancy rate. The HTI sector's occupancy rate has decreased due to low number of guest arrivals.

**Table 05: Impact of crises on occupancy Rate of HTIs**

Criteria	T value	P value	Decision
Change in Occupancy Rate in after Easter attack	34.94	.000	Occupancy Rate has a significant impact due to Easter attack
Change in Occupancy Rate in COVID-19 pandemic	12.64	.000	Occupancy Rate has a significant impact due to COVID-19 pandemic
Change in Occupancy Rate in economic crisis	31.353	.000	Occupancy Rate has a significant impact due to economic crisis

Source: Survey data, (2022)

Significance level: 0.05

## Online reviews

Table 6 displays the results of the paired t-test, where p-values for all the criteria are higher than the significance level ( $p < 0.05$ ), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative hypothesis. Consequently, the Easter attack, COVID-19 and the current economic crisis in the country do not have a significant effect on the occupancy rate. This could be attributed to the fact that online reviews are a cost-effective activity for guests, allowing them to review hotels at any time and at a low cost. Alternatively, they may be reviewing hotels with the intention of booking them in the future.

**Table 06: Impact of crises on online review of HTIs**

Criteria	T value	P value	Decision
Change in online reviews after the Easter attack	-.862	.391	Online reviews have had no significant impact due to Easter attack
Change in online reviews in COVID-19 pandemic	-.440	.661	Online reviews have had no significant impact due to COVID-19 pandemic
Change in online reviews in economic crisis	-.673	.503	Online reviews have had no significant impact due to economic crisis

*Source: Survey data, (2022)*

*Significance level: 0.05*

## Analyse the transition in Human Resource practises and initiatives to cope the crises impact

### Managing labour force

The assessment of the transition of prevailing HRM practises during crisis situations involved measuring key indicators concerning the management of the labour force, labour retention, and working schedule in hotels. Six main variables were utilised to identify the variables associated with labour force management.

**Table 07: HRM practises and initiatives for managing labour force**

Sub variable	P value	T value	Decision
Hire an external workforce analyst	.000	5.049	HIT hasn't hired an external workforce analyst during the crisis
Focus on education and training for managers and employees	.0000	5.395	HTI in southern province hasn't focused on the education and training for managers and employees in the crisis
Set targets, measure, and report	.000	-.690	In the crisis HTI sector highly concern to set targets, measure, and get reports
Enable employee self service	.001	3.244	Self-service practises are used in difficult situations to reduce the cost by HTI in southern province
Integrate HCM with WFM software	.000	5.646	have a positive mind to integrate with software in the crisis situations and for the easiness of operations but not having a significant knowledge about them.

Source: Survey data, (2022)

Significance level: 0.05

When managing the labour force becomes difficult during a crisis, management often prefers to reduce costs in the company (Grillo, 2014). Table 07 displays the results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, where the p-value for all the criteria, except for the "build workforce management statement", is less than the significance level ( $p < 0.05$ ), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This suggests that crisis situations have a significant impact on labour management practises such as hiring external analysts and focusing on education and training, which have experienced negative changes. On the other hand, setting targets, measuring, and reporting are highly preferred by HR management. The other two variables have also undergone changes.

## Managing retention

**Table 08: HRM practises and initiatives for managing labour retention**

Sub variable	P value	T value	Decision
Build employee engagement.	.000	-5.719	Building employee engagement in responding to crises is something that HTI in the southern province highly accepts.
Get recognition and rewards right	.000	4.543	In a crisis, the Southern province HTI sector hasn't paid attention to the rewards with additional cost to them
Create an exceptional onboarding experience	.000	5.590	In a crisis, it is not worth to provide exceptional onboarding experiences within the HTI sector, Southern Province
provides avenues for professionals	.000	5.552	HTI in Southern Province reduces professional networking opportunities at an additional cost to the business.
Build a culture that employees want to be a part of	.000	-5.930	Giving employees the impression that they are a part of the hotel during a crisis is crucial. Therefore, HR professionals highly regard this subvariable.
Offering winning incentives	.000	4.993	HTI in Southern Province does not induce offering winning incentives in a crisis with an additional cost
Prevent burnout by focusing on employee wellness	.000	5.512	The goal of HR professionals is to promote employee wellness during times of crisis, not to prevent burnout.

Source: Survey data, (2022)

Significance level: 0.05

The result of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicates that the p-values for all statements were lower than the significance level ( $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that there have been significant changes in the variables related to managing retention. Especially, building employee engagement and creating a culture where employees want to be a part of have shown positive acquisition. Additionally, other variables related to managing retention have also experienced significant changes. These findings align positively with the research conducted by Kimes and Anderson 2015.

## Managing working schedule

**Table 09: HRM practises and initiatives for managing working schedules**

Sub variable	P value	T value	Decision
Identify time suckers	.000	-5.706	Finding time wasters in emergency situations is a major concern for the HTI sector in the Southern Province.
Prioritise wisely	.000	-5.371	Wisely prioritising is a dominant activity in the HTI sector in the Southern Province in crisis time
Create a daily schedule and stick with it	.006	-2.745	Maintaining a daily schedule is another crucial transition in the Southern Province's HRM and HTI sectors.
Group similar tasks together	.942	.073	The human resource personnel working in the HTI sector in Sri Lanka's Southern Province are not particularly concerned with grouping similar tasks.
Avoid the urge to multitask	.006	-2.122	In order to prevent further harm to the hotel, the HTI sector in the Southern Province resists the urge to multitask during a crisis.
Eliminate distractions	.034	2.734	The HTI sector in Southern Province has eliminated distractions more frequently than usual during this crisis.

*Source: Survey data, (2022)*

The evaluation criteria used to compare working schedule management practises before the occurrence of three distinct crisis situations are shown in Table 9. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was employed to analyse the significant measures relevant to this study. Based on the findings, there was a significant impact on almost all working schedule management practises, with the exception of one practise (grouping similar tasks together). Therefore, it can be concluded that these activities have undergone considerable changes as a result of the crisis situations.

## Explore innovative HR practises and suggestions to mitigate the future crisis in the HTI sector

This study attempts to explore the different innovative HR practises adopted by the HTI industry during the crisis using a few dimensions such as insurance policies, leave and compensation packages, employee welfare facilities, and training and development plans.

**Innovative HRM practises adopted during the crises****Table 10: Innovative HRM practises adopted by HTIs during crises**

<b>Sub variable</b>	<b>P value</b>	<b>T value</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Life insurance policies	.001	-3.253	Life insurance benefits to the employees are reduced due to crises to reduce the additional cost.
Paid time off, vacation time, and sick leave	.004	2.846	Completely stopped paying time off, vacations and sick leaves are strictly reduced due to the crisis to reduce the cost
Extended leave or family leave programmes	.000	4.427	Family leaves and extended leaves are almost stopped by the HR professionals in the HTI sector due to the downfall of the sector with the crisis.
Student loan repayment programmes, college grants and scholarships	.000	4.743	The provision of student loan repayment programmes, college grants, and scholarships in the HTI sector has significantly decreased as a result of the crisis.
Paid training and development opportunities	.027	2.214	The HTI sector restricted paid training and development opportunities due to the crisis to reduce the additional expenditure.
Continuous education	.001	-3.479	Facilities for continuous education in the HTI sector have been reduced due to the crisis to reduce costs.
Company equipment and transportation	1.000	.000	The HTI sector controls the provision of transportation facilities and purchases new equipment due to crises to reduce extra expenditure.

*Source: Survey data, (2022)*

*Significance level: 0.05*

The significance of the practises was evaluated using the Wilcoxon signed rank test. Accordingly, the p value of all the criteria except company equipment and transportation is less than the significant level ( $p < 0.05$ ), and the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis retained. According to this, the benefit plan for hotel employees is significantly impacted by the country's current crises. Dissanayake (2020) discovered findings that were consistent with previous research.



## **CONCLUSION**

In the era of globalisation, the hospitality and tourism industries enhance economic growth through job creation, foreign exchange earnings, and regional development. The economy of any nation is influenced by the food served in both households and eating establishments within the country. It is the primary responsibility of the hospitality industry to provide food for people of all ages, from all walks of life, at all times of the day or night, and in every situation.

In the context of the country, the hospitality, tourism, and leisure sectors in Sri Lanka have been significantly impacted by three consecutive crises. This study reveals the performance of the sector, as measured by total bookings, Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR), Average Length of Stay (ALOS) and occupancy rate. Those have been affected significantly by these crises. The average daily rate (ADR) was only affected by the Easter attack, and online reviews were not significantly impacted.

With the exception of building a workforce management team, all labour force management measures studied were influenced by the aforementioned crises. Previous studies have supported these research findings and demonstrated the implementation of organisational resource supporting activities during times of crisis. All human resource management (HRM) strategies need to be implemented with a crisis plan.

During the crisis, the management of the hospitality, tourism, and leisure industry faced pressure in manage workforce retention. Literature suggests several strategies, such as employee motivation, managing labour schedules, and providing transportation and other facilities even during a crisis. Management made significant changes to the working schedule due to the Easter attack, COVID-19, and the economic crisis. In terms of strategic HRM initiatives adopted by the industry, all practices except company equipment and transportation expenses have been reduced by management. HR managers suggest implementing well-directed cost reduction strategies to ensure the survival of the industry in future crises. Additionally, they recommend improving professional networks with private and public organisations to attract them to hold their organisational functions at hotel premises, thus recovering the income loss due to the absence of tourists.

In summary, there was a significant impact of the crisis on the performance of the HTI industry in the southern province, irrespective of the star category. The HRM departments of these HTI industries played a crucial role in

reducing costs due to low income, as well as in retaining and motivating their employees during the crisis. Therefore, it can be concluded that there was a substantial transition of HRM practises in the HTI sector to cope with the crisis. Importantly, HRM managers and upper management of the hotels have embraced innovative approaches and developed new HRM plans as alternatives for future crisis situations.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Arranging flexible working behaviour/patterns to make it easier to work in crisis situations without the extra pressure of the employees, close supervision should be strengthened because employees have difficulties in even normal working situations. Because profit must exist, but employees are necessary to make profit, it is crucial to strike a balance between profit-making strategies and employee welfare initiatives. So, hotels must protect their workforce. With the knowledge gained from past crises, management can deal with challenges in the present and future in an effective and efficient manner. HR development activities should be aimed at managing future crises. Develop an employee – employer relationship during a crisis to get mutual benefit for the organisations; with that, problems can be easily identified, and solutions can be easily found.

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## **Research in Microinsurance: A Bibliometric Analysis and Review**

By Chandrarathne WRPK, Gamage SK & Perera DAM

The term microinsurance was introduced as a new term in the vocabulary of development and social protection through the publication of an article in 1999 by the International Social Security Review. Today, the concept of microinsurance is becoming increasingly popular in developing countries, and the need for financial services for the poor has become universally acknowledged. Therefore, it is necessary to study the current state of microinsurance research to date. Thus, the study attempts to explore the consolidated picture of the microinsurance literature since 1999 using bibliometric analysis. The study mainly addressed four objectives: (1) to find the growth and trends of microinsurance research; (2) to find the institutions, countries, journals, and authors who have made outstanding contributions to microinsurance; (3) to visually assess the relationship between sources, countries, keywords, authors, cited sources, and affiliations; and (4) to find the trending topics in the research domain of microinsurance. This study used the systematic literature review (SLR) methodology and the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. Following certain inclusion and exclusion criteria, 305 documents were extracted, including journal articles, book chapters, reviews, conference papers, books, notes, editorials, erratums, conference reviews, short surveys, and retractions published between 2000 and 2022 from the 'Scopus' database. The findings show a significant increase in microinsurance publications compared to the early years, with most being published in 2014 due to a special issue in a leading insurance journal. The most significant journal was the Geneva Papers on Risk and Insurance: Issues and Practice, with David Mark Dror as the most influential author. The USA is the country that contributes the most to microinsurance literature, with the Micro Insurance Academy providing the most support for scientific research. Key terms in microinsurance publications include microfinance, insurance, health insurance, microcredit, health microinsurance, and index insurance. Financial literacy and consumer protection are potential topics that need to be closely associated with microinsurance.

**KEYWORDS:** Microinsurance, Bibliometric analysis, Biblioshiny, R-package, Scopus

## INTRODUCTION

Risks are an inherent part of our lives. Individuals, households, businesses, and communities face various risks and use multiple strategies to manage them. Households with low incomes are much more susceptible to a variety of risks than the general population (Eling et al., 2014). In developing countries, a significant proportion of the population belongs to the low-income class, and they are highly exposed to a variety of risks that could harm their households' wellbeing and income (The ICMIF Foundation, 2021; Inyang & Okonkwo, 2022). These are mainly accidents, health problems, the death of the breadwinner and /or family members, and the loss of assets. Coping with these risks is harder for the rural community (Devarakonda, 2018) especially as they do not have any money in hand to cover the unforeseen losses brought on by these events. In order to cover these losses, they have to sell or mortgage their properties, take loans at high interest rates from informal sources, cut down their children's educational expenses, and cut down family health care expenses (Schanz, 2020; Caroll, 2022; Biswal & Bahinipati, 2022). Accordingly, many of them are pushed into income insecurity or become vulnerable to poverty due to the lack of access to appropriate risk management instruments (OECD and International Labour Organization, 2019). However, well-designed financial products can help them prepare for risk, reduce risk, increase business investment despite the risk, and bounce back from shocks when they occur (Aizpun et al., 2022). An essential component of insurance for reducing risks in low-income households is microinsurance. According to Churchill (2006), microinsurance is the protection of low-income people against specific perils in exchange for regular premium payments proportionate to the likelihood and cost of the risk involved. It is not a specific product or product line, but it is the provision of cover to a specific market segment and generally targets the low-income segment of an overall population. Microinsurance offers protection from a range of risks, such as illnesses, accidental injuries, deaths, natural catastrophes, property losses, and any other risks that can be insured. While lowering poverty and boosting welfare, microinsurance can help low-income households manage risk and maintain a sense of financial security (Chow, 2022; Worku & Asmare, 2018; Wanczeck et al., 2017; Paramasivan & Subbiah, 2016; Apostolakis et al., 2015; Varshini & Suresh, 2013; Zenklusen & McCord, 2009). Hence, it is considered not only as a financial service but also as a social protection system (Churchill, 2006). Although microinsurance is a better risk management tool for low-income households and a social protection system, in the world, hundreds of millions of people are still left

without appropriate risk management tools (Munich Re Foundation, 2021). According to the report published by the Micro Insurance Network (Merry, 2021), in 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, between 6% and 14% of the target population are covered by microinsurance. Therefore, microinsurance is a veritable strategy to increase insurance penetration (Inyang & Okonkwo, 2022) and finally, this financial inclusion becomes a key lever for building resilience, reducing poverty, and stimulating economic growth (Aizpun et al., 2022).

The term microinsurance was introduced by ... as a new term in the vocabulary of development and social protection through the publication of an article in 1999 (Dror & Jacquier, 1999). Currently, the idea of microinsurance is gaining popularity in developing countries, and it is widely acknowledged that the poor need access to financial services. In the initial phase, there were no more publications on microinsurance. In 2005, the International Microinsurance Conference (IMC) was launched and became an annual event to promote microinsurance and engage academics and practitioners in IMC content. In addition, since 2014, a leading insurance journal has published a special issue on microinsurance every two years, which has made a significant contribution to the publications on this topic. Due to its increasing importance, the number of published articles on microinsurance has recently increased (Dror, 2019).

There is minimal information on how scholarly research on microinsurance practice and theory has changed over time and has added to the microinsurance literature (Dror, 2019). Analysis of which journals, countries, and authors are contributing more to the topic of microinsurance is likewise yet in its infancy. There are very few comprehensive literature reviews on microinsurance (Dror & Eling, 2021). Such a study of the literature has been performed by earlier academics on microfinance (Ali et al., 2022) but not specifically on microinsurance. Thus, there is a timely need to present a consolidated picture of the microinsurance literature.

Accordingly, this study quantitatively analyzed selected literature on microinsurance from 1999 to 2022 using the bibliometric method. The main objectives of this study were to (1) find the growth and trends of microinsurance research; (2) find the institutions, countries, journals, and authors who have made outstanding contributions to microinsurance; (3) visually assess the relationship between sources, countries, keywords,



authors, cited sources, and affiliations; and (4) find the trending topics in the research domain of microinsurance.

The organization of the paper includes five sections. The introduction, which is the first section, describes the study's background, current knowledge, rationale for the study, and objectives. Section 2 discusses the methods used in this study; Section 3 presents and analyzes the results; Section 4 summarizes and discusses the results; and finally, Section 5 includes the article's conclusion, limitations, and suggestions for further study.

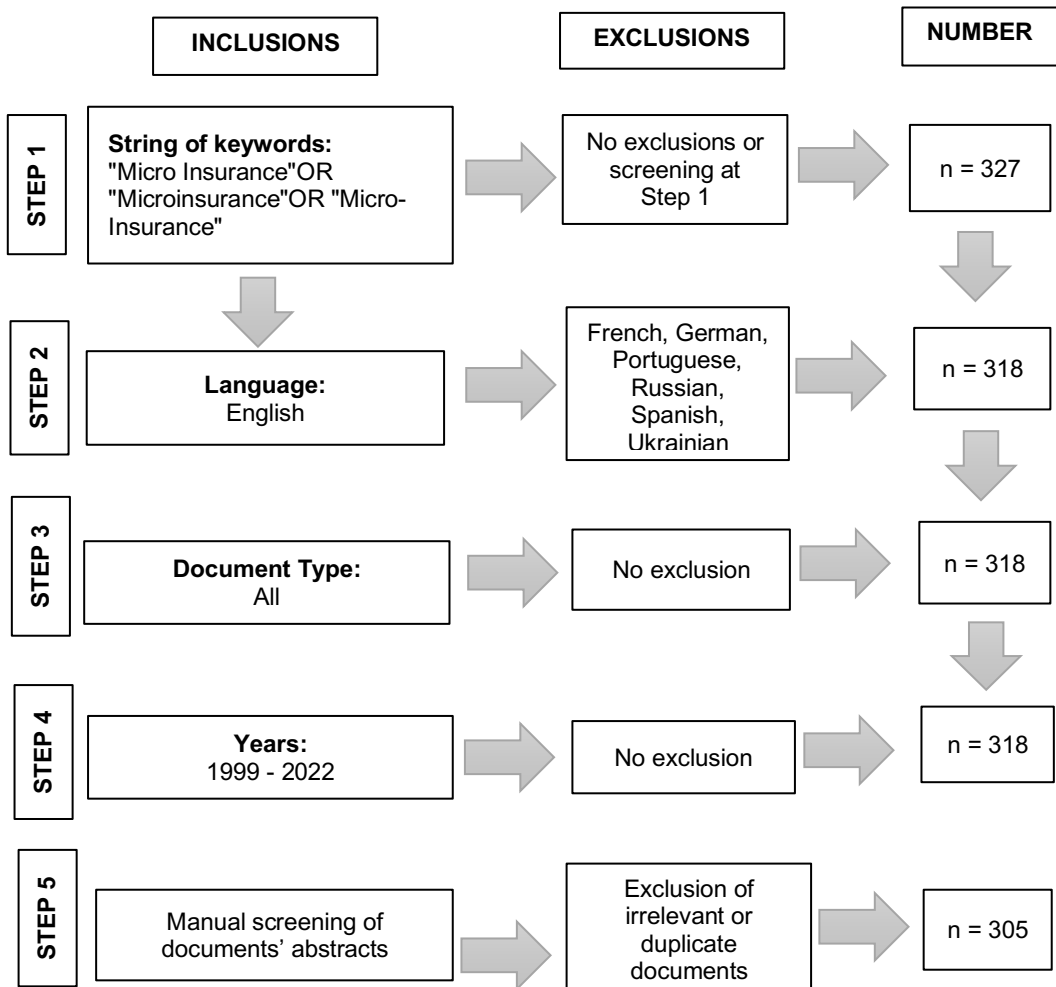
## **METHODOLOGY**

In accordance with the objective of the present study, the method of bibliometrics was used to analyze scientific publications on microinsurance. This study's methodology was divided into two sections, which are each discussed in more depth in the section below.

### **Article Inclusion and Preparation**

This was a literature-based descriptive study involving bibliometric analysis. The study was based on the original data collected during the period from 1999 to 2022 by using the Scopus database. The research data were retrieved from the Scopus database using the search string "Micro insurance" or "Microinsurance" or "Micro-insurance" in December 2022. The language was restricted to English, and all types of publications were selected. The search strategy yielded 305 records and searched documents (articles, books, book chapters, conference papers, reviews, short surveys, notes, and editorials) that were stored in the Excel spreadsheet with complete records and cited references. These data were exported for analysis.

