



full article

<https://elibrary.ru/ayufgc>

## Strains on Sri Lankan Families: Pandemic, Politics, and Economic Turmoil

Felician Shehan

University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, Colombo

Muhammed Rilwan

University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, Colombo

Paboda Koralage

University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, Colombo

Faiz Marikar

General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka, Ratmalana

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4579-7263>

[faiz@kdu.ac.lk](mailto:faiz@kdu.ac.lk)

**Abstract:** Sri Lanka is currently navigating a complex interplay of crises, including the aftermath of the global COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with deeply intertwined political, social, and economic turmoil. This confluence of challenges has had a profound impact on families throughout the nation, disrupting individual lives, community structures, and the very foundation of family stability. Understanding the specific ways in which these crises affect families is crucial for the development and implementation of effective family policies aimed at mitigation and support. The research objective was to comprehend how families are being impacted by the pandemic, political unrest, and economic hardships. We sought to pinpoint the important issues, investigate their root causes, and offer guidance for creating laws and support networks. We delved into the key issues that are currently jeopardizing Sri Lankan families, with a focus on illuminating the underlying factors contributing to these challenges. First, we examined how the pandemic, political instability, and economic challenges have affected family stability and well-being in Sri Lanka, e.g., issues like financial strain, stress, and weak support systems. Second, we investigated what policies and support systems can help families cope with these challenges. These factors include the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic, such as the strain on household resources, increased stress levels, and disruptions to social support networks. Third, we examined how the existing political and economic instability exacerbates these difficulties, creating a complex web of challenges for families to navigate. By thoroughly analyzing these interconnected issues, we provided some valuable insights for policymakers and other stakeholders. These insights can improve the development of targeted interventions, support systems, and social programs designed to strengthen Sri Lankan families in the face of adversity. Ultimately, this research is essential for crafting effective policies that not only bolster and protect families during these turbulent times but also promote long-term resilience and well-being.

**Keywords:** Sri Lanka, family stability, crises, COVID-19 pandemic, political instability, economic turmoil, family policy

**Citation:** Shehan Felician, Rilwan Muhammed, Koralage Paboda, Marikar Faiz. Strains on Sri Lankan Families: Pandemic, Politics, and Economic Turmoil. *Vestnik Kemerovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Seriya: Politicheskie, sotsiologicheskie i ekonomicheskie nauki*, 2025, 10(2): 338–349. <https://doi.org/10.21603/2500-3372-2025-10-2-338-349>

Received 19 Jan 2025. Accepted after review 7 Mar 2025. Accepted for publication 10 Mar 2025.

оригинальная статья

## Нагрузка на семьи Шри-Ланки: пандемия, политика и экономические потрясения

Шехан Фелисиан

Университет Коломбо, Шри-Ланка, Коломбо

Рилван Мухаммед

Университет Коломбо, Шри-Ланка, Коломбо

Кораладж Пабода

Университет Коломбо, Шри-Ланка, Коломбо

Марикар Фаиз

Университет обороны имени генерала сэра Джона Котелавала,

Шри-Ланка, Ратмалана

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4579-7263>

[faiz@kdu.ac.lk](mailto:faiz@kdu.ac.lk)

**Аннотация:** В настоящее время Шри-Ланка переживает сложное переплетение кризисов, включая последствия глобальной пандемии COVID-19, в сочетании с глубоко взаимосвязанными политическими, социальными и экономическими потрясениями. Это сочетание проблем оказало глубокое воздействие на семьи по всей стране, снизив уровень благополучия людей, нарушив функционирование общественных структур и пошатнув стабильность самого института семьи. Цель – понять, как пандемия, политика и экономические потрясения влияют на стабильность и благополучие семей в Шри-Ланке. Установлены основные факторы, которые способствуют возникновению проблем, угрожающих стабильности и благополучию семей в Шри-Ланке. Они включают прямые и косвенные последствия пандемии, такие как нагрузка на ресурсы домашних хозяйств, повышенный уровень стресса и сбои в работе сетей социальной поддержки. Выявлены стратегии и системы поддержки, которые позволяют справиться с указанными проблемами. Результаты исследования могут быть использованы в разработке и реализации целенаправленных мероприятий, систем поддержки и социальных программ, а также эффективной семейной политики, направленной на смягчение кризисных последствий, поддержку, защиту, укрепление семей и рост их благополучия.

