

ABSTRACT

Tourism industry employment plays a significant role in Sri Lanka economy. To be successful in any situation, an individual's perception of their career is critical. Recently, the COVID 19, the world's largest health pandemic of the century has hit every aspect of global tourism making individual's career challengeable. Particularly, the situation commands undergraduates who follow tourism related degree programs to re think about their career selection with a fear. Hence, this study was to identify the difference of undergraduates' perception on career selection in the tourism industry before and after effects of COVID 19 and to examine the major factors that caused to make a difference or remained constant in undergraduates' perceptions of career selection in the tourism industry. Primary data was gathered from the 20 final year hospitality and tourism undergraduates of government and private universities in Sri Lanka. The sample was formed through homogeneous purposive sampling, and data were collected using structured in-depth interviews. Employing qualitative research approach, thematic analysis and systematic conscious building analysis were utilized to transcribe and analyze the gathered data. The findings indicated that undergraduates' perceptions of career selection differed before and after the pandemic. Moreover, respondents had a more favorable perception of career selection in the tourism industry which was before than post-pandemic. However, after the pandemic, respondents had a negative perception of tourism career selection. According to respondents, the most important factor in selecting a tourism industry career was a good starting salary, while the least important factor was job security. Therefore, this research suggests some alternatives for fostering a positive perception of tourism as a career after the pandemic. Enhance students' practical experience, Career coaching, Create favorable working conditions within the tourism industry careers, Update course curriculums to reflect current industry needs. Government must create policies to secure tourism employment would be highly appreciated.

Key words: COVID 19 pandemic, Tourism industry, Undergraduates perception, Career selection