**Figure 1: Search Criteria of Scientific Publications**



Source: Authors' own data

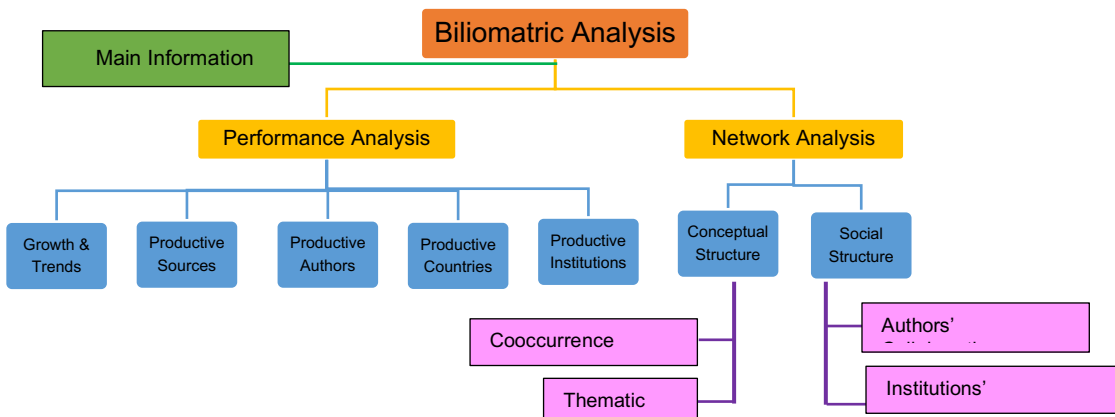
## Bibliometric Analysis Strategies

The shiny app for bibliometrics from R Statistical Package was used to carry out the present bibliometric analysis and, in addition, Microsoft Excel was used for the data analysis. Figure 2 depicts an overall view of the bibliometric analysis techniques.

Using the Bibliometric R-package (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017), fundamental analytical findings on the microinsurance study were calculated and reported in 5 categories during the performance analysis phase. These include growth and trends (Annual Scientific Production), most relevant sources, most productive authors, most productive countries, and most productive institutions. Further, the three-field plot in Biblioshiny was utilized to visually assess the relationship between sources, countries, keywords, authors, and affiliations.

In the network analysis segment, the collaborative network of the authors and the institutions was plotted by way of using the social structure factor of the bibliometric R-package (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) provided in the Biblioshiny user interface. Further, a co-occurrence network and thematic map analysis were executed by using the conceptual structure component of the bibliometric R-package in order to express research themes and trending topics in the area of microinsurance.

**Figure 2: Bibliometric Analysis Strategies**



*Source: Developed by researcher based on literature*

## Results

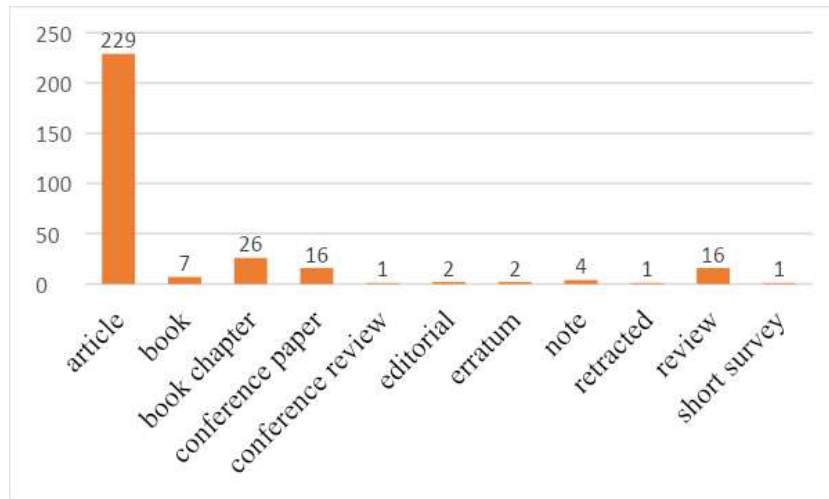
In this section, the results of findings are presented to show (i) growth and trends in the field of microinsurance research in terms of annual scientific production and citations; (ii) prolific sources, authors, countries, and institutions; (iii) the relationship between sources, countries, keywords, affiliations, and authors; (iv) social networks and co-occurrence networks; and (v) the thematic map of the field of microinsurance.

## Data Analysis

This literature review included 305 documents related to microinsurance published between 1999 and 2022. Figure 3 shows the summary of document types, which included 229 articles, 26 book chapters, 16 conference papers, 16 reviews, and 7 books from 191 sources, and the annual growth rate of the publications relating to this area is shown as 12.81%. A total of 12,130 references from different countries were made to the documents published in the Scopus database during this time, with an average of 11.22 citations per publication. As shown in Table 1, there were a total of 567 authors used for the bibliographic analysis, and there were 717 author keywords.

**Table 1: Description of the Papers Used in Bibliographic Analysis**

<b>Timespan</b>	<b>1999:2022</b>
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	191
Documents	305
Annual Growth Rate %	12.81
Average citations per doc	11.22
References	12130
Author's Keywords	717
Authors	567

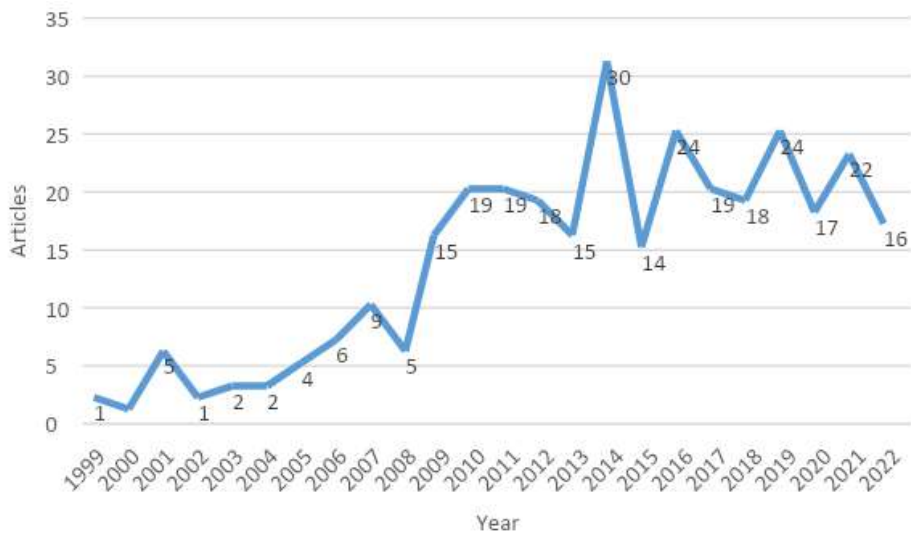
**Figure 03: Document Type**

Source: Authors' own data

### **Growth and Trends of Microinsurance Research**

Figure 4 shows the trend of published work on microinsurance over the period 1999 - 2022. Research on microinsurance appears to have begun in 1999, as seen in Figure 4, with the work of Dror and Jacquier (1999) being the first and only article included that year. According to the bibliometric R package's analysis from 1999 to 2022, the field of microinsurance has an annual growth rate of scientific output of 12.81%. According to the findings, the trend in publications has greatly increased compared to the early years. Most publications related to microinsurance were published in 2014 (N = 30), with the leading insurance journal publishing a special issue on microinsurance. The number of publications per year was less than 10 in the first 10 years after 1999, and in 2000, no article on microinsurance was found in Scopus. However, the number of publications produced up to 2022 generally increased while recording peaks in 2016, 2019, and 2021, in which the leading insurance journal published special issues on microinsurance.

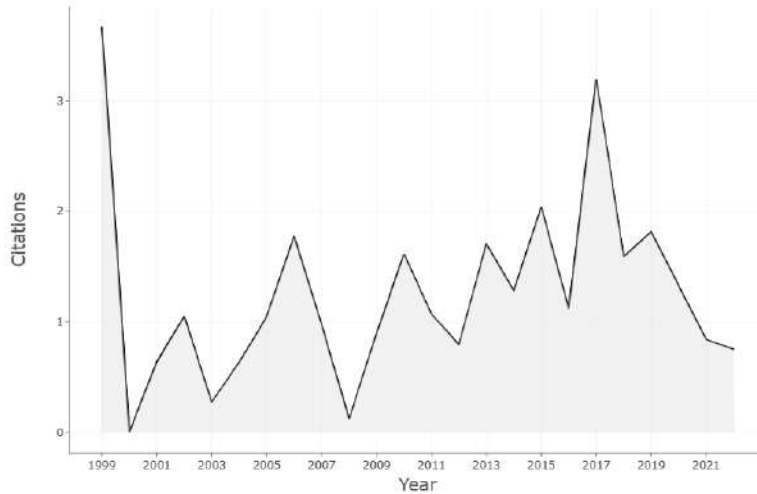
**Figure 4: Annual Scientific Production**



*Source: Authors' own data*

Figure 5 displays the typical number of citations made to articles on microinsurance every year. This outcome demonstrates the annual impact of publishing on the field. The final analysis reveals that, with an average of 3.67 citations, the lone article from 1999, which marks the field's inception, has received the most citations to date. This suggests that the authors' (Dror & Jacquier, 1999) study had a significant influence on the microinsurance industry. However, this variety dropped sharply to zero in 2000, and the cause of this decrease in citations may be that in 2000 there were no articles searched in Scopus related to microinsurance. Besides, in line with Figure 5, it may be seen that after 1999, average citations per year did not increase a lot, apart from the year 2017, which recorded 3.19 average citations per year.

**Figure 5: Average Citations per Year**

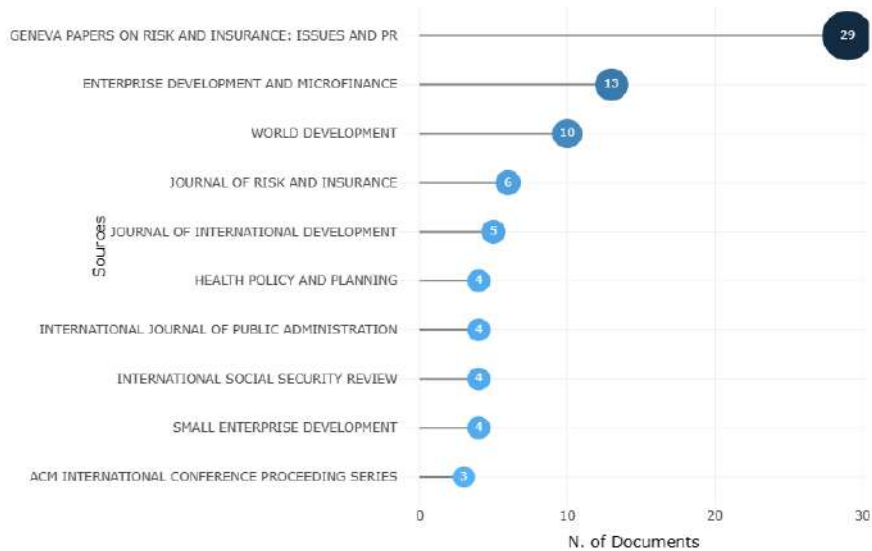


Source: Authors' own data

**Most Productive Sources of Microinsurance**

According to Figure 6, “Geneva Papers on Risk and Insurance: Issues and Practice”, had the highest contribution in this domain. This journal alone published 29 research papers within the specified period, which is almost 9.5% of the total publications.

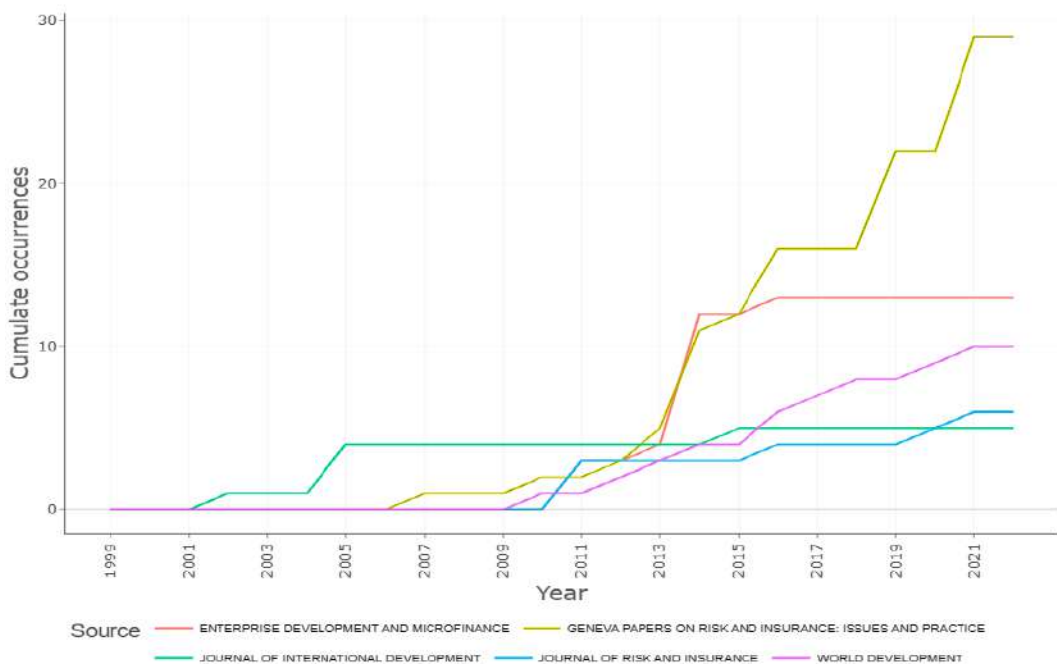
**Figure 6: Most Relevant Sources**



Source: Authors' own data

However, as Figure 7 shows, the number of articles produced shows slow growth until 2013 and then increases significantly from 2014, with peaks in 2016, 2019 and 2021, which were the years that published special issues on microinsurance. *The Journal of Enterprise Development and Microfinance* has published 13 articles, while *The Journal of World Development* contributed 10 articles in this area. However, the *Journal of Enterprise Development and Microfinance* last published articles in 2016 and will not be published until then.

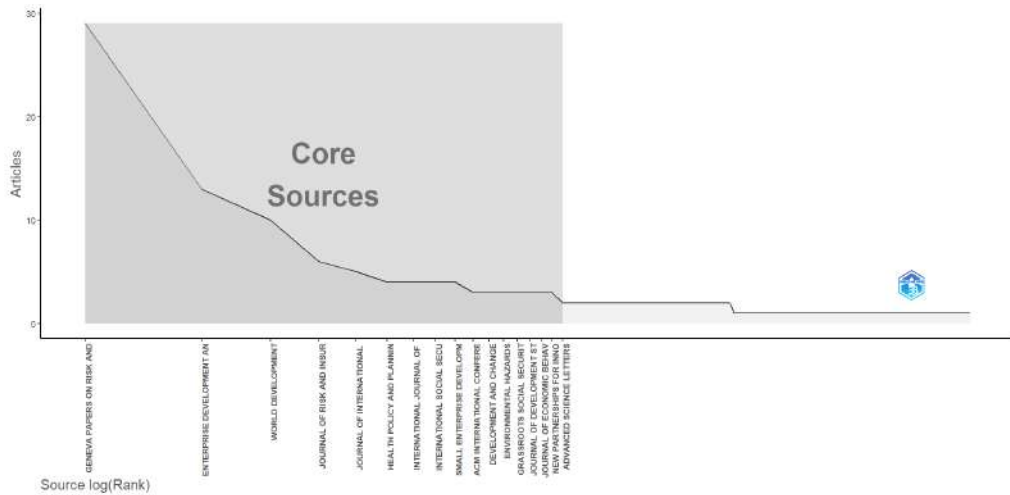
**Figure 7: Source Dynamics**



Source: Authors' own data

When analyzing the productivity of publication sources by using Bradford's Law in Figure 8, it is evident that the output is diversified with 17 sources out of 191. But the important factor to be considered here is that only three journals have established themselves as the most important publishers in this field, with fewer than 10 articles published by other journals.



**Figure 8: Source clustering through Bradford's Law**

Source: *Authors' own data*

**Table 2: Most Relevant Sources**

Source	No. of Publications	Total Citations	h_index
Geneva papers on risk and insurance: issues and practice	29	256	10
World development	10	224	6
Third world quarterly	2	156	2
Handbook of development economics	1	146	1
Health policy and planning	4	112	4
Global environmental change	2	108	2
International social security review	4	107	2
Journal of economic behavior and organization	3	92	3
Agricultural economics (The United Kingdom)	1	87	1
Environmental hazards	3	86	3

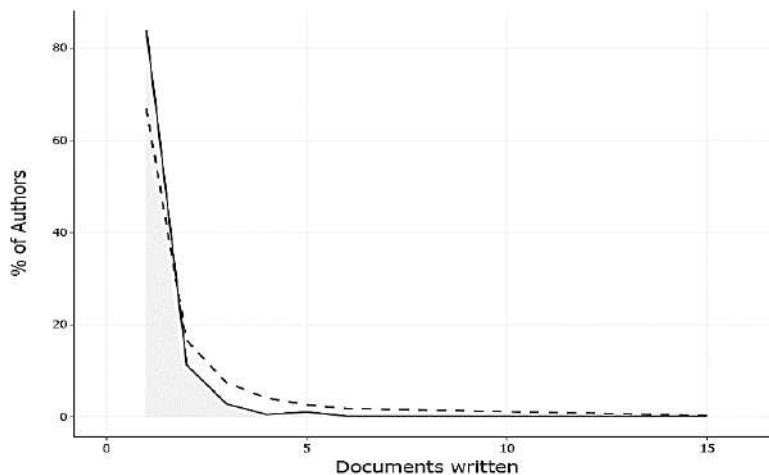
Source: *Authors' own data*

To further comprehend the influence of these journal articles, we show the top 10 most cited journals in Table 2 together with their total number of publications (NP), total citations (TC), and related h-index values. Accordingly, the ranking changes when we look at the TC and h-index. Geneva Papers on Risk and Insurance: Issues and Practice is the most abundant in terms of publications as well as the most influential journal, receiving a total of 256 citations with a 10 h-index. Although the *Journal of Enterprise Development and Microfinance* ranked second on the publication list, it fails to place itself in the top ten influential journals. The other five journals, *Journal of Risk and Insurance*, *Journal of International Development*, *International Journal of Public Administration*, *Small Enterprise Development*, and *ACM International Conference Proceeding Series* also dropped from the top 10 when considering the impact of publications.

### Most Productive Authors in Microinsurance

It is feasible to determine whether the field under analysis is one in which the majority of the output is concentrated on a small number of authors, according to Lotka's law (Figure 9). In our situation, production is diverse because 84% of the total number of contributing authors (476 out of 567) had only one publication. In essence, the distribution shows that scientific publications' contributions are not evenly split among their authors but rather vary with the number of authors.

**Figure 9: Author Productivity through Lotka's Law**



Source: Authors' own data

We can better comprehend how each researcher has made a substantial contribution to the subject of microinsurance by looking at the most prolific authors in the field. To understand the productivity and influence of these publications, Table 3 displays the top 10 most cited authors together with the total number of publications (NP), the total number of citations (TC), and the corresponding values of the h-index. David Mark Dror tops the list as a result, with 15 articles. His publication impact ranking in terms of total citations (TC) and h-index places him as the top author. He garnered 246 citations, giving him a 9 h-index.

**Table 3: Most Productive Authors**

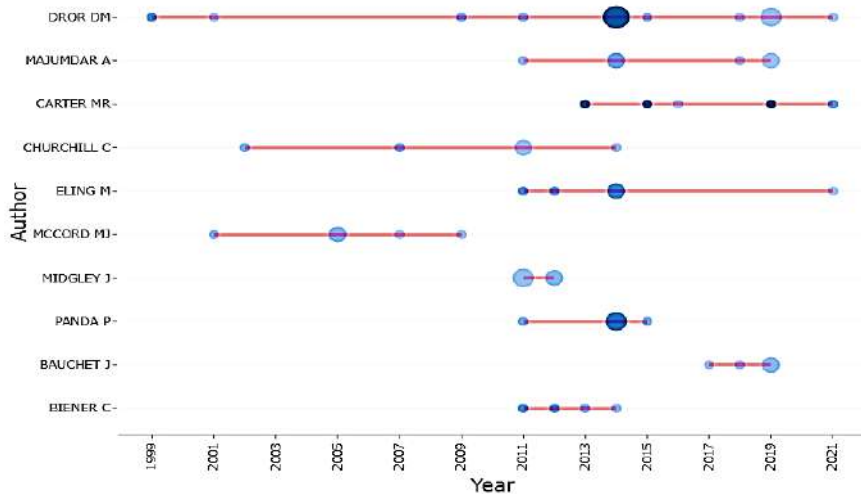
<b>Authors</b>	<b>No. of Publications</b>	<b>Total Citations</b>	<b>h_index</b>	<b>Publication Year Started</b>
DM Dror	15	246	9	1999
P Panda	5	89	5	2011
MR Carter	5	206	4	2013
M Eling	5	126	4	2011
MJ Mccord	5	56	4	2001
C Biener	4	102	4	2011
R Radermacher	4	57	4	2009
J Bauchet	4	13	3	2017
S Akter	3	70	3	2010
T Arun	3	40	3	2009

Source: *Authors' own data*

Further, Dror has published scientific documents consistently in the area of microinsurance since 1999 to date (Figure 10), which is significantly higher than all other authors that have five or less than five publications on the related topics. P Panda, MR Carter, M Eling, and MJ Mccord published five each. However, MR Carter received 206 citations and an h-index of 4, followed by M. Eling, who received a total of 126 citations with an h-index of 4. P Panda and C Biener are next among the other influential contributors to

research areas in terms of received citations for their scientific publications and corresponding h-index scores.