**Ключевые слова:** Шри-Ланка, семейная стабильность, кризисы, пандемия COVID-19, политическая нестабильность, экономические потрясения, семейная политика

**Цитирование:** Шехан Фелисиан, Рилван Мухаммед, Кораладж Пабода, Марикар Фаиз. Нагрузка на семьи Шри-Ланки: пандемия, политика и экономические потрясения. *Вестник Кемеровского государственного университета*. Серия: Политические, социологические и экономические науки. 2025. Т. 10. № 2. С. 338–349. (In Eng.) <https://doi.org/10.21603/2500-3372-2025-10-2-338-349>

Поступила в редакцию 19.01.2025. Принята после рецензирования 07.03.2025. Принята в печать 10.03.2025.

### Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has left Sri Lanka's socio-political landscape severely altered, exacerbating an already fragile situation. Sri Lanka's recent economic growth was inadequate to propel its economy, and it was not insignificant compared to other nations that pursued populist and nationalist policies or had violent civil wars and conflicts at times. Moreover, it is not the first time Sri Lanka has struggled with foreign debt, and it has frequently been paired with worries about defaulting debt and the Chinese debt trap controversy. The pandemic, initially a health crisis, quickly snowballed into an economic and political catastrophe. The country's reliance on tourism, agriculture, and remittances from abroad came to an abrupt halt, triggering an economic spiral. With industries shuttered and jobs lost, the unemployment rate surged, leaving many families without the financial stability they

once had. As businesses closed and inflation soared, particularly the prices of such essentials as food and medicine, the strain on families became unbearable [1; 2]. The government, struggling with its own internal challenges, was unable to provide adequate relief, further deepening the crisis.

The political instability that followed added another layer of hardship. Mass protests erupted across the country as citizens, disillusioned with the government's inability to address their needs, demanded change. The political impasse not only paralyzed effective governance but also created an environment of uncertainty, making it difficult for families to plan [3]. The constant shifts in leadership, compounded by allegations of corruption and mismanagement, only added to the societal unrest [4]. This instability also led to a breakdown in the social fabric as communities became polarized,

and the trust between citizens and their leaders eroded. Families, who should have been pillars of support, found themselves torn between competing political ideologies, further straining relationships within households.

As the economic and political turmoil continued to unfold, the social impact on families became profound. Economic hardship often translates into stress, anxiety, and, in some cases, domestic violence [5; 6]. With the rising cost of living and shrinking incomes, many families were forced to make difficult choices between necessities, leading to heightened tensions at home. Children, who are often the most vulnerable party in such crises, faced disruptions in education, health services, and overall well-being [7]. Families that had once enjoyed a level of security were now grappling with the uncertainty of their future. In this context, understanding the ripple effect of these cascading crises on family stability is critical [8]. Only through targeted policy interventions can Sri Lanka hope to restore a sense of stability, provide economic relief, and rebuild the social fabric that has been so deeply affected by the compounded challenges of the pandemic, political unrest, and economic collapse.

The contemporary Sri Lankan society was forced to examine its vulnerability during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic itself placed immense strain on Sri Lankan families, compounding the challenges brought on by the broader crises of political instability and economic downturn. The lockdowns and economic disruptions, including the closure of businesses and industries, led to job losses, leaving many households without a steady income [9]. This financial hardship triggered stress and anxiety, particularly for families that had already been living on the edge before the crisis. With their savings depleting and no immediate relief from the government, the psychological toll on individuals and families was substantial. The uncertainty about when life would return to normal added to the sense of helplessness, leaving many grappling with the fear of an uncertain future [10]. In households, tensions rose, with financial strain often spilling over into strained relationships and, in some cases, conflict, which further jeopardized family cohesion.

