
Analysis of Social Distancing Behaviour during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the Protection-Motivation Theory (PMT), this study aims to analyze the influence of perceived health risk on social distancing behaviour and the mediating role of attitude towards social distancing among the residents of Colombo and Gampaha districts of the western province of Sri Lanka. A questionnaire was designed and distributed using online means to collect data. A total of 312 complete responses were received and used for analysis. Our findings show that there is a significant and positive relationship between perceived health risk and social distancing behaviour, and attitude towards social distancing mediates the relationship between perceived health risk and social distancing behaviour. Moreover, our findings also reveal that females are more likely to demonstrate social distancing behaviour than males. Also, females are likely to show a strong relationship between perceived health risk and social distancing behaviour compared to males. A shortfall in response rate is a limitation of the study. This study is among the first few studies to emerge from Sri Lanka to examine the predictors of social distancing behaviour amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings of this study have several implications for public health communication in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Attitude towards social distancing, Generalized structured component analysis, Perceived health risk, Protective behaviour, Protection-motivation theory

1. Introduction

The ongoing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a novel deadly pandemic that originated in Wuhan, China, in late 2019 and spread faster across the world than no one expected (Ko et al., 2020; Zhong et al., 2020). WHO, therefore, declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a public health emergency of global attention that needs immediate intervention (World Health Organization, 2020). As many experts point out, this is the most crucial pandemic ever happened in this century. It has caused social and economic disruption, including a higher mortality rate that affected many countries worldwide (Jose et al., 2020). Sri Lanka is also

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