**Figure 10: Authors' Production over Time**

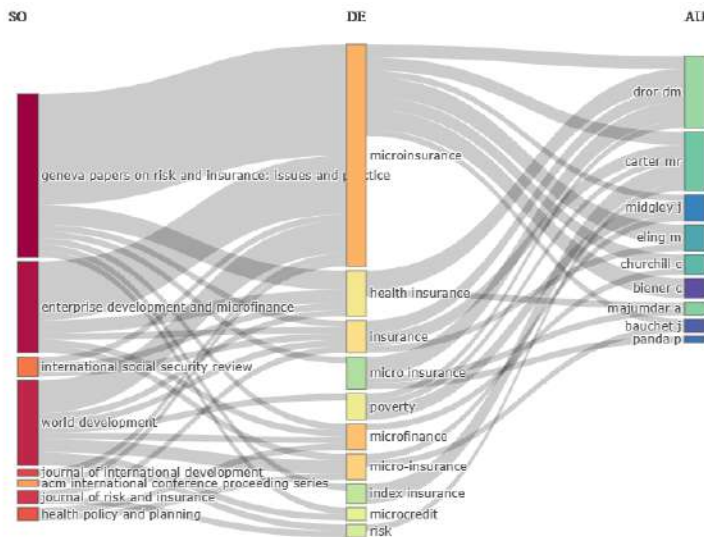


Source: Authors' own data

**Relationship between keywords, authors, and sources**

The three-field plot in Biblioshiny is utilized to visually assess the relationship between sources, countries, keywords, authors, cited sources, affiliations, etc. Figure 11 included three field analyses that illustrated the connections between authors, sources, and keywords. The left column in Figure 11 featured the name of the journal, the middle column contained keywords, and the right column contained the authors. With the use of this research, we can locate authors who have written about microinsurance and determine the kinds of journals that have published their work. The analysis established that most of the authors have considered microinsurance as their keyword, and most of their research on microinsurance has been published in sources such as *Geneva Papers on Risk and Insurance*, *Enterprise Development and Microfinance*, and *World Development*. As well as 'microfinance', 'health insurance', 'index insurance', 'insurance', 'poverty', 'microcredits', and 'risk' are closely related keywords with microinsurance that are used by different authors. Additionally, David M. Dror and M.R. Carter focused on many of these topics.

**Figure 11: Three Field Analyses (keywords, authors, sources)**



Source: *Authors' own data*

**Most Productive Countries**

Fifty-eight different countries have publications in the field of microinsurance. For the overall number of documents per country, the study adopts a cutoff of 20. Accordingly, based on the overall number of publications, Table 4 ranks the top 10 countries out of 58 as the most productive countries. The United States of America is the most productive country in this research area, with 136 published documents and 697 citations. According to Table 4, India, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom have microinsurance related publications of 64, 47, and 40, respectively. Other countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Australia, China, and South Africa have less than 40 publications in this field. However, Germany and Switzerland received 240 and 139 citations, respectively.

**Table 4: Most Productive Countries**

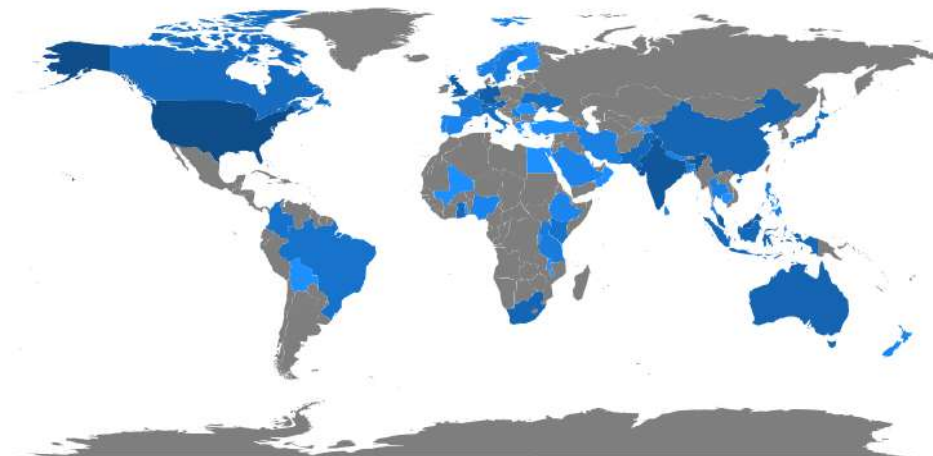
Country	Total Publications	Total Citations
USA	136	697
India	64	123
Malaysia	47	10
UK	40	161
Germany	37	240

Netherlands	31	97
Switzerland	29	139
Australia	23	33
China	22	12
South Africa	22	6

Source: Authors' own data

Figure 12 illustrates the country's scientific output. On the map in Figure 12, the blue color denotes the presence of publications for specific countries on the themes under consideration, while the gray color denotes the absence of a publication. More publishing countries are represented by the countries with a darker blue color.

**Figure 12: Country Scientific Production**



Analyzing the geographic distribution of publications and considering the countries of the corresponding authors, Table 5 shows the most prolific countries in terms of the total number of publications and represents the collaborative nature of the leading countries' scholarly output through multi-country publications (MCP) and multi-country Publication Ratio (MCPR). When considering the number of publications, researchers from the United States of America have attained first place in this field of research with 40 published documents. According to Table 5, India, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Switzerland have microinsurance related publications of 19, 14, 13, and 10, respectively. Other countries, such as South Africa, Australia, China, Malaysia, Canada, and the Netherlands, have less than 10

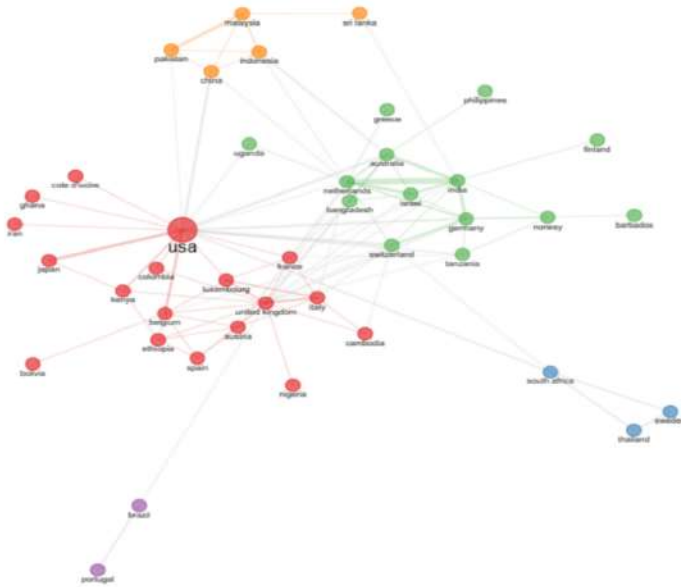
publications in this field. Surprisingly, however, in the case of MCP or author collaborations with authors from other countries, the US has not secured at least one spot in the top five positions in this area, while India has superior collaborative publishing performance weighed against the other major publishing countries on the list with an MCPR of 0.684. In addition, the collaborative research trend is higher for the Netherlands, Australia, and China, with MCPR values of 0.6, 0.571, and 0.429, respectively. Other countries have average contributions.

**Table 5: Most Productive Countries (corresponding authors' countries)**

Rank	Country	Number of Publications	Single Country Publications	Multiple Country Publications	Multiple Country Publications Ratio
1	USA	40	31	9	0.225
2	India	19	6	13	0.684
3	United Kingdom	14	11	3	0.214
4	Germany	13	10	3	0.231
5	Switzerland	10	7	3	0.3
6	South Africa	8	7	1	0.125
7	Australia	7	3	4	0.571
8	China	7	4	3	0.429
9	Malaysia	7	6	1	0.143
10	Canada	5	4	1	0.2
11	Netherlands	5	2	3	0.6

Source: *Authors' own data*

**Figure 13: Country Collaboration Network**

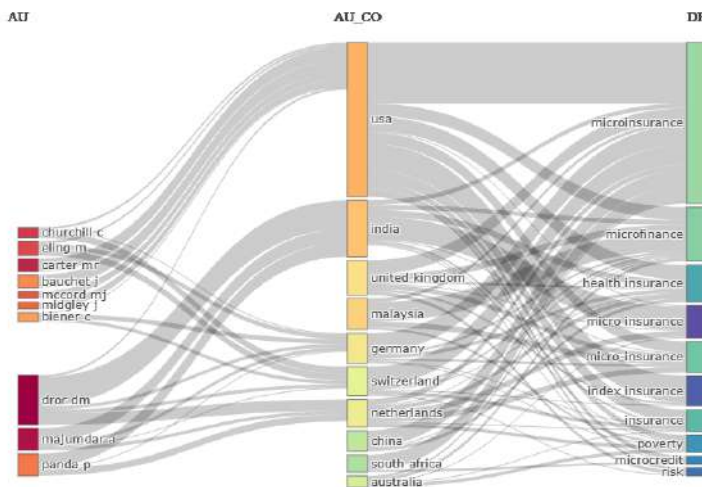


The top 40 country collaboration networks from our collected bibliographic data are displayed in Figure 13, which could reflect the degree of international communication as well as the countries that are influential in this field. The network contains three main communities, each with a unique color for its nodes. The size of the nodes indicates how much a country has influenced research on microinsurance (based on the number of publications). The strength of international cooperation is indicated by the edges between the nodes.

**Relationship between keywords, countries, and authors**

Figure 14 featured three field analyses illustrating the link between keywords, countries, and authors. The authors are listed in the left column, the countries are listed in the middle column, and the keywords are listed in the right column. The height of the rectangles indicates the number of studies carried out by the authors, countries, and study areas; as more studies are undertaken by each of these entities, the rectangles grow in both width and height.



**Figure 14: Three Field Analyses (keywords, countries, and authors)**

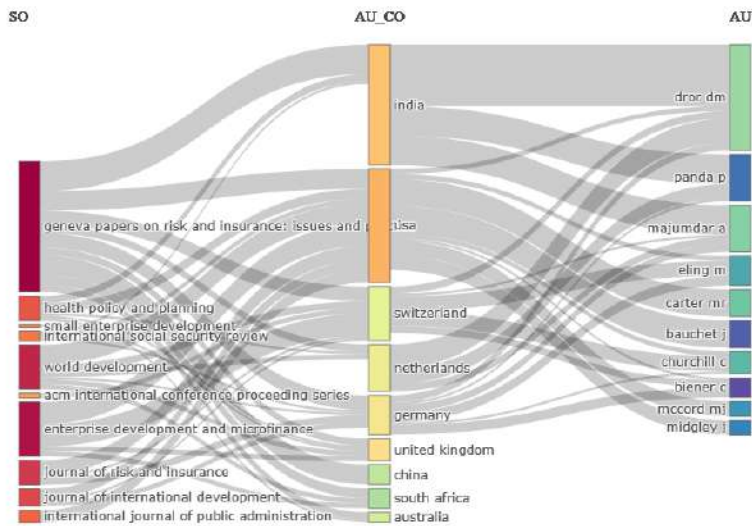
Source: Authors' own data

The analysis showed that the USA, India, the UK, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Germany are the countries with the most research on microinsurance as evidenced by the size of the rectangles representing each country. It also confirms that 'microinsurance' is a common keyword across most studies. However, variations of the term, such as 'micro insurance' and 'micro-insurance,' appear in some articles. Notably, 'micro insurance' is frequently used in Indian research, while Malaysian studies predominantly focus on microfinance. Most of the Indian research has been led by David M. Dror, who has conducted fewer studies in the USA, Switzerland, and Germany, and none in the UK.

### Relationship between sources, countries, and authors

The three-field analysis depicted in Figure 15 highlights the relationships among sources, countries, and authors. The left column of Figure 15 lists the sources, the center column shows the countries, and the right column names the authors. The volume of studies conducted by countries and authors, as well as those published by sources, is indicated by the height of the rectangles. Parallel to the increase in the number of studies from each entity increases, the size and height of the rectangles also increase. Additionally, the lines connecting authors and countries to sources represent the strength of their relationships; the more research by authors and countries that is published in a source, the thicker these connecting lines will be.

**Figure 15: Three Field Analyses (sources, countries, and authors)**



Source: Authors' own data

The larger rectangles indicate significant contributions from India, with notable work by DM Dror, P Panda, and A Majumdar, primarily published in *Geneva Papers on Risk and Insurance: Issues and Practice*, *Health Policy and Planning*, and *International Social Security Review*. Conversely, the size of the rectangles for the USA reflects strong performance supported by seven authors, who diversified their research across various top-tier journals. In Switzerland, key authors such as DM Dror, A Majumdar, M Eling, C Churchill, and C Biener mainly published in *Geneva Papers on Risk and Insurance: Issues and Practice* and the *Journal of Enterprise Development and Microfinance*. Germany, benefiting from contributions by all the principal authors recognized in Switzerland, along with P Panda, disseminated their research across five journals. From the standpoint of publication sources, *Geneva Papers on Risk and Insurance: Issues and Practice* is the most published journal, with significant contributions from authors in India, the USA, and China, as well as Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, South Africa, and Australia. Publications in other sources are distributed more randomly among various leading publishing countries.

### Most Productive Academic Institutions

According to the results presented in Figure 16, the Micro Insurance Academy possessed the greatest backing for publishing scientific research on microinsurance with 13 studies. Multimedia University and the University of California are at the next level with 11 studies. Purdue University has made a

notable contribution and published eight documents, followed by the University of Utara Malaysia. Further in this field, notable contributions are made by the International Labour Organization with seven scientific publications.

**Figure 16: Most Relevant Affiliations**



*Source: Authors' own data*

### Co-authorship and Social Collaboration Analysis

The study looked at the social structure section of the bibliometric R-package offered in the Biblioshiny user interface regarding social collaboration and co-authoring analyses (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). According to scholars, the collaboration between two or more individuals, institutions, or countries is described by the social network of participants in a domain (Song, et al., 2019). In a network, the links connecting the nodes stand in for the relationships, while the nodes themselves represent the participants in the network. Figures 17 and 18 depict the collaboration network of authors and the collaborative network of institutions, respectively, in this study. As a result, the big name is already mentioned as the most published and impactful scholar in the field; DM Dror has a well-established collaborative network, and other scholars have been shown to have a little collaborative network.

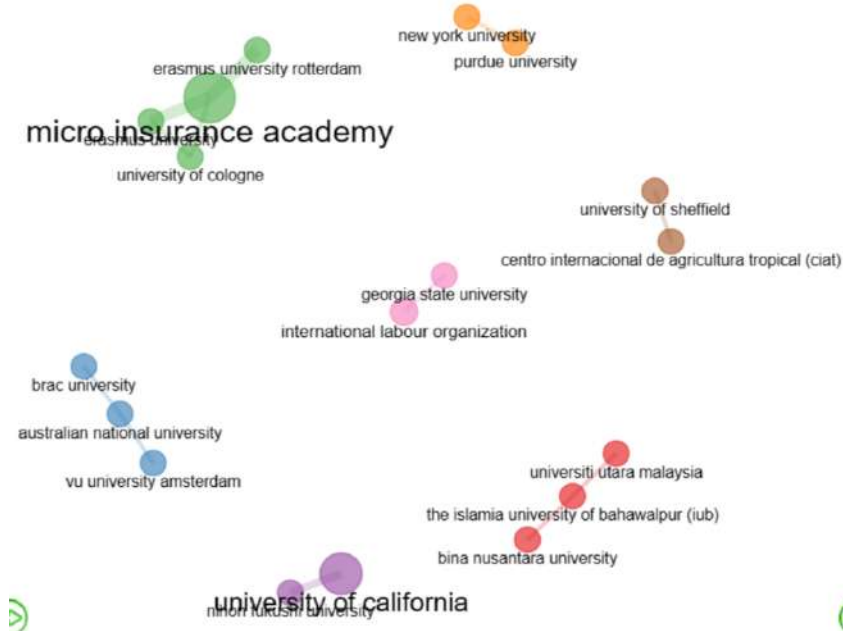
**Figure 17: Authors' collaboration network**



*Source: Authors' own data*

Likewise, organizations such as the Microinsurance Academy and the University of California have forged an extensive network of partnerships with others. For example, the Microinsurance Academy has Erasmus University, the University of Cologne, and Erasmus University Rotterdam in its partnership network. However, several other organizations are shown to have a small network of partnerships. Although these organizations contribute to the field of microinsurance research, they have not collaborated with other organizations to broaden their social networks in the domain.

**Figure 18: Institutions' collaboration network**



Source: Authors' own data

## Trending Topics on Microinsurance

### Word cloud map analysis

Examining the keywords writers employ in their works is one of the analytical tools for researching trending topics and academics focusing on the field (Song et al., 2019). This analysis was done because a publication's keywords can be used to easily pinpoint the subject and focus of that article.

Figure 19: Word cloud



Source: Authors' own data

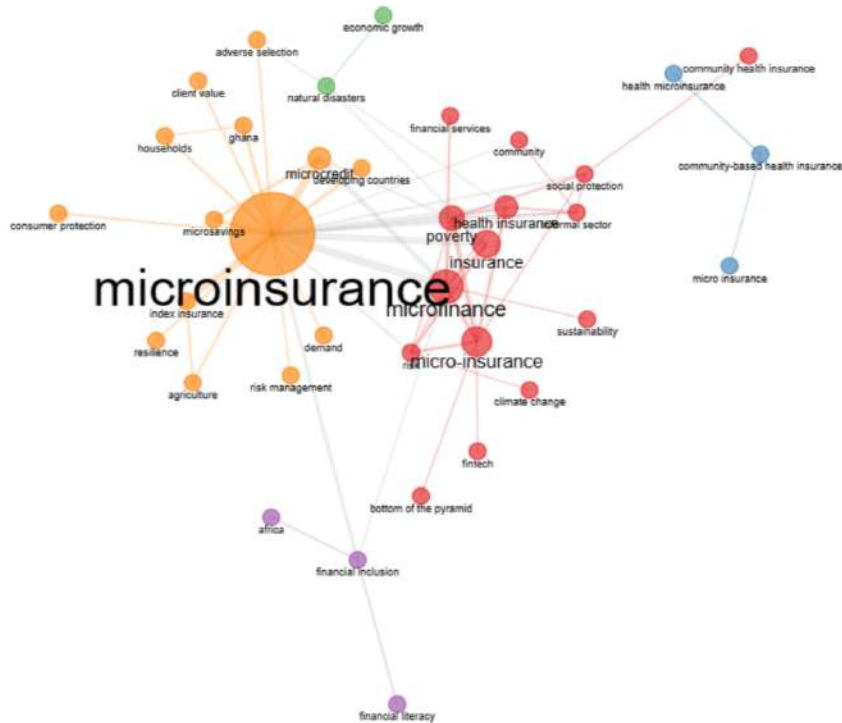
The word cloud in Figure 19 demonstrates the microinsurance researchers' primary areas of study. Cloud tags are a visual representation of how much attention researchers give to particular topics; larger tags indicate higher keyword usage frequency, while smaller tags indicate lower keyword usage frequency. Accordingly, topics such as microfinance, micro-insurance, insurance, health insurance, microcredit, health microinsurance, and index insurance are frequently used keywords in microinsurance publications.

### Keywords Co-occurrence Analysis

Additionally, the study explored keyword co-occurrence networks (KCN) to delve deeper into microinsurance trends. As Esfahani et al. (2019) suggest, KCN analysis delineates the interrelations among keywords within the literature, shedding light on the knowledge structure of the subject. Our findings indicate that KCNs do more than identify common keywords like a word cloud and as shown in Figure 19, they also elucidate the connections between these terms, as depicted in Figure 20. Certain terms have a more pronounced impact on the network. For example, when examining the keywords by color code, it becomes evident that larger keywords, indicated by their width, are linked to other, smaller keywords within the network. For instance, 'microinsurance' is associated with 'microcredit,' 'microsavings,' 'risk

management,' 'agriculture,' 'resilience,' and 'consumer protection.' Similarly, the keyword 'microfinance' is closely connected to 'microinsurance,' as well as to 'poverty,' 'insurance,' and 'sustainability.'