In addition to the economic burdens, the pandemic also disrupted the social and academic structures that are critical to family well-being [11]. School closures and limited childcare options placed a significant additional load on parents, particularly mothers, who had to balance caregiving responsibilities with remote work or its absence. For families with young children, the lack of consistent education and socialization has had lasting effects on both the children's mental health and academic development [12]. The absence

of structured schooling and extracurricular activities created an environment of isolation and stress, eroding the resilience of families already reeling from the financial crisis. Mental health, already a vulnerable area in Sri Lanka, worsened as individuals faced not only the external pressures of economic collapse and political unrest but also the internal toll of isolation, worry, and family breakdown. As these compounded stressors still continue to destabilize family life, addressing the psychological and social aspects of this crisis is just as critical as economic recovery and political reform.

Beyond the immediate effects of the pandemic, Sri Lanka's political and social turmoil has significantly exacerbated the existing vulnerabilities, further destabilizing families and communities [13]. Political instability has fueled widespread uncertainty, particularly as changes in leadership and governance have been marked by discontent and distrust. Families, already struggling with the aftermath of the economic collapse, find it increasingly difficult to plan when the political environment is unpredictable. The lack of clear and effective policy responses to the crisis has left families in a constant state of flux, unable to rely on the state for basic services or long-term solutions [14]. Their trust in institutions has eroded, which undermines any hope for a quick recovery. Families that were once able to weather challenges through community or governmental support now face a situation where even basic assurances of stability seem out of reach.

The social unrest, often ignited by the economic grievances of a population facing poverty, unemployment, and rising inflation, has only deepened the sense of fear and insecurity within the country [15]. Widespread protests, violent clashes, and civil disturbances create an environment where daily life is fraught with anxiety. This insecurity negatively impacts communication within families as members struggle to focus on day-to-day survival in an atmosphere of constant upheaval. The emotional toll of living in such an environment can hinder families' ability to support one another, with stress, fear, and anger taking precedence over cohesion and mutual understanding [16]. If families cannot predict when violence might erupt in their communities or when their basic needs are met, their coping mechanisms weaken, making it even harder to manage mental health or family dynamics. In this context, the ability to maintain strong familial bonds and effective communication becomes one of the most critical factors for resilience in the face of multiple, interconnected crises.

COVID-19 was one of the biggest pandemics in modern history. As of November 12, 2020, the disease infected around 52.44 million people, of whom 1.29 million

perished. The fatal coronavirus still has active instances in all 220 nations, regions, or territories, despite the fact that almost 36.67 million people have recovered from the illness. Lockdowns and shutdowns were the two social actions regarded as the available prevention methods during the COVID-19. In addition to having detrimental consequences on social, economic, and academic aspects of life, COVID-19 still exercises its adverse effect on all aspects of human existence, including faith and religion. Numerous people have experienced its devastating effects. The economic downturn in Sri Lanka was particularly devastating for families as it fundamentally altered their daily lives and survival strategies [17]. The sharp rise in food and fuel prices eroded the purchasing power of ordinary citizens, forcing families to make difficult decisions between such necessities as food, medicine, and utilities. For many, these decisions became a matter of sheer survival. In the face of such financial constraints, the pressure on parents to provide for their children increased, leading to heightened levels of stress and anxiety [18]. With food security and basic health services becoming increasingly unaffordable, the quality of life for Sri Lankan families has declined rapidly, further deepening the country's existing socio-economic inequalities. The situation has led to a breakdown in family routines as the resources that were once allocated for education or healthcare have now to be redirected towards mere subsistence.