**Figure 20: Keywords Co-occurrence Network**



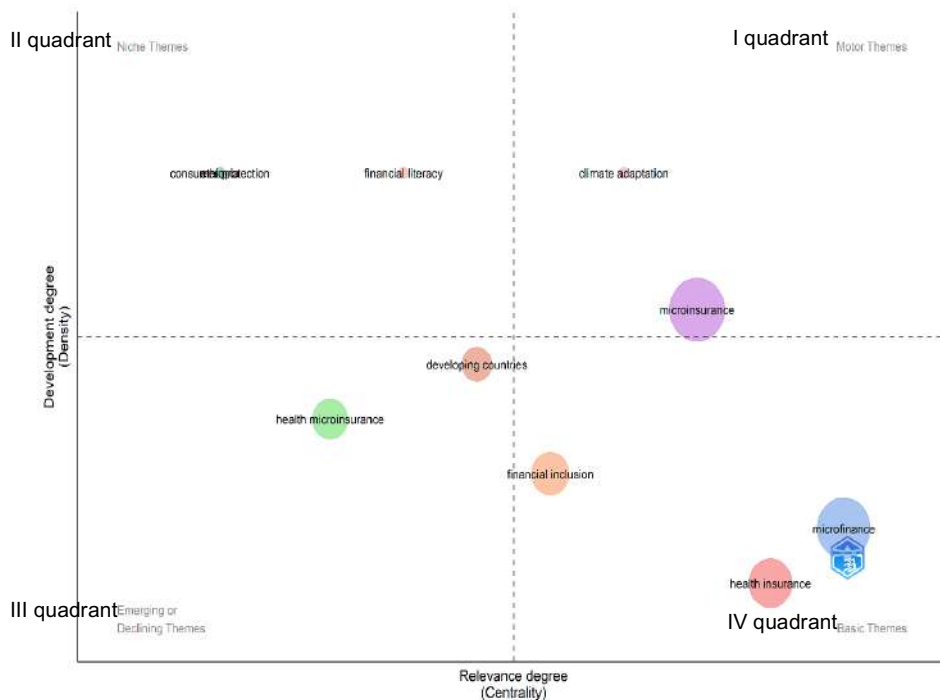
*Source: Authors' own data*

### **The Thematic Map: Co-word Analysis**

The thematic map of microinsurance represents another analytical dimension of this research. The aim of a thematic map is to assess the current state of the field and its potential for sustainable development. This analysis provides insights into the potential growth of subject areas within a domain, valuable information for researchers and stakeholders. Thematic analysis employs clusters of authors' keywords and their interconnections to identify themes. The thematic map is divided into four quadrants (clusters of keywords) based on centrality and density rank values plotted along two axes. The X-axis, denoting centrality, indicates how integral a cluster is to the network, reflecting its significance in the evolution of the entire research field. The Y-axis

measures the internal strength and cohesion of the cluster network, indicating the development level of each theme. Consequently, the first quadrant highlights motor themes (mature and central to structuring a research domain); the second quadrant points to niche themes (advanced yet peripheral to the field); the third quadrant encompasses either emerging or declining themes (nascent or waning in relevance); and the fourth quadrant includes basic and transversal themes (broad topics that span various research areas within the field).

**Figure 21: Thematic Map**



*Source: Authors' own data*

Figure 21 presents the thematic map of the microinsurance industry. Consequently, a theme like 'microinsurance,' positioned between Quadrants 1 and 4, demonstrates strength and a capacity to structure the research area. In other words, 'microinsurance' remains the dominant theme within the field. Themes such as 'microfinance' and 'financial inclusion' from Quadrant 4 form the foundational and critical pillars for the field's growth. Themes from Quadrant 2, while interconnected, still contribute only marginally to the



development of microinsurance. Hence, topics in Quadrant 2, like 'financial literacy' and 'consumer protection,' are potential areas that require stronger linkage with microinsurance. More effort is necessary to evolve these themes and forge more connections to microinsurance. This endeavor is crucial because 'financial literacy,' as an established field, can significantly influence the structure, future, and sustainable development of microinsurance.

## DISCUSSION

Using a bibliometric analysis, this work has sought to present a thorough overview of all scientific works about microinsurance from 1999-2022. The study mainly addressed four objectives: (1) to find the growth and trends of microinsurance research; (2) to find the institutions, countries, journals, and authors who have made outstanding contributions to microinsurance; (3) to visually assess the relationship between sources, countries, keywords, authors, cited sources, and affiliations; and (4) to find the trending topics in the research domain of microinsurance.

Figure 4 shows the trend of published work on microinsurance over the period 1999–2022. Research on microinsurance appears to have begun in 1999, and only one article was included that year. According to the analysis, the annual growth rate of scientific output on microinsurance is 12.81%, and the trend in publications has greatly increased compared to the early years. The number of publications per year was less than 10 in the first 10 years after 1999, and in 2000, no article on microinsurance was found in Scopus. Most publications related to microinsurance were published in 2014 (N = 30), and the number of publications produced up to 2022 generally increased while recording peaks in 2016, 2019, and 2021, in which the leading insurance journal published special issues on microinsurance.

By examining the bibliometric data of the relevant literature, we discover that, out of 567 writers, DM Dror is the most published author, having written 15 scientific papers. In addition, DM Dror was identified as the most influential author with the highest h-index and the total number of citations. With a total of 256 citations and a 10 h-index, *Geneva Papers on Risk and Insurance: Issues and Practice* is recognized as the publication source with the highest production rate and the greatest influence. Regarding the number of publications and the countries of corresponding authors, the USA is the most productive country. The Micro Insurance Academy was recognized as the organization that contributed the most to the microinsurance industry.

Sections 3.4.1, 3.5.1, and 3.6 assess the relationship among sources, countries, keywords, authors, cited sources, and affiliations. Figure 11 illustrates the connections between authors, sources, and keywords. The analysis established that most of the authors have considered microinsurance as their keyword, and most of their research on microinsurance has been published in sources such as Geneva Papers on Risk and Insurance, Enterprise Development and Microfinance, and World Development. As well as 'microfinance', 'health insurance', 'index insurance', 'insurance', 'poverty', 'microcredits', and 'risk' are closely related keywords with microinsurance that are used by different authors. Additionally, David M. Dror and M.R. Carter focused on many of these topics. Figure 14 analyzes the link between keywords, countries, and authors. The analysis revealed that the countries with the most research on microinsurance were the USA, India, the United Kingdom (UK), Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Germany. Furthermore, this analysis confirms that most of the countries have considered microinsurance as their keyword. However, in some articles, the term microinsurance is used differently as 'micro insurance' and 'micro-insurance'. Especially in India, the term micro insurance and most of Malaysia's research have focused on the topic of microfinance. Furthermore, most of the Indian studies were led by David M. Dror. As well, David M. Dror has conducted very few studies for the USA, Switzerland, and Germany and none for the United Kingdom (UK). Figure 15 illustrates the link between the sources, the countries, and the authors. Analyze signifies that India performed well with the significant contributions of DM Dror, P Panda, and A Majumdar and mainly published these studies in *Geneva papers on Risk and Insurance: Issues and Practice*, *Health Policy and Planning*, and *International Social Security Review*. The USA also performed well with the support of seven authors and diversified the sources by publishing their research in different top publishing journals. Switzerland has main authors such as DM Dror, A Majumdar, M Eling, C Churchill, and C Biener, who published mainly in *Geneva Papers on Risk and Insurance: Issues and Practice* and *Journal of Enterprise Development and Microfinance*. Similarly, Germany gets contributions from all the main authors used by Switzerland, in addition to P. Panda, while publishing their research work in five journals. From a publication source perspective, the most published journal, *Geneva Papers on Risk and Insurance: Issues and Practice*, is primarily contributed by authors from India, the USA, and China, as well as from Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands,

the UK, South Africa, and Australia. Publications from other sources are disseminated at random to several top publishing countries.

Word cloud map analysis and co-occurrence analysis are used to express research themes and trending topics in the area of microinsurance. In addition, a thematic map analysis was carried out to inform academics and stakeholders about the potential for future research growth in each field's theme areas. Topics such as microfinance, micro-insurance, insurance, health insurance, microcredit, health microinsurance, and index insurance are frequently used keywords in microinsurance publications. Microinsurance is related to microcredit, microsavings, risk management, agriculture, resilience, and consumer protection. As well, microfinance is closely related to microinsurance, poverty, insurance, and sustainability. Financial literacy and consumer protection are potential topics that need to be more closely associated with microinsurance, and more effort is needed to develop these themes to make more connections to microinsurance. This work must be done because financial literacy, a recognized field, can contribute significantly to the structure, future, and sustainable development of microinsurance.

## **CONCLUSION**

Using a bibliometric analysis, this work has sought to present a thorough overview of all scientific works on the subject of microinsurance over time. For this study, 305 documents in total were taken from the Scopus database. Reporting on significant elements of study in the subject, such as the most influential authors, publications, institutional affiliations, and geographic diversity, this study makes several notable improvements to the body of knowledge. To understand from historical evolution to recent development, we further examined the most significant keywords in this research area, their conceptual structure, and research dynamics.

The first objective was achieved by analyzing the annual scientific production. The second objective was achieved by finding the most published author, publication source, productive country, and organization that contributed to the microinsurance industry. The three-field plot in Biblioshiny is utilized to achieve the third objective. Word cloud map analysis, co-occurrence analysis, and thematic map analysis were carried out to achieve the fourth objective.

Finally, this investigation has produced a number of theoretical ramifications. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to analyze the older

literature from 1999 to 2022 using a bibliometric analysis in order to examine the origins of the microinsurance literature. The survey also looked at the most popular journals, countries, keywords, and authors, as well as future research on the topic of microinsurance.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The primary limitation of this study is that significant works that are indexed in other important databases (like the Web of Science) are not included. Additionally, just the keyword "microinsurance" was used to search for papers; other pertinent keywords were not considered. To simplify the analysis and make it simpler for the authors to interpret, only one keyword was chosen. As a result, an additional study can be done to obtain a more comprehensive perspective by considering other terms that are closely connected, such as inclusive insurance, insurance for the informal sector, index insurance, and microfinance.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

This study integrated existing studies from all the previous literature available in the Scopus database on microinsurance and provided comprehensive knowledge and current research trends in the microinsurance literature to stimulate future research. Accordingly, future research may focus on the role of microinsurance in sustainable development, the impact of financial literacy and consumer protection on microinsurance development. In addition, it may be important to develop broader research collaborations between academics and institutions in order to have a more global impact on microinsurance.

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## **The Portrayal of Women in Contemporary Sinhala Newspaper Reporting**

*By Pumudu Jayasuriya<sup>1</sup>*

The portrayal of women in media has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry, with significant attention given to television, film, and advertising. This study on “The Portrayal of Women in Contemporary Sinhala Newspaper Reporting” examines how women are depicted in Sinhala newspaper reporting, focusing on prominent Sinhala publications such as Lankadeepa, Divaina, Silumina, and Mawbima. The study looked at how women are portrayed in terms of their social roles, traits, and ideals of femininity in the setting of Sinhala newspapers by using a qualitative methodology. The study's findings illustrated that women are depicted through language in three ways: the use of derogatory terms, such as 'dooshanaya', 'kelesima', and 'ganika', when reporting incidents involving women; a negative emphasis on women's presence in news reporting, resulting in gender bias; and an exaggeration of women's physical appearance in news reporting, leading to the objectification of women and a reduction of their value to superficial characteristics, disregarding their expertise, skills, and contributions. Suggestions for enhancing the portrayal of women in Sinhala newspaper reporting include advocating for the adoption of gender-sensitive guidelines and language and fostering diverse gender perspectives within newsrooms to foster inclusivity and equity in news dissemination.

**KEYWORDS:** Gender, Media, Sinhala Newspapers, Stereotypes, Media Ethics, Gender Bias

### **INTRODUCTION**

Press media refers to the news industry within the mass media that disseminates news to the general public through various channels such as print media (newspapers), broadcast news (television and radio), and other available forms of media. In Sri Lanka, there are media operators, both state-owned and privately-owned, that offer different types of television, radio, and newspaper services in Sinhala, Tamil, and English. The media plays a significant role in society by reporting on current events and situations, raising awareness among citizens about various issues, reflecting and perpetuating the prevailing culture and societal norms, and serving as a key communicator with the public. Hence, the media can significantly influence the promotion of gender equality, encompassing both the workplace environment and the representation of men and women. This involves ensuring gender portrayal, utilizing neutral and non-gender specific information, and actively contributing to a more equitable society (Kangas, et al., 2015). However, the representation of women in media raises significant concerns and issues that require identification and addressing. Within the media landscape,

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the number of gender imbalances and gaps that exist needs to be acknowledged and remedied.

Exploring the representation of women in Sinhala newspapers is a pertinent and significant area of research. This is because the media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes regarding gender roles and relationships (Abeywardana, 2017). According to (Abeywardana, 2017) the way women are depicted in the Sinhala media carries substantial influence on their societal standing and can impact the opportunities and roles available to them. Moreover, the portrayal of women in Sinhala newspapers holds ethical implications and is the media's responsibility to report on issues in a fair and accurate manner, while avoiding the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and reinforcing unequal power dynamics.

Through a thematic analysis of women's portrayal in Sinhala newspapers, this study aimed to uncover the patterns and implications of media representation. By examining the relationship between media representation and broader concerns of gender equality and media ethics, valuable insights can be gained. The research findings contributed to the ongoing efforts to foster responsible and equitable media reporting practices.

The portrayal of women in the media can have ethical implications (Abeywardana, 2017) . Media representations that reinforce gender stereotypes, objectify women, or diminish their worth can perpetuate inequality and contribute to the marginalization of women. Ethical concerns arise when media content reinforces harmful narratives that undermine women's agency, perpetuate gender biases, or contribute to the overall discrimination and oppression of women (Abeywardana, 2017). Media professionals have an ethical responsibility to challenge and question such portrayals and strive for more equitable and inclusive representations. Media ethics and the portrayal of women are closely linked, as ethical considerations guide how women are represented in media, and the portrayal of women in media can have ethical implications in terms of fairness, accuracy, and promoting gender equality and social justice.

The significance of this study lies in its ability to shed light on the portrayal of women in contemporary Sinhala newspaper reporting. By identifying and analyzing specific patterns in language use, such as the employment of derogatory terms, negative emphasis on women's presence, and exaggeration of physical appearance, the study provides valuable insights into the potential biases and objectification prevalent in media representations of women.

The problem statement revolved around how women are portrayed in current Sinhala newspaper reporting. The main question to be addressed was "How are women portrayed in contemporary Sinhala newspaper reporting?"

The research objectives of the study were as follows:

- To examine how women are represented in Sinhala newspapers.
- To explore the relationship between media ethics and portrayal of women in Sinhala newspaper reporting.
- To suggest recommendations for improving the portrayal of women in Sinhala newspaper reporting.



The research questions of the study were as follows:

- How are women represented in Sinhala newspapers?
- What are the dominant themes and messages about women that emerge from Sinhala newspaper reporting?
- To what extent do Sinhala newspapers adhere to media ethical guidelines and norms when reporting about.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The theories used in the study are social responsibility theory, feminist theory, agenda setting theory, social cognitive theory, cultivation theory, and critical race theory.

### **Social responsibility theory**

Social responsibility theory is defined as an ethical theory in which individuals are accountable for fulfilling their civic duty and the actions taken by an individual should benefit the entire society (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). This theory is built on a system of ethics where actions and decisions must be ethically validated before proceeding or starting anything. If the actions and decisions harm society, then that is considered socially irresponsible (Pachamama Alliance, 2022). Therefore, media professionals should act in a manner that benefits society, not just the individual or the media organization he or she is representing.

### **Feminist theory**

Feminist theory examines the ways in which gender inequalities are perpetuated through social, cultural, and economic structures. Feminist theory recognizes that gender is a socially constructed category that intersects with other forms of identity, such as race, class, sexuality, and ability. Feminist theory has evolved over time, with different waves of feminism emphasizing different aspects of gender-based inequality. First-wave feminism, which emerged in the 19th and early 20th centuries, focused on securing women's legal rights, such as the right to vote. Second-wave feminism, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, focused on issues such as reproductive rights, workplace discrimination, and the portrayal of women in media and popular culture. Third-wave feminism, which emerged in the 1990s, expanded the movement's focus to include issues such as intersectionality, globalization, and the diversity of women's experiences (Crossman, 2020).

### **Agenda setting theory**

Agenda setting theory suggests that media outlets have the power to shape public opinion by selecting which issues to cover and how to cover them. "Accessibility" is the cognitive process in which agenda setting occurs. Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, two college professors who conducted a study of North Carolina voters during the 1968 U.S. presidential election and published their findings in 1972, discovered that what individuals perceived to be the most crucial concerns were also those that received the most negative media coverage. Public agenda setting, media agenda setting, and policy agenda setting are the three types of agenda setting theories (McCombs, 2015).

### **Social cognitive theory**

Social cognitive theory developed by Albert Bandura in 1986 emphasizes the role of social learning in shaping attitudes and behavior. People are seen as active agents who are both influenced and are influenced by their environment. The act of learning desirable and

undesirable behaviors through observing others and then replicating those behaviors in order to maximize rewards is known as observational learning and is a key element of the theory (Vinney, 2019).

### **Cultivation theory**

Cultivation theory suggests that long-term exposure to media messages can shape individuals' perceptions of reality. George Gerbner introduced this theory in the 1960s. This theory was mainly associated with television, but later it was applied to other media as well (Vinney, 2019).

### **Critical race theory**

Critical race theory examines the ways in which race intersects with other forms of oppression, including gender. According to the scholar, this is a theoretical framework and academic discipline emerged in the United States in the 1970s aimed to examine how race and racism intersect with other forms of social oppression and privilege, such as gender, class, and sexuality (Bodenheimer, 2021).

There are several key concepts related to the portrayal of women in media, such as 'Representation', 'Stereotyping', 'Objectification' and 'Intersectionality'.

### **Representation**

According to Stuart Hall, the process by which members of a culture use language to produce meaning is what is meant by representation. Conceptual maps and language are the two systems of representation identified by Hall (Stilesguilsborough, 2021).

### **Stereotyping**

Research has shown that women are often portrayed in stereotypical ways, such as being overly sexualized, submissive, or objectified. Stereotyping refers to the process of making assumptions or generalizations about a group of people based on their characteristics or traits. In the media, women are often stereotyped based on their gender, leading to limited and narrow depictions that do not accurately reflect the diversity and complexity of women's experiences (GCSE Media Studies Revision - BBC Bitesize, n.d.)

### **Objectification**

Objectification refers to the process of reducing a person to an object or commodity, often for the purpose of sexual gratification. Women in the media are frequently objectified, treated as mere physical objects to be looked at and evaluated based on their appearance (Barber, 2011).

### **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality recognizes that individuals have multiple identities and experiences that interact and intersect with one another, including gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and socio-economic status. Research on the portrayal of women in media has increasingly recognized the importance of intersectionality, showing that women from marginalized groups may face unique challenges and experiences in media representation (Sampurna, 2022).

### Previous research findings

Several past research studies have focused on the representation of women in television advertisements and the film industry in Sri Lanka, and it was identified that there is a lack of local research on this topic.

“A Critical Analysis of Gender Stereotypes; A Case Study with Special Reference to Sri Lankan Sinhala Films in the Year 2015” by Rathnayake (2017) emphasized how gender stereotypes are portrayed in the film and media, which does affect how we view gender roles. The perception of what a man and a woman are and how they need to act toward one another can be strengthened by some gender-specific characteristics. Through male performers and female actresses, films understand the reflection of social connections and gender roles. A study found certain instances of gender prejudice in male and female characters in movies. In all the movies, there was discrimination, particularly verbally and nonverbally. Male characters were highlighted in movies as “independent, non-emotional, aggressive, rough and tough, competitive, experienced, strong and active characters” (Rathnayake, 2017, p. 73). Accordingly, women are frequently represented as “dependent, emotional, humble, shy and sympathetic, irrational, and unconfident characters” (p. 73-74) Through their positions in movies, male and female characters revealed that there was some gender discrimination.

Research on the Sinhala film industry by Dharmawimala (2020) titled “Angel or Monster: Representation of Women in Sri Lankan Period Films, argues that “Sri Lankan period films contain a dichotomous motif of female identity through the construction of related images that may differ from the dominant Eurocentric discourse on the angel/monster concept” (Dharmawimala, 2020, p. 46). Thavishi analyses two Sri Lankan period Films; Vijaya-Kuweni which was released in 2012 and Paththini which was released in 2016. The reconstruction of Kuveni's character aims to highlight her feminine identity as compensation for her original masculine identity. Her appeal and acceptability in the film rely on her feminine attributes, which evoke sympathy for the injustices she faces. This portrayal underscores the need to present female characters as embodying societal ideals of femininity to gain positive recognition. The second is the portrayal of two distinct female characters—Kannagi and Madhavi—as diametrically opposed ones in Paththini (2016). They allow for the representation of both socially acceptable and unacceptable female characteristics.

Berberick (2010) explores how the media's objectification of women continues unabated and impacts society as a whole and argues that the image of an “ideal woman” as presented by media is harmful (Stephanie Nicholl Berberick, 2010).

“Media's Portrayal of Women and its Impact on Body Image and Self-Esteem” by Bareis (2021) shows findings related to the negative impacts of the media's representation of women on their self-esteem and body image. According to (Bareis, 2021) this study examines the development of magazine publishing in the United States over time. The success of Dove's Real Beauty Campaign is then discussed, as well as how they were a crucial forerunner in this trend. According to this study, media will remain integrated into every aspect of consumers' lives. A difference can be observed for the next generation of women if more businesses and brands push to include diversity in their content. The same goes for consumers, who can use resources to have a more positive relationship with the digital world and educate themselves on media literacy.

Hazir et al., (2016) have researched the representation of men and women in Pakistani media. They have tried to examine gender stereotypes and sexism in Pakistani media and attempted to highlight whether print media reproduces or challenges gender stereotypes and sexism. The findings show that women are primarily portrayed in traditional gender roles in Pakistani

print media. The conventional views of women as being less interested in politics, becoming mothers, and being more preoccupied with physical appearance may cause some women to construct a false sense of self in an effort to conform to male standards of femininity. To maintain male hegemony over both the public and private spheres, patriarchal societal structures use print media as an instrument (Hazir Ullah, 2016).

“Portrayal Of Women in Print Media: A Nepalese Context” by (Gurung, 2016) where a national daily newspaper Kantipur and the Nepali women's magazine Nari were examined to identify women's issues and portrayal of women in print media. Advertising has primarily shown women in a passive role while emphasizing males in more assertive and decisive ones. The aesthetic value of female bodies has been used to judge them. Gender sensitization is essential to changing the process and practices of positive portrayals of women in media through advertising, news, interviews, and articles. Therefore, change is required not only inside media organizations but also among ordinary readers since they may influence how such media function, be exploratory, and present the issues in a more justifiable way to advance gender equality in society.

The study on ‘Women Representation in The Media: Gender Bias and Status Implications’ by (Nguye, 2020) studied the persistent bias and stereotyping of women in the media, particularly when compared to their male counterparts. The author has used three magazines; Entrepreneur, Fast Company, Inc. to analyze gender stereotypes. The findings show that women's representations are less confident and less future-focused, and specifically that they are given noticeably lower word counts than men. The paper then goes on to analyze the significance of its findings for how women are perceived in society, making some generalizations about how women might combat gender bias that future research can address.

Abeywardena (2017) shares that the media in Sri Lanka keeps diverging from accepted norms of ethical journalism which include offensive imagery, deceptive images, the use of racial slurs against ethnic groups, factual inaccuracies, and the denial of the right of response in media reporting. As a result, the portrayal of women in Sri Lankan media has frequently violated moral standards and contributed to stereotypical beliefs, which have a direct impact on how society views women. There are different ways objectification happens; some newspapers portray women as sex objects where sexist references and pictures are used. These references used by media professionals are irrelevant to the context of the article; Terms such as ‘beautiful’, ‘pretty’ etc. are reductionist terms used in the press. In an incident where it shows victims of sexual abuse, reductionist terms are used, and different terms are used that are irrelevant to the context of the article; Sinhala press media sensationalize and romanticize news when reporting on acts of violence against women such as sexual abuse (Abeywardana, 2017).

## **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative methodology was used for this study, with a focus on the analysis of newspaper extracts from renowned Sinhala press media publications; Mawbima, Silumina, Lankadeepa, and Divaina. The textual material from these newspapers provided significant evidence for this study of how women are portrayed and the related gender issues. Qualitative data in this study refers to the textual content extracted from these newspapers that provides evidence for examining the portrayal of women and related gender issues. The extracts from these newspapers were chosen from the Ethics Eye Facebook page, an online platform that monitors and flags violations of media ethics in the Sinhala press (Verité Research). By utilizing a qualitative approach, this study aimed to delve deeper into the nuances of media

representation and explore the underlying meanings and themes surrounding the depiction of women in Sinhala newspapers. It uncovered patterns, trends, and potential biases that emerged from the analysis of the selected newspaper extracts.

The data collection process used a random sampling method to ensure a representative sample for the study. The population considered for this research comprised all Sinhala newspapers printed and circulated throughout the country. From this population, a sample of newspaper extracts was selected for analysis, specifically focusing on articles from Lankadeepa, Divaina, Silumina, and Mawbima newspapers. The selection of these four Sinhala newspapers was based on their wide circulation and substantial readership, making them pertinent sources for examining the portrayal of women in the media. This sampling approach enabled the research to capture a diverse range of content and perspectives from the selected newspapers, providing a comprehensive understanding of how women are represented in the Sinhala media. The random sampling method ensured that the articles that were analyzed were representative of the broader population of Sinhala newspaper content, thereby enhancing the validity and generalizability of the findings. By utilizing this random sampling technique, the study aimed to obtain a fair and unbiased representation of the portrayal of women in Sinhala newspapers.

This research incorporated the collection of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered through the examination of newspapers, which included extracts of Sinhala newspapers published during a three-month period from September 2020 to November 2020. This involved the systematic reading and analysis of selected newspaper articles as the primary source of information. In addition to primary data, secondary data was obtained from various sources such as books, journals, articles, and other relevant publications. These resources provided valuable foundation for understanding existing knowledge and theories related to the research topic.

By combining primary and secondary data sources and applying thematic analysis, this research aimed to provide a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the representation of women in the Sinhala media. The integration of different data collection methods and thematic analysis techniques enhanced the robustness and validity of the findings, contributing to a deeper understanding of the research topic.

This study was completed by avoiding any unethical practices and protecting the human participants involved in the study. The study focused on minimizing the risk of harm, protecting anonymity and confidentiality, and avoiding deceptive practices. Any personal or identifiable information was handled with the utmost care to protect the privacy rights of individuals.

## **DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Presentation of data**

The research followed the manual coding method by analyzing the data in the newspapers. To analyze the collected data, a thematic analysis method was employed. Initially, the data was read to familiarize the entire dataset by reading it in its entirety without engaging in any coding activities. Subsequently, during the next stage, the data was reread to identify key elements and generate initial codes that capture these elements. These initial codes were reviewed and organized to establish overarching themes that encompassed multiple related codes. To ensure consistency, these themes went through a final review and revision, taking into consideration the codes generated from the data. By following this step-by-step process,

a comprehensive and well-structured thematic analysis was conducted. By employing a thematic analysis approach, the study aimed to uncover underlying meanings, implicit messages, and common trends related to the portrayal of women in Sinhala newspapers.

The analysis of the data resulted in the identification of three themes that depicted how women are portrayed through language:

1. Utilization of derogatory terms in news reporting.
2. Negative emphasis on the presence of women in news reporting.
3. Exaggeration of women's physical appearance in news reporting.

### **Data findings and analysis**

Each theme within the analysis incorporated data, including the corresponding code number/s, conclusions, and evidence derived from the data collection process. Due to limitations on word count, the full articles could not be included within the evidence section; therefore, extracts were chosen from the infographics published on the Ethics Eye Facebook page, which is an online platform, and the article headings will be presented as part of the analysis.

#### **Theme 1: Utilization of derogatory terms in news reporting**

Words such as 'dooshanaya' or in English, 'pollution' creates negative feelings about a sexual crime where a woman is involved and indicates something 'impure' has happened and the woman's image is highlighted, which leads to distress and pain in the victim. Perera (2020) highlights the various words that are reported in several languages that are anti-feminist. In his article, he describes how a lecturer from Jaffna University discussed the term 'dooshanaya' in Tamil, saying that it is inappropriate to refer to a sex crime with words like 'katapalittal' ('dooshanaya' in Sinhala) which has a patriarchal connotation and means 'destroying virginity'. The term 'ismathdari' 'issathlutna' used in Pakistan and denotes a loss of respect and dignity. According to Mehwish Hussain of a Pakistani media site, they have stopped using words that imply a woman's 'loss of virginity' and 'polluted'. In Perera (2020)'s article, Author, Upul Shantha Sannasgala, points out that certain words in the Sinhala language contain emotional expressions rather than technical meanings, stating that the word 'dooshanaya' is one such example.

During the analysis process, several references were found pertaining to the theme 'Utilization of derogatory terms in news reporting' (Table 1). A majority of the newspaper articles examined contained terms such as 'dooshanaya' and 'kelesima' in both the headline and the body of the text. The word 'ganika' is used in media reports in Sinhala with negative social and derogatory connotations. . In Sinhala language reporting, it is desirable to use the phrase 'lingika shramika' to promote a more impartial and courteous attitude. Similar news reporting frequently uses the term 'sex worker' rather than 'prostitute' in English-language newspapers, maintaining a more suitable and less stigmatizing tone.

**Table 1: Examples of Theme 1 – Utilization of derogatory terms in news reporting**

Code number/s	Conclusion	Evidence
Mawbima/2020-09-01/01 Mawbima/2020-09-01/02 Mawbima/2020-09-02/04 Mawbima/2020-09-02/05 Divaina/2020-10-07/16	Each article highlight the case of a young girl or a woman who experienced abuse perpetrated by a man. The media often employ terms like "dooshanya" (polluted) and "kelesima" (defilement) when reporting on sexual crime or abuse incidents. These terms carry connotations that portray the victim as dirty and defiled, which can lead to marginalization and social disdain. In such instances, it would be more appropriate for the media to use terms such as "Lingika aparadaya" (sex crime) or, in the case of a minor, "Lingika apayojanaya" (sexual abuse).	"Baalawayaskaara dhariya dhooshanaya kala pudgalaya saphthambar 04 dhakwaa remand."  (The person who sexually assaulted the minor girl was remanded until September 04) "Rathri geta pana niwasei thaniwa siti 80 hawiridhi katha kelesala"  (The 80-year-old who was alone in the house at night was sexually assaulted) "Dhariyak rawata paasal nila andumin genagos kelasala" (A girl was tricked and taken while wearing a school uniform and sexually assaulted)
Lankadeepa/2020-09-16/10 Dinamina/2020-09-21/11 Divaina/2020-11-19/20	The continued usage of certain terms that have been entrenched in society raises the question of their appropriateness, particularly due to the stigmatizing and marginalizing attitudes attached to them. One such example is the term "Ganika" (Sex worker). The utilization of the term "Ganika" in Sinhala language media	"Ganikawak asurukara salli nogewwama hadunumpatha balen aran. Katha remand" (When he was in the company of a sex worker and did not pay, the identity card was taken by force and the woman was remanded) "Sisunta mathdrawya ganikawan alewi kala saka 13k aththadanguwata"
Mawbima/2020-09-09/08 Mawbima/2020-09-22/12 Divaina/2020-10-02/13	An inappropriate trend in various media is the use of offensive and demeaning language when depicting women can be observed. This includes the use of demeaning and disrespectful language that objectifies and marginalizes women and maintaining harmful stereotypes.  The term "Kudu Katha" mentioned in one of the news reports, mentions a	"Biriya niwasei nathi atharei dhariyan thidenukata katha wadak kalai hamudha samajikaya aththadanguwata" (while the wife was not at home, a member of the armed forces was arrested for doing dirty work to three girls) "Tile chamindage kudu katha 25da thek ranndhawagena prahsna karanna awasara" (Tile Chaminda' is allowed to be detained and interrogated

derogatory term which carry stigmatizing and marginalizing meanings, particularly in relation to individuals with drug addiction. The news writer uses the term "sakakariya" in the body, while the heading refers to the suspect as "kudu katha," which conveys different meanings. Ethnicity of the women is specifically stated as Muslim in the body of the news article titled "Two women caught with drugs" in the Island newspaper. The contrasting interpretations between the Sinhala phrase and its English translation highlight the power of language in evoking both negative and positive connotations.

Source: Developed by Author

## Theme 2: Negative emphasis on the presence of women in news reporting

In certain media news reports, a pattern can be observed where only women are prominently highlighted even when both men and women have committed the same crime and faced legal consequences. This disproportionate emphasis on a crime committed by a woman shows the gender bias in the reporting. Such selective highlighting of offenses committed by women contributes to the marginalization of women based on their gender. The analysis revealed several findings related to the theme of "Negative emphasis on the presence of women" as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Examples of Theme 2 – Negative emphasis on the presence of women in news reporting**

Code number/s	Conclusion	Evidence
Dinamina/2020-09-02/03 Mawbima/2020-09-04/06 Dinamina/2020-09-04/07 Dinamina/2020-10-05/15 Lankadeepa/2020-10-20/17 Mawbima/2020-10-20/18 Divaina/2020-10-26/19	News reports tend to show how women's presence in a crime has been highlighted, when both men and women have faced the legal consequences. Women are portrayed negatively and highlighted in instances where mentioning the gender is irrelevant. This leads to unfair stereotypes, biases,	Polgedi thula heroine gena giya kathun 3k athulu pudgalayoe 5k dhale"  (Five people, including three women, who were carrying heroin in coconuts, were caught)



and discrimination. Such portrayal can perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes, undermine women's achievements, and reinforce societal prejudices. This negative highlighting of women in irrelevant contexts not only distorts the public perception of women but also perpetuates gender inequality and reinforces societal biases.	<p>“Sambahana madyasthanayak watalai, muslim kathakuth eh athara” (A Muslim woman among those in a massage parlor that was raided)</p> <p>“Mathkudu jawaram kala kaanthaawak athulu hayak polis dhalei” (Six people, including a woman, are in the police net for drug trafficking)</p>
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Source: Developed by Author

### Theme 3: Exaggeration of women's physical appearance in news reporting

In news articles or media coverage, women may be depicted in a sensationalized manner that focuses on their appearance, personal lives or other irrelevant aspects rather than their professional accomplishments or the topic being discussed. This can result in objectifying women and reducing their value to superficial characteristics, disregarding their expertise, skills and contributions. It appears that the intention behind highlighting these details may be to attract readers' attention, rather than addressing the underlying social issues and the actual dangers faced by women. As a result, the news fails to adequately address the significant societal problem that exists. Some examples that relate to this theme are given below in Table 3.

**Table 3: Examples of Theme 3 – Exaggeration of women's physical appearance in news reporting**

Code number/s	Conclusion	Evidence
Divaina/2020-09-16/09	The paper article draws attention to the negative use of language, specifically pointing out the term "buurugassala" which does not convey a respectful tone. In this media report, there is a tendency to place more emphasis on the physical appearance of woman. The term "soorupi" (beautiful) is used to describe women in the content, even when it is not directly relevant to the news being published. This focus on women's physical characteristics, and the exaggeration of such features	“Jathyanthara pasale ingrisi teacher ge gei asse buruu gassala” (Gambling in the house of an English teacher at an international school)

	can detract from the actual content of the news.	
Lankadeepa/2020-10-04/14	In a news report published by Lankadeepa newspaper about a murder, it was evident from the content that there were references made to the physical appearance of the woman who was killed. Such a focus on women's physical characteristics, including exaggeration of these features, can divert attention from the substantive content of the news.	“Aniyam Pemwathiya mara pulussa maoyata damu penwatha”  (The boyfriend who killed his mistress, burned and threw her to the Ma Oya)

Source: Developed by Author

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the portrayal of women in contemporary Sinhala newspaper reporting. A qualitative research approach was followed in order to analyze the data. Information from newspaper extracts and secondary literature, which are qualitative data collection methods, was adopted to gather the data for the study. This study uncovered a depiction of women in a negative light, particularly in cases where media institutions fail to adhere to media ethics. Three themes were derived through the coding, which was done manually, and the data gathered was divided into those three themes.

The findings of this study have revealed distinct patterns in the portrayal of women in contemporary Sinhala newspaper reporting. The analysis of language use in news articles demonstrated three primary ways in which women are depicted, which were the three themes derived: using derogatory terms, emphasizing the presence of women negatively, and exaggerating their physical appearance.

### Theme 1: Utilization of derogatory terms in news reporting

The media use terms like "dooshanya" (polluted) and "kelesima" (defilement), as shown below, when reporting on sexual crime or abuse incidents in newspapers. These words imply that the victim is impure and tarnished, contributing to their marginalization and societal disapproval. The Media Gender Charter(2020) developed by (Sekaram & Abdela, 2020) emphasizes that there is a need to use non-sexist and derogatory language that discriminates against, patronizes, trivializes or stigmatizes women.

*“Baalawayaskaara dhariya dhooshanaya kala pudgalaya saphthambar 04 dhakwaa remand.”*  
(The person who sexually assaulted the minor girl was remanded until September 4)

The media use the term "Ganika" in Sinhala language media reporting.

*“Ganikawak asurukara salli nogewwama hadunumpatha balen aran. Katha remand”*  
(When he failed to pay the sex worker he was with, the woman was placed under arrest and her identity card was removed by force.)

The media use the term "Kudu Katha" with stigmatizing and marginalizing implications, especially when referring to individuals struggling with drug addiction.

*"Tile chamindage kudu katha 25da thek ranndhawagena prahsna karanna awasara"* (Tile Chaminda' is allowed to be detained and interrogated until the 25th in connection with the use of drugs.)

### **Theme 2: Negative emphasis on the presence of women in news reporting**

The media highlights the presence of women even when both men and women have committed the same crime and faced legal repercussions. It is evident that how women are portrayed in newspaper reporting affects and changes our view of women's place in society, as mentioned by (Rathnayake, 2017).

*"Mathkudu jawaram kala kaanthaawak athulu hayak polis dhalei"*  
(Six people, including a woman, are in the police net for drug trafficking.)

### **Theme 3: Exaggeration of women's physical appearance in news reporting**

The media exaggerates and sensationalizes the women, with an emphasis on their looks, personal lives, or other unimportant details. It states that "details of an individual's race, color, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story" and "press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, color, gender, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability" when reporting about discrimination and marginalization. The below mentioned quote was related to an article on a murder of a woman who was killed, and physical attributes were mentioned in the content (Verité Research, 2020, p. 4).

*"Aniyam Pemwathiya mara pulussa maoyata damu penwatha."*  
(The boyfriend who killed his mistress burned and threw her to Ma Oya.)

While the methodology effectively captured language patterns, a more extensive qualitative analysis could provide deeper insights into the context and intentions behind specific language choices. Future research might benefit from a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches for a more comprehensive understanding. Building on the current findings, future research could explore the impact of media portrayals on public perceptions and attitudes towards gender roles in Sinhala-speaking communities.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings from the analysis, the following recommendations are made to reduce the discrimination and negativity faced by women in media portrayal:

Encourage the presence of various gender perspectives in newsrooms by aggressively seeking out and retaining female journalists. This can support bringing in diverse viewpoints and ensuring that women are fairly represented in news coverage. This commitment to diversity enhances the depth and accuracy of news reporting, reflecting a broader range of perspectives and ensuring a more representative portrayal of society.

Develop gender-sensitive guidelines. Establish clear policies or rules of behavior outlining the fundamentals of gender-sensitive reporting. The use of polite language, avoiding stereotypes, and encouraging positive stories about women should all be covered by these rules.

Implement regular sensitivity training for journalists through media organizations to develop gender-sensitive writing styles. These training sessions can offer insights into nuanced language choices, eliminate unconscious biases, and enhance awareness of gender-related issues.

Increase coverage of women's issues by dedicating specific segments or features to highlight diverse aspects of women's experiences. Give women's issues, such as gender equality, women's rights, and women's accomplishments, greater time and space to be discussed. Give women's experiences and voices a platform to be heard.

Policy makers can advocate for the inclusion of guidelines related to gender-sensitive reporting in media regulations. By actively supporting and promoting these guidelines, policymakers contribute to the establishment of a framework that encourages fair and inclusive representation of gender in the media. This advocacy can lead to the development of standardized practices across the industry, fostering an environment where media outlets are held accountable for promoting gender equality and avoiding stereotypes. Additionally, policymakers can collaborate with relevant stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation and monitoring of these guidelines, thereby promoting a more equitable and responsible media landscape.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Few challenges/limitations were faced when conducting the research. The newspapers were chosen based on their wide circulation and significant readership; the findings may not be representative of all Sinhala newspapers in Sri Lanka. The limited sample size restricted the generalizability of the results to a broader context and focused on a specific timeframe, which limited the generalizability of the findings to other periods.

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## **Cross-Cultural Adaptation of the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire to Sinhalese for Implementation among Nursing Students in Sri Lanka**

By GDDDB Weerasinghe, PNM Patabendige, SVR Thuduwage, PM Arumapperumachchi, CKW Gamage<sup>1</sup> & K Hettigoda

The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) is a valuable tool for assessing empathy in nursing students. This study aimed to translate the 16-item TEQ into Sinhalese and cross-culturally adapt it to Sri Lanka. The process of cross-cultural adaptation consisted of five distinct stages: (I) initial translation, (II) synthesis of the translation, (III) back translation, (IV) Expert Committee Delphi review, and (V) testing of the pre-final version after obtaining permission from its developer. The content and consensual validity of the translated version were assessed by a two-round Delphi procedure involving a panel of five experts. Evaluation metrics included Content Validity Index (CVI) parameters such as I-CVI, Universal Agreement (S-CVI/UA), and Average CVI (S-CVI/Ave). Administered to 197 nursing undergraduates at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University in Sri Lanka, the finalized Sinhalese TEQ demonstrated exceptional content validity (I-CVI = 1.0 for each item) and the highest overall content validity indices (S-CVI/UA = 1.0; S-CVI/Ave = 1.0). The high internal consistency, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.732, underscores the Sinhalese TEQ's reliability. In conclusion, this cross-culturally adapted assessment tool proves valid and reliable for evaluating empathy levels among nursing students in Sri Lanka.

**KEYWORDS:** Empathy, Toronto Empathy Questionnaire, Nursing Students, Sri Lanka

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **The significance of effective communication in healthcare**

The significance of effective communication skills has been emphasized as a key attribute for healthcare professionals. To facilitate effective communication, the clinician needs to possess a sense of assurance in their comprehension and documentation of the patient's needs, thus enabling the provision of individualised treatment (Moudatsou et al., 2020).

#### **Communication in nursing**

Communication is considered an essential component within the nursing profession, including several areas such as prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, health education, and promotion. Moreover, it is acknowledged that the quality of communication between nurses and patients plays a crucial role in improving the overall quality of patient care (DeWolf Bosek et al., 2013) and the acquisition of empathetic abilities is crucial in this context (Kahrman et al., 2016). During the latter half of the 19th century, Florence Nightingale, renowned as the pioneer of modern nursing, expressed her views on the significance of the interpersonal exchange that occurs between the nurse and the patient (Sharma and Gupta, 2023).

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## **Understanding Empathy**

Empathy is an essential component of every caring interaction and has special significance in the provision of high-quality nursing care (Yu and Kirk, 2008). Therefore, it is considered essential for therapeutic communication that serves to enhance the connection between caregivers and their patients (Moudatsou et al., 2020). Defined as the ability to share and understand the emotional experiences of others (Lemogne, 2015), Empathy is a crucial component of therapeutic communication. Extensive evidence supports the notion that empathy plays a crucial role in promoting improved health outcomes (Moudatsou et al., 2020) as well as comprehending the requirements, needs, feelings, and emotions of patients.

## **Cultivating empathy in healthcare professionals**

The cultivation of empathy plays a significant role in the preservation of therapeutic alliances between healthcare professionals, namely nurses, and their patients (Wu, 2021). When nurses fail to attend adequately to both direct and indirect emotional signals from patients, it results in missed opportunities to demonstrate empathy. The patient's physical and psychological well-being is greatly impacted (Yu and Kirk, 2008). Hence, the nurse needs to preserve therapeutic alliances with the patient. The presence of empathy in a nurse facilitates the establishment and maintenance of a therapeutic alliance with the patient, hence contributing to the patient's holistic healing, including physical and psychological aspects. Enhancing empathy among nursing students may have substantial effects on their clinical practicum. Empathy serves as a mechanism for efficient communication and contributes to enhanced patient care via the comprehension of patients' ideas and emotions (Hajibabaei et al., 2018).

## **Theoretical frameworks of empathy in nursing**

Within the field of nursing, there is a multitude of hypotheses that have been put forth about the concept of empathy. Peplau underscores the need to cultivate empathetic connections with patients at all stages of nurse-patient communication (Hagerty et al., 2017). Parola et al. (2020) believe that Travelbee's theory of human-to-human connections suggests that a nurse who has empathetic qualities is capable of understanding the underlying cause of an individual's suffering and predicting the subsequent behavioural responses (Parola et al., 2020). Paterson and Zderad emphasised the participatory and sympathetic characteristics inherent in the nurse-patient interaction (McCamant, 2006). These theories have been developed by theorists to provide a theoretical understanding of the nature, relevance, necessity, and constituent parts of interpersonal relationships, namely those between individuals or between nurses and patients. These explanations are grounded in the theorists' professional expertise and viewpoint. Pehrson et al. created a model of empathetic communication with patients based on the experiences of nurses working in cancer wards. The model's strategies encompassed the identification or elicitation of empathic opportunities in patients, the pursuit of a mutual comprehension of the patient's emotions or experiences, the provision of empathic responses to said emotions or experiences, the facilitation of coping mechanisms, and the establishment of social support networks (Pehrson et al., 2016). Wu (2019), drawing upon the insights of psychotherapists, outlines ten strategies employed by nurses to effectively establish empathetic communication with patients. These practises include actively engaging in the clients' emotions or thoughts, providing comfort, relating to shared experiences, summarising the essence of clients' challenging encounters, summarising the consequences of clients' challenging encounters, offering an empathic diagnosis, proposing potential approaches for resolving the reported issue, and elucidating the significance of clients' problematic experiences (Wu, 2019). According to Tyner's observations, empathetic communication with cancer patients involves employing nonverbal

behaviours. These behaviours encompass the utilisation of facial expressions to effectively convey an understanding of the patient's concerns, purposefully positioning oneself in a seated position facing the patient to foster a sense of genuine interest, employing bodily movements to demonstrate comprehension, and employing hand gestures to establish an appropriate level of humility and sensitivity (Tyner, 1985). According to Raudonis (1993), the observations made by hospice nurses suggest that the establishment of an empathetic connection involves the recognition of patients as valued persons, irrespective of their medical diagnosis, and the development of a warm and friendly rapport with them

### **Positive outcomes of empathy in nursing**

Research consistently demonstrates that there is a positive correlation between the degree of empathy exhibited by nurses and the enhancement of patient well-being. Throughout their healthcare experience, patients who receive empathy from their healthcare providers tend to report decreased levels of stress and anxiety as well as an overall improvement in their emotional well-being. Moreover, empathetic communication significantly contributes to the satisfaction of patients. Establishing a relationship of trust with patients is facilitated when nurses demonstrate authentic empathy and regard for their emotional matters. Positive feedback regarding healthcare experiences and greater adherence to treatment plans are positively correlated with elevated levels of patient satisfaction (Moudatsou et al., 2020). Consequently, patient engagement may facilitate expedited recuperation, diminished sojourns in the hospital, and a more streamlined regimen of treatment.

Effective communication that is based on empathy and comprehension fosters patient adherence to prescribed medications, treatment plans, and subsequent consultations, ultimately resulting in improved health outcomes (Squier, 1990). Moreover, empathic nurses often demonstrate an enhanced awareness of the needs and concerns of their patients. An increased level of consciousness may potentially aid in the mitigation of medical errors and complications. Gaining insight into the viewpoints of patients has the potential to result in enhanced precision in evaluations, informed decision-making, and a proactive stance in averting potential complications (Hannan et al., 2019).

The development of empathy in nursing students throughout their academic journey yields enduring advantages. Scholars who cultivate robust empathic abilities are more adept at navigating the intricate emotional terrain that comprises the healthcare industry. Subsequently, this fosters the development of compassionate healthcare practitioners, thereby guaranteeing a beneficial influence on future patient treatment. Moreover, regular evaluation of the degree of empathy exhibited by nursing students holds substantial importance in fostering the development of a future practitioner who embodies empathy (Kumara and Sudusinghe, 2021).

### **Measuring empathy**

Several empathy measuring instruments, including the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI: (Davis, 1983); the Empathy Scale (Hogan R, 1969); and the Emotional Empathy Scale (Mehrabian and Epstein, 1972) were available and used by medical education researchers. Nevertheless, these instruments were originally designed for widespread use among the general populace, and none of these adequately captures the substance of empathy in the context of patient care and health professions education (Evans et al., 1993). However, the Jefferson Scale of Empathy (JSE) and TEQ (Spreng et al., 2009) are psychometrically sound instruments measuring empathy in the context of health professions education and patient care.

TEQ is a freely available tool which was designed to measure empathy levels in several research cohorts, including nursing students. The TEQ comprises a set of 16 questions that include a diverse array of attributes about the conceptual underpinnings of empathy (Spreng et al., 2009). Based on the provided inquiries, it is seen that a total of eight items, including items 2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 15, are assigned negative scores due to their phrasing with reverse scoring. Conversely, eight items are scored as positive. The scale used in this study is a Likert-type scale consisting of five points, with a range from 0 (representing "never") to 5 (representing "always"). Ultimately, the collective responses were aggregated to quantify a final score of 64. Based on the final ratings, those individuals with higher scores had a notable degree of empathy. Consequently, the TEQ emerged as a concise, uncomplicated, uniform, and potent evaluative instrument for measuring empathy as an affective phenomenon. The internal consistency and test-retest reliability coefficients of the TEQ were found to be 0.79 and 0.73, respectively (Totan et al., 2012). Although the scale used to evaluate empathy was deemed reliable, it had not undergone cross-cultural adaptation for its use among nursing students in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the main aim of this research was to translate TEQ into Sinhalese and cross-culturally adapt it to the Sri Lankan context. The specific objectives of the study were to translate the TEQ into Sinhalese and cross-culturally adapt it for the Sri Lankan context; assess the content and consensual validity of the Sinhalese version through a Modified Delphi Technique; Conduct a pre-test of the adapted TEQ among a sample of nursing graduates; and determine the internal consistency reliability of the cross-culturally adapted TEQ using a larger sample of nursing students.

#### Research Questions

1. What is the process of cross-cultural adaptation of the TEQ to Sinhalese for nursing students in Sri Lanka?
2. How valid and reliable is the Sinhalese version of the TEQ in assessing empathy among nursing students in Sri Lanka?

## METHODOLOGY

### The translation process

The original authors have provided permission for the translation, cross-cultural adaptation, and the use of TEQ. The research obtained ethical clearance from the Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Medicine at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University in Sri Lanka. The process of cross-cultural adaptation included five distinct stages: (I) initial translation, (II) synthesis of translations, (III) back translation, (IV) Expert Committee Delphi review, and (V) testing of the pre-final version (Beaton et al., 2000).

During the first step, two proficient translators who are local and possess native-level proficiency in both English and Sinhalese languages were engaged to translate the TEQ scale from English to Sinhalese. Initially, the two translators engaged in individual efforts to do the forward translation of the original items, instructions, and answers. During the second phase, the translators, along with the principal investigator, engaged in discussions about the translations and reached a consensus on a reconciled version. The language was adapted to be conversational and easily comprehensible for the intended audience, while also ensuring that the translated scale maintained conceptual equivalence with the original scale. During the third stage of the study, a proficient translator, who has native fluency in English and expertise in Sinhalese, conducted a back-translation of the first Sinhalese version of the scale into English. At this point, the translator was not given authorization to use the original version of the scale to avoid biasness.

### Content and consensus validity

The Modified Delphi Technique was used to assess the content validity and consensual validity of the translated scale. The panel of experts involved in this evaluation consisted of a consultant psychiatrist, two clinical psychologists, a senior lecturer in sociology, a senior lecturer in nursing, and a nursing officer (Grade I) (Hecht, 1979; Jones and Hunter, 1995). On a scale of 0 (complete disagreement) to 9 (complete agreement), each item was rated for consensual validity based on whether its conceptual meaning was retained after translation (ii) if it was appropriate for use with nursing students (iii) if it was culturally relevant to Sri Lanka. The content validity of each item was graded on a scale of 0 (complete disagreement) to 9, with consideration given to (i) whether each item was a relevant indication of its scale and (ii) whether the scale's overall set of items was adequate for evaluating empathy. Items that had ratings of 70% or above in the categories of 4-6 or 7-9 were included in the analysis. Conversely, items that obtained ratings of 70% or above in the 0-3 category underwent an additional round of the Delphi procedure. The content validity of individual items (I-CVI) and the overall scale (S-CVI) was evaluated by using the consensus of the panel of experts. There are two techniques often used for determining the Scale Content Validity Index (S-CVI), namely the average CVI (S-CVI/Ave) and the universal agreement (UA) among experts (Polit and Beck, 2010). The S-CVI/UA was computed by using the proportions of items on a scale that obtained ratings falling between the 4-6 or 7-9 categories, as determined by all experts. Additionally, the S-CVI/Ave value was derived by averaging the I-CVIs for all items on the scale.

### **Pre-testing**

A group of thirty nursing graduates from the Faculty of Allied Health Sciences at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University were involved in a preliminary examination to evaluate the degree of difficulty, conceptual clarity, respondent discomfort, and appropriateness of length of a given scale.

### **Assessing reliability**

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among nursing students at the Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University in Sri Lanka, to assess the reliability of the cross-culturally adapted scale. To conduct an internal consistency reliability test, it is recommended to use a sample size that is five to ten times more than the number of items included in the instrument (Kyriazos, 2018). Therefore, to verify the scale, it was necessary to have a minimum sample size of 140 individuals (calculated by multiplying 28 items by 5). The online version of the translated and cross-culturally modified TEQ was disseminated to a total of 197 nursing students of General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka who expressed their willingness to participate. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0 was used to analyse the demographic features of the participants via the application of descriptive statistics. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency reliability of the scale. A Cronbach's alpha internal coefficient of reliability of at least 0.7 is considered the minimum acceptable threshold (Furtado et al., 2022).

## **RESULTS**

### **Personal Characteristics**

The total sample consisted of Sri Lankan individuals, with a total of 197 participants. Most participants, specifically 160 individuals, identified as female, constituting 81.20% of the sample. The study population consisted of nursing undergraduates at various stages of their academic journey, namely first-year students (43.7%,  $n = 86$ ), second-year students (20.8%,  $n = 41$ ), third-year students (19.3%,  $n = 38$ ), and fourth-year students (16.2%,  $n = 32$ ) (Table 1).

**Table 1 Personal Characteristics**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Gender	Female	160	81.20
	Male	37	18.80
Nationality	Sri Lankan	197	100.0
Year of Study	First-year	86	43.70
	Second year	41	20.80
	Third year	38	19.30
	Fourth year	32	16.20

### **Content and consensual validity of cross-culturally adapted TEQ**

All the components of the Sinhalese version of the TEQ were retained, without any exclusions, since a significant majority (70% or more) of the ratings were categorised into groups 4-6 and 7-9, as determined by the Delphi technique in a summative manner. Furthermore, the Delphi technique was repeated in the second round for all the items, which included doing re-ratings specifically for categories 7-9. Consequently, the TEQ that underwent cross-cultural adaptation demonstrated the most substantial content validity for both the individual questions (I-CVI = 1.0) and the overall test (S-CVI/UA = 1.0; S-CVI/Ave = 1.0). The consensus among scholars is that the cross-culturally adjusted TEQ has high reliability as a tool for assessing empathy.

### **Reliability of the cross-culturally adapted TEQ**

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.732 suggests that the validated scale had a satisfactory level of internal consistency.

## **DISCUSSION**

Empathy is a competency to be learned by nurses and a therapeutic tool in the helping relationship that has repercussions on the health of both patients and professionals (Bas-Sarmiento et al., 2017). Therefore, it is of utmost importance to cultivate and conduct frequent evaluations of this essential characteristic throughout the nursing education process (Kumara and Sudusinghe, 2021). However, there is no cross-culturally adapted instrument to assess empathy in the Sri Lankan context. Therefore, the current study aimed at cross-culturally adapting the TEQ, which is a valid commonly used tool to assess empathy worldwide.

### **Cross-cultural adaptation of the TEQ**

The adaptation of a questionnaire for use in a different cultural context is not governed by rigid rules and standards. Nevertheless, it is well acknowledged that using a questionnaire in a different language context immediately after a translation is deemed unsuitable (Beaton et al., 2000; Guillemin et al., 1993; Herdman et al., 1998; Reichenheim and Moraes, 2007; Wang et al., 2006). Consequently, the process of cross-cultural adaptation of the TEQ has undergone five distinct steps to attain satisfactory content and consensual validity, as shown by previous studies (Beaton et al., 2000; Fink et al., 1984; Jones and Hunter, 1995).

## **Reliability in cross-culturally adapted TEQ**

Reliability has three key components: internal consistency, stability, and equivalence. (Bannigan and Watson, 2009). The concept of internal consistency is often used in the context of reliability testing to assess the degree to which each item within a test assesses a consistent idea or construct (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). To establish the reliability of a scale, it is generally recommended that both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) values be above the threshold of 0.70. Moreover, a Cronbach's alpha value over 0.9 is regarded as exceptional (Lin et al., 2020). Nevertheless, Cronbach's alpha value for the cross-culturally adapted and translated TEQ demonstrated satisfactory outcomes ( $\alpha = 0.732$ ), compared to prior studies that reported test-retest reliability coefficients of 0.79 and 0.73, respectively (Totan et al., 2012).

## **CONCLUSION**

The content and consensual validity of the TEQ's Sinhalese translation for nursing students in Sri Lanka are both exceptional. The comprehensive translation process, which incorporates expert evaluation, guarantees that the Sinhalese TEQ measures and conveys empathy with precision. The Delphi procedure yielded high Content Validity Index parameters, which confirmed the questionnaire's cultural alignment and relevance. As indicated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient, reliability analysis verifies that the Sinhalese TEQ is internally consistent. In the future, this culturally adapted TEQ will significantly contribute to the assessment and growth of empathy among nursing students in Sri Lanka.

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## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors assert that they have no conflicts of interest.

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## **Religion and culture-related explanatory models of cancer and their association with wellbeing: a survey-based study in Sri Lanka**

By TH Solomons<sup>1</sup>, S Malaviarachchi<sup>2</sup>, J Balawardane<sup>3</sup>, S Manjuka<sup>4</sup>, IT Wijesekara<sup>5</sup> & TH Hettige<sup>6</sup>

Health beliefs are recognized as being important in predicting disease-related variables. Among health beliefs, explanatory models are observed to be strongly held beliefs. The personal etiological framework of an individual regarding his or her health condition is referred to as an explanatory model. In Asian countries, it has been observed that individuals have two parallel sets of explanatory models. One is based on the Western medical model, and another is based on cultural and religious beliefs. The current cross-sectional study expects to understand the religion and culture-based explanatory models among Sri Lankans. The study's first phase was conducted with 142 adults in Sri Lanka as an online survey. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to gauge the relationship between selected demographic variables and religious-cultural beliefs related to cancer. A short questionnaire was developed to record the religious-cultural beliefs related to cancer, following five mini-interviews. This was pre-tested before being used in the study. 50 cancer patients participated in the second phase, where their commonly held religion and culture-related explanatory models and their levels of well-being were correlated to understand if they had a significant impact on their well-being. An adapted version of the PERMA profiler was used to measure well-being. No statistically significant relationships were observed between the religious-cultural explanatory models of cancer and the disease-related variables. Thus, the prominent religious and cultural explanatory models of cancer can be seen as part of personal core beliefs in people, which are not normally affected or necessarily changed significantly via education, gender, or other disease-related circumstances. Further, beliefs related to karma appear to have a significant impact on well-being. Thus, karma and other religion- and culture-based explanatory models should be acknowledged in providing holistic care for cancer patients.

**KEYWORDS:** Explanatory models, Cancer, Wellbeing

### **INTRODUCTION**

The cancer fact sheet issued by the WHO (World Health Organization) (1) in January 2014 states the incidence of cancer in 2012 was 14.1 million. At present, it is known to be a leading cause of death worldwide. Globocan 2020 states that the number of new cases of cancer in the world to be 19,292,789. In the recent past, the incidence of cancer has been rising in significant numbers. The estimated prevalence estimate is 50.5 million. In addition to this, the WHO states that "approximately 44% of cancer cases and 53% of cancer deaths occur in countries at a low or medium level of the Human Development Index" (BW S, CP W, World Cancer Report 2014) This observation is significant to Sri Lanka, as Sri Lanka has been categorized in the middle-income category until recently. With the current economic crisis,

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there is a possibility of the country being categorized as a low-income country too. Further, Sri Lankan data on cancer has observed an increase in the incidence of cancer in the country.

It has also been observed that, as a result of the “Westernization” of low- and middle-income countries as a result of globalization, rates and patterns of cancer in low- and middle-income countries are expected to follow those that are observed in countries with high Human Development Index (HDI) values. Following this, a decline in infection-related cancers and an increase in cancers related to reproductive, dietary, and hormonal risk factors are expected in the near future in low- and middle-income countries.

According to the current statistics, the crude incidence rate of cancer in Sri Lanka is 82.5 per 100,000. According to the national cancer program in Sri Lanka, one out of every ten people has a lifetime risk of developing cancer. (National Cancer Control Programme, 2015) Further, the statistics show an increase in rates of incidence in the country. A similar increase has been observed in the rates of cancer in Asia too. (Pfizer Medical Division, 2008)

With increased attention to quality of life in healthcare, there is a focus on providing holistic care for many physical and mental illnesses. It is important to understand the psychological aspects of patients as a prerequisite for providing holistic care. This is highly important in attempts to provide holistic care for cancer patients as well. Understanding the personal beliefs of a cancer patient is quite important, as these have a strong impact on the psychological response to the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. In addition to these psychological aspects, personality traits have also been implied as being important in the etiology of cancer (Kupper & Denollet, 2018)

Health psychological research has beyond doubt demonstrated that health beliefs play a significant role in different stages of a disease or illness. Their impact is observed in preventive measures, the course of illness, prognosis, and the outcome and subsequent quality of life in any health condition. Studies by Daher (2012) and Hoffman, Lent, and Raque-Bogdan (2012) have clearly shown how health beliefs affect etiological factors, prognosis, course of illness, ultimate outcome, and consequent quality of life in cancer patients.

Among the many types of health beliefs, explanatory models of illnesses have been observed to be important in the course of illness and the outcome of the disease. The personal etiological framework of the individual regarding an illness or disease is referred to as an explanatory model (EM). In other words, how a person may explain a disease-related condition is known as an EM. EMs have been observed to have a strong impact on treatment-seeking, the type of treatment sought, adherence to treatment, prognosis, and other illness-related outcomes (Marmarà, Marmarà, & Hubbard, 2017). EMs have been observed to have a significant impact on both mental and physical illnesses. (Jacob & Kuruvilla, 2018; Gunn et al., 2019) These can also have a strong impact on cancer patients due to the chronic nature of the disease and the common adverse effects experienced by patients following treatment. Therefore, understanding the EMs related to cancer can be important in providing cancer care.

Research related to EMs among Asian populations has indicated the presence of two categories of EMs that co-existed simultaneously. One category of EMs was based on Western medical models, while the other type was based on religious and cultural practices (Mathews et al., 2019) This could be a result of Asian countries adapting to Western medical models and treatment methods while retaining strongly held beliefs about their traditional religious-cultural belief systems and treatment methods. Therefore, understanding these parallel belief systems is important as both of these systems can impact treatment outcomes as well as the resulting quality of life.

Explanatory models (EMs) of cancer have not been extensively discussed in the Sri Lankan context due to cultural reasons, which has resulted in a lack of previous research on this important topic (Solomons et al., 2021). The lack of knowledge and understanding of EMs among healthcare personnel has a substantial influence on the quality of care provided to cancer patients in the nation. As a result, providing holistic care becomes challenging, making it more difficult to give patients the right kind of support and direction as they navigate their cancer journey. Hence, this research, which explores the various facets of EMs in the Sri Lankan context, is a crucial first step in filling this gap. By investigating this as-yet-undiscovered domain, this study aims to provide important new perspectives on the EMs that cancer patients have. This investigation has the potential to have a beneficial influence on holistic care approaches, allowing medical professionals to better comprehend and address the diverse requirements of cancer patients in Sri Lanka.

In addition to this, there are many expatriates of Sri Lankan and Asian origin living in Western countries. As religious and cultural beliefs are recognized as core beliefs, when they access health care services in the Western context in general and for cancer in particular, understanding their EMs can be immensely beneficial in providing holistic care.

Sri Lankans have been observed to have strong beliefs related to both the Western medical model and the religious and cultural practices of EMs related to cancer. While most individuals believe Western medical treatment to be the most important type of treatment, religious and cultural beliefs are seen as highly important as EMs of cancer. The most commonly held religious and cultural explanatory models of cancer among Sri Lankans are karma, destiny, and God's will (Solomons et al., 2021). The current paper attempts to explore whether these strongly held beliefs are affected by demographic and other disease-related factors.

### **Wellbeing and cancer-related beliefs**

The impact of personal belief systems in the course of cancer has been demonstrated by the fact that these have been independently associated with survival in breast cancer patients (Schlottmann, 2018). Many healthcare systems in the world have begun to look at the importance of the well-being of cancer patients (Soler-Vila et al., 2005). The spiritual health of cancer patients has also been indicated by their well-being (Elliott et al., 2011). Spiritual health is strongly associated with culture and religion-related beliefs. According to current literature, health-related beliefs have been observed to be associated with quality of life and all other cancer-related variables. Therefore, the current study explored the types of religion and culture-related explanatory models and their relationship to well-being among a sample of cancer patients. The objective of this was to understand the EMs of the Sri Lankan population regarding cancer and how these EMs affected their overall well-being as cancer patients. At present, the healthcare system does not have a mechanism to take into consideration cancer patients' fundamental beliefs about their medical complications. This study expects to draw the attention of the healthcare system to these complex aspects of human beings and support them in providing more holistic care to cancer patients.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The current study was a cross-sectional study. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Medicine of General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University (RP/2021/01). At all stages of the study, written informed consent was obtained from the participants.

During the first phase of the study (a one-month period in March 2021), the investigators conducted an online, survey-based study on the common religious and culture-based explanatory models among individuals with and without cancer. The principal investigator

used social media to recruit participants. Participants who were over 18 were allowed to respond to the survey. The survey requested that the participants rate their beliefs regarding cancer, which were related to the biomedical model and beliefs related to religious and cultural factors. Participants were also asked to rate their treatments of choice for themselves and their close family members in case they developed cancer. The treatments listed included choices related to the biomedical model and choices related to traditional treatment methods as well.

This study identified karma, destiny, and God's will in sequence to be the strongest religious cultural EMs in a convenient sample of (n=142) Sri Lankan adults (Solomons et al., 2021). During the second phase of the study, the data was further analyzed to find associations among the EMs and other sociodemographic variables. Among the sociodemographic variables that were analyzed were the level of education of the participant, the type of treatment the participant would choose if he/she or a close family member developed cancer, what the participant believed to be the most important type of treatment for cancer, and the participant's gender.

During the third phase of the study, three mini-interviews were conducted to further explore the cultural EMs of karma, destiny, and God's will, which were identified as the most strongly believed religious-cultural EMs during the first phase. As the locus of control people attached to these three EMs appeared to be important, a brief questionnaire was developed to measure the locus of control people attached to these EMs. It was pretested on five cancer patients and five individuals who did not have cancer to make sure the questionnaire was easily understood.

During the final phase (a two-month period in June and July 2022), a study was conducted among a convenient sample (n = 52) of cancer patients from the oncology department of the University Hospital of General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University (UHKDU), Werahera, to investigate associations between their religious-cultural EMs and their level of wellbeing. Adult patients who were decided to be suitable to participate in the study by the consultant oncologist were recruited following their consent. The level of well-being was measured via the PERMA profiler, which was adapted to Sinhala. The standard scoring guide provided by the original author of the scale was used for scoring. Cultural EMs were recorded using a self-developed, pretested questionnaire that included questions regarding their religious-cultural EMs and questions on whether they thought those EMs were amenable to change. These questions were added based on three mini-interviews conducted with two patients and one first-degree relative of a patient regarding the religious-cultural EMs. During the interview, it was clear that some perceived the EMs as changeable through their own actions and some perceived them as not changeable. Thus, some perceived the EMs to have an internal locus of control, while others perceived them to have an external locus of control. Therefore, a brief questionnaire was used to measure the patient's most strongly held religious-cultural explanatory models and their corresponding locus of control.

### **Sample**

In the first and second phases, the sample size was 142 (n = 142). Out of the total sample, 72 participants responded in English, 29 responded in Tamil, and 39 responded in Sinhala. 05% of the sample had a current diagnosis of cancer. 20.7% had a first-degree family member with a diagnosis of cancer. The mean age of the sample was 36 years. 35% of the sample was male, while 65% was female. 33.6% of the sample had a postgraduate qualification. 29.3% had a degree, and 15.7% had a General Certificate of Education Advanced Level qualification.

During the third phase, the participants of the mini-interviews were recruited from the Oncology Department of UHKDU. Two patients and one first-degree relative of a cancer patient participated in these.

During the final phase, the sample consisted of 50 patients (n = 50) who were diagnosed with cancer and were receiving treatment at the Oncology Department of UHKDU. Out of them, 24% of the sample was male, while 76% of the sample was female. The mean age of the sample was 62 years. 28% of the sample had pursued education up to the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level, and 30% of them had completed the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level. Participants who had a bachelor's or a master's degree were 8%, while 4% had PhDs. The mean income of the sample size was LKR 50,000 per month.

**Scales of measurement**

During the first phase of the study, a brief questionnaire was developed to record the different types of explanatory models related to cancer. The principal investigator conducted five mini-interviews to obtain an idea about both biological and religious-cultural explanatory models of cancer for the purpose of developing the questionnaire. This was pretested on a sample of 15 people from different educational backgrounds before being used in the study. An adapted version of the PERMA profiler was used to measure well-being. This has been adapted using the WHO-recommended, five-step methodology (World Health Organization, 2019) for Sri Lankan Sinhala speakers. Adaptation to Tamil was not carried out as there were no Tamil speakers in the chosen sample. During the final stage, a brief questionnaire was developed incorporating the most commonly held religious-cultural beliefs that were recognized during the first stage of the study, as were their corresponding loci of control.

**RESULTS**

**A. Associations between sociodemographic variables and religious-cultural EMs**

Multiple regression analyses were carried out between the variables of karma, destiny, God's will, and the demographic and disease-related factors of education, the type of treatment chosen if the participant had to obtain treatment for cancer, what is believed to be the most important treatment, and gender. The outcomes were as follows:

**Table 1: Summary of coefficients between Explanatory Models and Sociodemographic Factors**

EMs	Education	The type of treatment they would choose for themselves	What is believed to be the most important type of treatment?	Gender
Karma	b= -0.125 p = 0.187	b= 0.020, p= 0.832	Karma = b= 0.020, P= 0.832	b= -0.043, p = 0.651
Destiny	b= 0.104, p =0.308	b= -0.092, p= 0.362	b = -0.092, p = 0.362	b= 0.127, p =0.213
God's will	b= 0.053, p = 0.564	b= 0.104, p = 0.025)	b= 0a .227, p= 0.013)	b= -0.018, p = 0.843

The regression analysis between the three explanatory models and gender showed that the observed coefficients between the EMs and gender were not significant. There was no significant relationship observed between the EMs and educational level. The analysis between the EMs and the type of treatment chosen showed that the EMs of Karma and Destiny did not have a statistically significant relationship to the type of treatment chosen. The majority of the people who believed God's will to be their strongest religious and culture-based EM

chose Western medical treatment as their treatment of choice ( $n = 12$ ). The relationship between God's will and their treatment of choice appears to be statistically significant. A majority of the participants who believed in God's will as their main EM selected Western medical treatment as the most important treatment ( $n = 55$ ). The relationship between God's will as the EM and the treatment that is thought of as the most important has a statistically significant relationship. The other two EMs did not display a statistically significant relationship to the most important treatment.

R<sup>2</sup> values have not been reported in the current paper, as the main objective of the paper is to gauge the relationship between the variables studied rather than using it as a model for prediction.

### **B. Outcomes of the mini-interviews**

During the mini-interviews, it was clear that some felt the three EMs of karma, destiny, and God's will were changeable, while others felt they were not changeable. It was an important finding related to the locus of control of the three EMs. It appeared that the corresponding emotions related to these three EMs were based more on the locus of control they attached to them than the belief itself. Especially as the health locus of control is believed to have a strong influence on disease severity, prognosis, and subjective feelings of well-being (Dopelt, Bashkin, Asna, & Davidovitch, 2022), the investigators felt that it was important for the researchers to understand whether these beliefs are commonly attached to an internal locus of control or an external locus of control.

Following this, a brief questionnaire to measure the locus of control of the EMs was developed based on the current psychometric measures that are used for measuring the locus of control. This was used in the final phase to measure the locus of control of the three most common religious-cultural EMs of cancer patients.

### **C. Association between religion and culture-based EMs, their associated locus of control, and level of wellbeing**

There was a statistically significant, moderately negative correlation between the level of overall well-being and the locus of control of the EM of Karma ( $r = -3.11$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ). A significant correlation was not observed between the overall well-being and the EM of Karma ( $r = -0.06$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ). However, the observed almost negligible correlation was statistically significant. The EM of destiny also demonstrated a statistically significant, moderately negative correlation with the overall level of well-being ( $r = -0.31$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ). The EM of God's will, or its measured locus of control, was not associated with the overall level of well-being at a statistically significant level.

PERMA values pertaining to the level of positive emotions ( $r = -0.314$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ) and the level of engagement ( $r = -0.32$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ) had a statistically significant, moderately negative relationship to the locus of control related to the EM of Karma. A statistically significant association was not observed between having the EM of karma and positive emotions.

A statistically significant, moderately negative, relationship was observed between having the EM of Destiny and having positive relationships ( $r = -0.37$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). No other EM or their associated locus of control were significantly associated with scores related to positive relationships.

None of the EMs or their associated locus of control demonstrated a statistically significant relationship to scores related to having a sense of meaning and purpose in life, feelings of

accomplishment, negative emotions, physical health, and vitality, or scores related to loneliness.

Gender, age, and level of education did not demonstrate a statistically significant association with the overall well-being of the patients. Level of income demonstrated a moderate, positive correlation to the overall well-being of the patients ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **A. Explanatory models as core beliefs**

The current results are compatible with the current scientific knowledge based on human beliefs. Our core beliefs developed during childhood, when our minds were not logical and rational (Schlottmann, 2018). According to current cognitive theories, our logical skills and capacity for abstraction develop from about the age of 7–12 years and complete upon reaching adulthood (Plotnik & Kouyoumdjian, 2013). Much before this, we start gradually acquiring our lifelong beliefs. Most personal beliefs are long-term and do not change much during a lifetime. Our beliefs related to culture and religion started forming when we could not scrutinize them logically. Therefore, these beliefs appear to be strong and difficult to change in most human beings.

The analysis of the associations between the religious and culture-based EMs and the sociodemographic factors in the current study shows that the culture and religion-related EMs of cancer do not have a significant relationship with the participants' educational level or gender. Further, it shows that the EMs of karma and destiny do not have a significant relationship with the type of treatment the participants thought of as the most important type of treatment for cancer. Further, there was no significant relationship between the culture and religion-related EMs of cancer and the type of treatment the participants thought they would choose if they had to obtain treatment for cancer. This clearly indicates that the culture- and religion-related EMs of cancer are unaffected by the treatment choices they make. Thus, a patient with cancer may adhere to a Western medical treatment regime and, at the same time, believe the cause of the cancer to be his or her karma, destiny, or God's will. Thus, the patient may totally reject the Western biomedical explanatory models of cancer on which the current Western treatment model is based.

Usually, a person's belief system exerts a strong effect on their actions. Thus, people may be accepting Western medical treatments for cancer due to the reason that the Western treatment model is well-established with updated research and due to easy access. We can speculate that if such well-established treatment protocols are developed in traditional medicine with increased access, Sri Lankans may be more willing to choose these, as they match their personal explanations of cancer. This further explains why most Sri Lankans resort to traditional treatment methods and religious healing practices alongside Western medical treatment.

There is a statistically significant relationship between the EM of God's will and the choice of Western medical treatment. Participants who chose this EM as their strongest EM for cancer thought Western medical treatment to be the most important and stated that they would choose Western medical treatment as the treatment of choice if they had to obtain treatment for cancer. The belief in karma is common to both Buddhist and Hindu faiths in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it can be speculated that the majority of participants who held beliefs about God's will are of Catholic-Christian backgrounds. Catholicism and Christianity are believed to have been introduced to Sri Lanka with the Western invasions. Therefore, it could be that Western ideals and medical methods are seen as more compatible with their EMs.



Nevertheless, the majority of the sample accepted Western medical treatment as the most important treatment modality for cancer while believing that they would opt for both religious and culturally-based treatment methods and Western medical treatment if they had to obtain treatment for cancer (Solomons et al., 2021) This may also indicate the unwillingness of people to totally part with their core cultural and religious beliefs. Even though a person may choose a Western medical regime, the person also wants to supplement it with treatment methodologies that are compatible with their belief systems. This need may explain the recent proliferation of religious-cultural healing methods for various diseases in Sri Lanka.

This study aims to explore the complex relationship between religious-cultural explanations for cancer and adult well-being in Sri Lanka; nevertheless, it should be noted that there are no direct comparisons with previous research in this area due to a lack of similar prior research. The lack of a comparison analysis restricts how broadly the results can be contextualized and how they may be validated against established or opposing viewpoints. Despite this drawback, the research remains an independent examination of the complex structure of religious-cultural explanatory models and provides an adequate foundation for further comparative studies.

### **B. Explanatory models and wellbeing**

It is interesting that the belief in karma as an explanatory model did not have a significant relationship to overall well-being or subscales of well-being. Yet, beliefs regarding whether karma can be changed or not were significantly associated with overall well-being. Believing that karma can be changed (locus of control) appears to be negatively associated with overall well-being. It could be that patients who believe that karma can be changed may assume responsibility for negative outcomes during cancer. In other words, patients perhaps feel that they should have done something better to change their karma to avert the negative consequences of karma. Therefore, the belief in karma itself does not explain the patient's emotional reactions to the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. It is important to understand the locus of control the patient attaches to understand the patient's emotions.

It is also interesting that the only other variable that was associated with the overall level of well-being was the EM of destiny. It appears that, irrespective of the associated locus of control, holding the belief of destiny as an explanatory model itself was negatively affecting the well-being of the patients.

The EM of God's will or its associated locus of control does not seem to have any significant relationship to any of the well-being-related variables. It could be that belief in God's will leads to more acceptance of the situation, and this may be why well-being is not significantly affected by this belief.

The level of positive emotions and engagement is negatively affected by holding the belief in Karma as an EM. This could be because the concept of Karma explains the current outcomes of a person's life in terms of their past actions pertaining to this life or previous births. Thus, current unfavorable life circumstances can be seen as mostly due to one's own actions. This may lead to more negative emotions. Further, this view may create negative emotions such as shame and guilt about the diagnosis of cancer as an effect of the person's past negative actions, and this could negatively affect engagement in day-to-day life activities.

It is interesting that, according to the current study, the EMs do not affect having a sense of meaning or positive relationships. Actually, understanding cancer in terms of karma may help the person have a better explanation of the situation for him/ herself. There are many cancer patients who feel that they are quite health-conscious individuals who try to maintain healthy lifestyles and are therefore unable to accept the bio-medical explanations of cancer. Even the

current research on bio-medical causes of cancer remains unclear. Thus, an explanation based on karma may provide meaning to the situation. Therefore, the overall sense of meaning in life may not be negatively affected.

In addition to this, people may be motivated to create more positive relationships to create better karma.

Gender or educational level does not seem to have a relationship with the measured level of well-being. Yet, it is interesting that income is positively related to the level of well-being. This is compatible with the current psychological research base, which recognizes economic hardships as a major reason for psychological issues. Economic hardships can lead to restrictions on treatment choices and the capacity to engage in positive activities, which may improve well-being and create more hardships in family circles, which may lead to more negative emotions being expressed. All these factors can directly affect the well-being of an individual with cancer.

It is also interesting that well-being is affected by economic concerns as opposed to factors related to education or gender.

### **Study limitations**

The study has used convenient samples, and not using random samples is acknowledged as a limitation of the study. The current study looks at correlations, and there can be unidentified confounders.

### **Clinical implications**

Karma is a strong belief system in Asian philosophies. There are people of Asian origin living in many different countries around the world. Irrespective of their country of residence, there is a high chance that most Asians will have some degree of belief in karma-related concepts. As belief in karma can have a strong impact on patient wellbeing, exploring or even intervening in these belief systems may improve patient wellbeing.

Further, as patients appear to choose Western medical treatment, even when they hold strong religion and culture-related EMs, the clinician's acceptance and acknowledgment of these beliefs may help patients of Asian origin to better adhere to Western medical treatments.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

Regardless of the treatment modalities patients choose their beliefs about why they have developed cancer remain highly related to their religious and cultural backgrounds. These religious and culturally based EMs do not change much with the gender of the person or their educational level. In addition to that, Sri Lankans appear to choose Western treatment models while also believing in culture and religion-based etiological factors and treatment methods. Thus, when providing cancer care, it is important that the clinician be able to understand the complex human being in front of them. As religious and cultural beliefs can be strong and not easily changed, the best approach for clinicians can be to acknowledge and accommodate them. As these are highly personal beliefs, such acknowledgment will greatly improve the rapport between the patient and clinician. This approach appears plausible because, despite these beliefs, patients also appear to believe Western medical treatment to be the most important type of treatment. Further, systematic research into these aspects will be of value in confirming the current findings.

When outcomes on wellbeing are considered, it appears that the belief in karma has a strong influence on patient wellbeing. Therefore, taking into consideration the presence of this belief in the patient may help the clinician better predict and understand the patient's well-being.

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### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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## **Book Review: Humanities and Social Sciences Education in Sri Lankan Universities: Past, Present and Future**

By T.U. Hewage<sup>1</sup> & S.R.S.D.K Weerawansa<sup>2</sup>

This is an essay about the book “*Humanities and Social Sciences Education in Sri Lankan Universities: Past, Present, and Future, Volume III: Premakumara de Silva... [et al.]—University Grants Commission, Government Press, Colombo: 2022, 332 pp. (ISBN 978-624-5980-09-3)*” reviewed as a commentary on the evolution of tertiary-level Humanities and Social Science (HSS) education in Sri Lanka. This essay will provide an in-depth analysis of the content of the book from a holistic point of view, highlighting the interconnectedness of parts I through VI, with a conclusion that discusses in part VII ‘Plans for Future’ and the concluding remarks of the book itself. Therefore, review comments for some chapters may not be in the same order as they appear in the book. This essay reviews how the content of the book addresses the relationship between HSS education and the country’s social problems, such as deepening inequalities of wealth, lack of employment opportunities for HSS graduates, persistent authoritarian regimes, imperfect democracies, corruption, and inadequate systemic responses to them.

**KEYWORDS:** Humanities, Social Sciences, Sri Lankan, Universities, Education, Teaching, Learning

### **INTRODUCTION**

The word ‘education’ has its roots in Latin, with ‘educare’ meaning ‘bringing up’ and ‘educere’ meaning ‘bring out’ or ‘lead forth’. The evolution of the word brought the meaning to refer to instructions in social codes and manners. The phrase ‘formal education’ refers to ‘systematic schooling and training that can help one be a productive citizen within the socio-economic and political framework one lives in’. Through structured and systematic teaching and learning experiences, the formal education process is expected to cultivate intellectual, social, emotional, and physical growth in students, preparing them to be well-rounded, critical, and socially responsible citizens of the world. In this process, the role of humanities and social science education in universities cannot be understated. In Sri Lanka, a nation of rich cultural heritage and diverse traditions, the significance of these disciplines takes on a profound meaning as they play a pivotal role in shaping the nation’s future.

As we delve into the pages of the book “*Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) Education in Sri Lankan Universities: Past, Present and Future,*” we embark on a journey that scrutinizes the challenges, triumphs, and opportunities that define the landscape of higher education in the humanities and social sciences within the country. Authored by scholars in respective fields of study and educationists, this illuminating volume addresses the complexities and transformations taking place in the realm of Sri Lankan higher education. Starting with the history and present status, this book confronts the critical question: How can Sri Lankan universities revitalize and redefine humanities and social science education to meet the evolving demands of a rapidly changing world?

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Gary Becker, the recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1992, dedicated his research efforts to studying the economic dimensions of various social issues, including education, crime and punishment, and family relations. In 1964, he introduced the concept of "human capital" through his book of the same name. In his work, Becker viewed education not merely as a form of consumption that incurs costs for the government but as an investment that enhances the economic value of individuals, effectively termed "human capital." By improving the skills and knowledge of individuals through education, a country's overall productivity and economic competitiveness can be elevated (Becker, 1964).

Over the last two decades, there has been a continuous push to strengthen science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education. However, educators worldwide unanimously agree that a parallel effort to enhance humanities and social sciences education is equally, if not more, crucial (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2013). Given the multiple challenges affecting human well-being, such as economic, military, ecological, religious, and technological concerns, the significance of being knowledgeable across all fronts of the humanities and social sciences cannot be overstated (Mapping the Future, 2013). As the world faces the daunting task of preparing the next generation of citizens, who must be educated comprehensively to actively engage in governance and interact efficiently with the global community, the University Grants Commission's (UGC) initiative to examine the past and present of humanities and social science education in Sri Lankan universities with the intention of planning for the future is not only a fruitful way to celebrate the hundred years of university education in the country but also an extremely timely endeavor at this critical juncture of the socio-economic and political history of the country. Chapters in the volume are mainly based on the papers presented at the Centenary Celebrations of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) Education in Sri Lankan Universities (1921–2021) held in December 2021, organized by the Standing Committee of HSS, UGC.

This review focuses on *Humanities and Social Sciences Education in Sri Lankan Universities: Past, Present and Future Volume III*: as a collection of eighteen chapters arranged into seven parts according to their thematic relevance. The volume is edited by Premakumara de Silva, Wimal Hewamanage, Asha Nimali Fernando, and Lalith Ananda, published by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Sri Lanka, printed at the Government Press of Sri Lanka, Colombo, 2022. This book came out as Volume III of a three-volume series in which the first two were named 'Beyond Boundaries: One Hundred Years of Humanities and Social Sciences in Sri Lankan Universities; Volume I: Humanities and Volume II: Social Sciences'. Together, these three volumes can be considered a much-needed self-evaluation of HSS education in Sri Lankan universities since its inception.

## **ANALYTICAL REVIEW**

### **Historical Perspective**

Part I: Higher Education in Sri Lanka: A Historical Perspective consists of Chapter 1: 'Education in Pre-Modern Sri Lanka: Scope, Content, and Institutions' and Chapter 2: 'Reflections on the Growth and Development of University Education in Sri Lanka: A Historical Perspective' contextualizing the establishment of higher education in the country. This part prepares the reader's mind to see the growth and evolution of 'modern' university education in the Sri Lankan context by taking him through the historical development of Buddhist monastic education from the pre-colonial period all the way to the post-colonial period. What is perhaps even more important is the effort the authors of these two chapters make to highlight the challenges to increasing access and improving the quality of undergraduate

education in Sri Lanka due to a lack of funding as important points to keep in mind for the whole journey through the book. The two chapters suggest improving the opportunities for professional development for university academics, upgrading the expertise of administrative staff of all higher educational institutions, and increasing and strengthening collaborative efforts involving the UGC, state universities, institutes, and the private sector as some of the areas to be investigated further. However, the authors' suggestions to reform educational policies (with the input of university academics and industry experts) to create an inviting environment for privately owned higher educational institutes as a remedy for a lack of state funding for universities may not be received by the public without a long and hard debate on the topic.

### **Current Status**

We will explore Part II: Current Status of Humanities and Social Sciences Education, consisting of Chapter 3: 'Present Status of Humanities Education in Sri Lanka' and Chapter 4: 'Current Status of Social Science and Humanities Education: An Exploratory Study' and Part IV: Teaching, Learning and Assessment, consisting of Chapters 10 and 11: 'Collaboration for Teaching and Assessment in Higher Education: Merits, Issues, and Quality Assurance' and 'Redesigning Learning Environments to Enhance Creation and Sharing of Open Educational Resources' respectively. The authors in Part II focus on the evolving significance of traditional disciplines, such as languages, literature, and history, in an increasingly globalized world. Despite the dynamic changes in various human endeavors and the resulting complexities in society, they argue that a broader approach that prioritizes critical thinking, advanced skills, and analytical abilities in HSS education is needed. Chapter 3 includes a brief history of the evolution of humanities subjects into what they are today around the world, providing an opportunity for the reader to do his own comparative analysis on the current situation of the same in any specific country. The graduates produced through such a program should be open-minded, empathetic, and sensitive individuals who are able to understand fellow human beings across ethnic, religious, cultural, and national boundaries. Both chapters emphasize the need to reevaluate not only the country's higher education but also the entire education system from pre-K up to postgraduate level, where the degree programs and course syllabi within the university system are not solely decided by the available employment opportunities at the time but by focusing on the ways to help the next generation become better and more productive citizens of the world who can understand other humans better. Besides, if the education system depends on the job market, then all such a system should be able to do is teach artificial intelligence (AI) so that people can make robots to take care of all their other needs. There are a lot of people around the world who lost their jobs due to the advancements of technology. In fact, COVID-19 gave people a chance to experience the formal education process without any human face-to-face interaction. If the idea is extended with rapidly developing applications of AI and education stays only as a prerequisite for employment, then the day university professors and schoolteachers become obsolete may not be that far away. However, the authors in Part II show that such things do not always progress in linear paths by pointing out how the world is beginning to understand the importance of HSS education after about a half a century long rendezvous with STEM education, where each subject was subdivided into more and more specific areas of study, now promoting interdisciplinary education. Now the universities are offering courses such as 'Engineering Sociology' and 'Medical Humanities', pushing the STEM education systems towards STEAM (A – Arts) education. Reading through the personal experience of certain workshops shared by the author of Chapter 4, one gets a chance to see what happens even with multimillion dollar projects launched by international organizations such as the World Bank (WB) or the United Nations (UN) under the guise of improving education, especially in developing countries. At least some of the participants have realized that the resource person herself had not



understood the definition of The Social Determinants of Health, a course of which she was trying to explain how to write the 'Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) for. One other very important aspect, avoided by most critics, of university education brought up in Chapter 4 is the quality of the academics responsible for training the next generation of the nation. Careerist academics concentrated not on research and pedagogy but patronage and political connections to further their careers, and the privilege and gatekeeping practices of incompetent senior academics restricting the exposure of the juniors to critical and cutting-edge scholarship are two of the leading causes mentioned in Chapter 4 as responsible for the deterioration of HSS education in Sri Lanka.

### **Graduate Employability**

Part III: 'Arts' Graduate Employability' consists of Chapters 5 through 9 each addressing a different aspect of the employability issue, including stakeholders' perception, an economic analysis, and an attempt to answer the question whether this is an exercise of trying to put 'square pegs in round holes.' Several authors mention the fact that unemployed or underemployed HSS graduates could have found better employment had they had mastery of the English language. This is true not only for HSS graduates but also for any candidate for graduate level jobs, and it should not be a surprise to anyone since English is still considered the international language of communication. Therefore, we will explore Part III together with Part V: 'English Language Skill' consisting of Chapters 12 and 13: 'Building Confidence to Speak English' and 'Developing Reading and Writing Skills in English' respectively. Chapter five highlights the lack of coordination and cooperation among the stakeholders, including academics, administrators of educational institutes, students, industrialists, government officials, and policymakers, as main constraints in the process of placing HSS graduates in suitable positions in the employment maze. The author's explanation about the causes behind such poor coordination, one of which is a lack of awareness about mutual expectations among stakeholders, would be helpful in planning for improvements in the employability of HSS graduates. Chapters six and seven explore the theoretical aspects regarding unemployment numbers within the framework of the market economy, describing the mismatch between skills developed through HSS degrees and the skills needed. While highlighting the importance of studying and understanding various factors influencing the employability of HSS graduates, chapter seven brings the importance of minimizing the errors in such studies to the forefront. What the academic community must focus on, especially, are the end users of their studies. If the results from such studies with errors are used by the universities to improve their programs, then they would even end up destroying what is already working well. If policymakers are advised based on such misguided conclusions, then they will end up implementing policies that can destroy the whole education system. Therefore, paying serious attention to the whole process of designing and carrying out such studies is an important aspect of finding corrective measures to improve the employability of HSS graduates. Though there is a risk of turning the degree into a vocational training program, the universities will have to introduce necessary changes to HSS education so that developing much needed soft and employable skills is also a regular part of the program. In that context, introducing innovative ways for the undergraduates to improve their language skills, especially reading, writing, and speaking in English, as chapters twelve and thirteen describe, would be invaluable.

### **Research and Innovation**

We will discuss Part VI: 'Research, Innovation, and Publication' consisting of Chapters 14 through 16 addressing the process of publishing scholarly work and university-industry collaboration, together with Part VII: 'Plans for Future' consisting of Chapters 17 and 18 presenting the plans for future development in HSS education in state universities and opportunities and challenges in international collaborations in the field of higher education.

These five chapters could have been grouped into one section with the title: 'Future of HSS Education in Sri Lankan Universities through Research and Innovation' since it is the research and innovation or research and development (R & D) culture that improves not only the process of teaching and learning but also extends the tentacles of the academic network towards the industry and to the global community. An interesting observation pointed out in Chapter 15 is the fact that most people tend to associate the word 'innovation' only with disciplines based on the natural sciences and do not know what kind of innovations could be related to HSS. Chapters fourteen and fifteen highlight the challenges the researchers, especially the younger researchers entering the exploratory world of HSS, encounter within the hierarchical and undemocratic environment of academic publishing. They emphasize the significance of creating a conducive environment, democratic principles of freedom and equality, and strong social networks to foster research and innovation within the university system.

## CONCLUSION

*Humanities and Social Sciences Education in Sri Lankan Universities: Past, Present, and Future Volume III*, which came out as the anchor of a three-volume series examining the topic through the last one hundred years, gives a bird's-eye view of the landscape of HSS education within the university system of Sri Lanka. Readers can appreciate the fact that the discussion is not only about the achievements but also about the setbacks and the relevance and legitimacy of the questions such as the quality of the graduates, the quality assurance of study programs, and the employability of the graduates with degrees in humanities and social sciences. Concluding the series with a self-evaluation about the UGC itself, the policymakers, and the academic community in general not being serious enough in making a legitimate effort to bring sustainable solutions to improving the Research and Development (R&D) culture and the employability of the graduates in these disciplines could certainly be appreciated as an unbiased self-criticism.

However, assessing the impact of HSS education on creating a better world go beyond just producing measurable outcomes since the indicators themselves are intertwined with broader societal and cultural changes. Though most of the authors seem to support the idea that universities are not just factories producing human resources for the labor market, the volume editors seem to have felt that the employability of HSS graduates is more important than discussing research and innovation or the way forward. That may be one of the reasons why there are more chapters discussing the topic 'Graduate Employability' than any other topic in the volume. Max Weber, in his speech 'Science as a Vocation', in 1917, said: "In this instance, this means starting with the question: What form does science take as a profession in the material sense of the word?" (Gerth & Mills, 1946). Perhaps an attempt to answer a similar question: "What form do HSS take as professions in the material sense of the word?" and a discussion about how to make the market ready for the HSS graduates rather than trying to make the graduate ready for the market would have provided a more analytical view about the employability issue. As the authors in Part III, 'Graduate Employability' mention, most of the HSS graduates seek state sector employment. Therefore, a larger portion of their job market consists of state sector institutions. This might encourage the state to influence the university academics and administrators to introduce degree programs designed according to the vacancies they might have at the time. People might not see anything wrong with it, especially if the universities are funded by the state. However, in countries like Sri Lanka, where most of the citizens do not understand the difference between the 'state' and the 'government' and where corrupt politicians who would only be concerned with their individual gain through their

party's ability to be in power, it will be the government that dictates the curricula and degree programs to universities, together with recruiting administrators and even academics who would support their agenda. Max Weber insisted that allowing scholarship to be so closely aligned with the state's agenda meant cultivating "political obedience among university students," and this was sure to prove catastrophic for universities. It would lead to the "castration" of academic freedom and stunt the "development of a genuine" scholarly character. He further said that: "Universities may have been better off under the church's influence; at least then they pursued something other than money and power" (Reitter & Wellmon, 2020).

Sri Lankans have had a good opportunity to experience the benefits of designing employment oriented degree programs since it was tried after the 1971 youth insurrection. One of the root causes of this was the mismatch between the graduates and the job market of the country. It was proven to be elusive, even after a series of curriculum reforms spanning several decades. The issue involved is something beyond university curriculum reforms, extending into the performance of the overall economy of the country as well as various other factors influencing labor market movements. Systematic analysis of global transformations affecting international markets, international trade and payment systems, relationships between nations, foreign exchange rate regimes, and wars in different regions of the world and their impact on the Sri Lankan economy and the education system would make it easier for the reader to grasp the interconnectedness of almost all the disciplines of the social sciences. This will help people see graduate employability as a socio-political as well as an economic issue rather than a curriculum issue (Lakshman, 2021).

Suggestions made by the authors of *Humanities and Social Sciences Education in Sri Lankan Universities: Past, Present, and Future Volume III* to improve HSS education within the university system in the country, starting from changing recruitment methods of academics to delivery methods, funding for research, introducing the subjects in other areas of study, and educating the public in the process of achieving social harmony, are food for thought not only for educators but also for policymakers and investors.

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**Book Review: Vodun: Secrecy and the Search for Divine Power by  
Timothy R. Landry**

**Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018. 201pp.**

*By Nuwan Herath<sup>1</sup>*

In this fascinating account of the West African religion Vodún, Timothy R Landry unravels the intricacies and role of secrecy in its growth as a globalized religion. His work traverses the terrains of spiritual tourism, initiation rituals, and expanding markets to showcase how the interaction of such elements contests the existing power structures. He examines the transnationalism of Vodún along with the belief and efficacy that contributed to its changing 'beliefscape' in the context of global capitalism. He provides a thorough analysis of how rural secrecy got commoditized in an enigmatic way to expand this West African religion in Benin. The paradoxical nature of secrecy is such that it became the propelling factor that took Vodún to the global stage rather than restricting its global outreach. Through his ethnographic account, Landry sheds light on this fascinating process as he navigates how cultural appropriation takes place with the mediating role of local agents in the transnationalization of Vodún. On the other hand, the transformative process that the foreign spiritual seekers undergo makes Vodún's secrets emerge as a global commodity, which enriches its international outreach. In exploring and explaining these intricacies, the author delves into previous scholarly work on West African religions and how Vodún has been resilient against the racial and postcolonial politics of West Africa.

Chapter one of Landry's work discusses the negotiated access to Vodún with some relevant political and economic aspects of spiritual tourism. Access to Vodún is an interaction that involves negotiation between the diviners and the spiritual seekers. In this respect, the author highlights the tension between the foreign spiritual seekers' intention of getting initiated and the locals' fears of misusing their cultural secrets. Both tourists and locals experience a sense of exploitation that stems from the histories of colonialism, racism, and the process of 'othering.' On the one hand, the tourists have a sense of getting financially exploited because of their common misconception that Africa is usually cheap.

In contrast, locals feel that the tourists seek access to their sacred knowledge to profit from it for minimal compensation. Landry believes this reflects the potential of spiritual tourism evolving into a form of neocolonialism. However, amidst these challenges, exchanges take place with compromises to share some secrecy while retaining some. Also, Vodún is becoming popular among Western spiritual tourists despite certain unintentional prejudices they may have about Vodún as a primitive African religion. Nevertheless, the author argues that this process contributes to the evolution of Vodún as a transnational belief system. Moreover, Landry argues that the successful spiritual seekers become part of the ritual community, becoming a type of diaspora linked with locals, not physically but ritually in a multinational marketplace where religious initiations, artifacts, and spirituality are exchanged.

Chapter two provides a detailed and interesting tapestry of Landry's experience with the spiritual landscape of Benin. His account of 'occult ontology' argues that becoming part of the spiritual community is not just an acquisition of knowledge but undergoing ontological changes

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by becoming agents of the global expansion of Vodún. The author takes the readers on an immersive journey of rituals through his personal experience in the symbolic space of the forest, sacrificial ceremonies, and ritual baths, marking the symbolic rebirth within the Vodún community as a diviner by describing how rituals generate moods, motivations, and a view of the world through symbols (Geertz 1973).

Further, the narrative takes us through a challenging experience that the author encountered as an outsider transgressing the sacred space of an Egúngún cult. This encounter, followed by punishment for him and his fellow violators, adds another layer of reflexivity and introspection to the chapter by showcasing how his peripheral presence as a foreigner, local politics, and the complexity of rituals have affected his ability to fully integrate into the community, despite his initiation to a similar cult. This echoes Mary Douglas's thesis that 'unclear is unclean' (Douglas 1966). Notably, the author becomes a testimony to his claim that foreigners lack 'habitus or embodied memory' in these ritual practices as he failed to prove that he was an initiate during the transgression.

The promotion of secrecy is a vital aspect of the commoditization of Vodún. In the third chapter, Landry shows how this is still the same in the transnational marketplace where ritual objects such as Egúngún masks get sold. These sacred items are no longer confined to the local space but are sold globally using technology such as money-transfer services and social media like Facebook. So, what is unique about this selling of Vodún paraphernalia with the use of e-commerce platforms? Firstly, it is the presence of Vodún practitioners online for spiritual services and artifacts. Secondly, the secrecy behind Vodún has become a marker of authenticity by adding an element of mystique to the spirituality-based businesses. It would be interesting to think more about how local practitioners handle the challenge of sharing their traditions with outsiders while preserving the esoteric nature of their spiritual traditions.

The fourth Chapter discusses the fluidity and negotiation of belief systems in the religious landscape of Benin, emphasizing understanding their contingent nature concerning their social context. Navigating through several cases such as individuals concealing religious identity to maintain the modern image and imitation into Vodún due to occult economy and spiritual tourism, the author argues that beliefs are contingent and shift through a socially negotiated process. Despite the concerns about the generalizability of this claim, the author's description of Vodún as an ever-expanding religion with diverse spirits like Tron and Gũ and room for individual expressions stand in agreement with the idea that African religions are not primitive, irrational but exceptionally ambiguous and cannot be discerned with conventional and Western categories of religion (Pritchard 1956). Moreover, the final Chapter reiterates that foreign participation in spiritual tourism exposes power disparities. In contrast, Beninese leverage and commoditization of the ritual secrecy of Vodún enhance its spiritual supremacy over its spiritual seekers.

As a part of globalization, spiritual tourism enhances the transnational spiritual economy where people interact in local settings and online to learn Vodún secrets. Urban centers in Benin and elsewhere are vital places for spiritual tourism that promote Vodún as a commodity with secrecy as its value addition. However, spiritual seekers may realize that secrecy lies in the process rather than as a commodity. What is discernible in this entire account is that there is always a gap between the spiritual seekers and spiritual holders. In the name of secrecy, this gap is being used to reverse the unequal power relationship between the foreign, western spiritual tourists and local Vodún diviners. As one could closely observe when reading this account, the very orientalist mythology of a mysterious East (Said 1978) has been used here in the course of accumulation in a global marketplace by the Beninese with their commoditization of Vodún secrecy. However, as argued by the author, this process helps the

globalization of Vodún with an increased demand for its items or paraphernalia for non-African initiates outside of Benin. The use of online marketplaces comes with such requirements. On the other hand, the modification to conventional Vodún rituals, such as bloodless rituals without sacrifices, shows how attempts were made to include the foreigners who disagree with such rituals.

Overall, Timothy R Landry's work offers a thought-provoking journey into the heart of Vodún, uncovering how the secrecy of Vodún gets connected to the global landscape through spiritual seekers. His insightful analysis makes this work an invaluable contribution to understanding the intricacies of Vodún and its dynamic presence in a globalized world.

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