This financial strain has also led to increased tension within households. As families grapple with the consequences of the shrinking economy, relationships often become frayed [19]. Parents, who once provided stable guidance, may find themselves overwhelmed by the challenges of making ends meet. Children may witness firsthand the emotional toll of financial instability, which can lead to feelings of insecurity and anxiety. In extreme cases, this economic pressure can push families apart, as individuals may resort to migration in search of better economic opportunities. Parents, often fathers, might leave their families to work abroad, hoping to send remittances back home to sustain the household. While this may provide a short-term financial relief, it creates long-term emotional and psychological challenges for the family. The absence of a parent may lead to feelings of abandonment or neglect in the children, and the fragmentation of family structures may exacerbate the existing vulnerabilities.

Additionally, the financial hardships caused by the economic downturn have resulted in decreased opportunities for education and healthcare, two pillars that traditionally supported the social mobility and

well-being in Sri Lanka [20]. As families face the harsh reality of limited resources, many children are forced to drop out of school to contribute to the household income, either by taking up low-paying jobs or helping with domestic work. This situation not only deprives them of a brighter future but also reinforces the cycle of poverty as these children grow up without the education necessary to break free from economic hardships. The lack of access to quality healthcare is similarly devastating as families prioritize food and fuel over medical care, leading to a deterioration in public health. This erosion of academic and health opportunities creates long-term social consequences, weakening the prospects of an entire generation. The compounded impact of financial strain on families highlights the urgent need for comprehensive policy solutions that address both immediate and long-term socio-economic challenges, in order to restore stability and opportunity to Sri Lanka's most vulnerable families.

In conclusion, the confluence of the pandemic, political instability, and economic crisis has created a precarious situation for Sri Lankan families. These interconnected challenges have placed immense strain on family structures, jeopardizing their stability and well-being. By examining the specific issues threatening families and identifying the key factors contributing to these challenges, policymakers can develop effective interventions to strengthen Sri Lankan families and ensure their resilience in the face of adversity.

## Methods and Materials

### Data collection

A mixed-method research approach was essential to fully capture the complexities of the issues affecting Sri Lankan families. It combined both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques, thus providing a comprehensive analysis. The quantitative component gathers numerical data on such key socio-economic indicators as income levels, employment status, food security, family migration patterns, and access to essential services, e.g., healthcare and education. By collecting and analyzing large-scale statistical data, we assessed the extent of the economic impact on families, identified patterns across different demographic groups, and understood regional variations in the crisis experience. However, this quantitative data alone may not reveal the personal, emotional, and social nuances of the challenges that Sri Lankan families had to face. To complement this, we deployed the qualitative component that involved in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies, which allowed for a deeper exploration of the lived experiences of individuals. These methods provided

insights into how families were coping with the financial hardship, political instability, and social unrest, and how these factors affected interpersonal relationships, mental health, and family cohesion. Furthermore, the qualitative data helped to understand the coping mechanisms and strategies that families had developed, as well as the social and emotional toll of enduring such prolonged crises. By combining the objective, statistical approach with rich, narrative-driven accounts, this mixed-method design allowed us to construct a more nuanced understanding of the cascading crises in Sri Lanka, offering valuable insights into both the immediate and long-term impacts on family life. This holistic approach not only highlighted the scope and scale of the problems but also provided a critical context for new policies to address both the material needs and the social and psychological well-being of affected families [7].

#### Quantitative data collection

This research relied on a National Household Survey, which provided essential data on a large, nationally representative sample of families across Sri Lanka. This survey was designed to capture a broad range of information, including such demographic details as age, gender, household composition, and geographical location, as well as such socioeconomic factors as income levels, employment status, education, and access to basic services. In addition, it specifically inquired about families' experiences during the pandemic, focusing on how they were impacted by the economic hardships, disruptions to daily life, and challenges in accessing healthcare and education. The survey also provided data on how political and social instability influenced family dynamics, including experiences of social unrest, political participation, and trust in governmental institutions. By collecting this diverse set of data points, the survey made it possible to compile a comprehensive picture of how these multiple crises intersected and affected family stability. The data gathered were subjected to statistical analysis to identify patterns, trends, and correlations, allowing us to understand how specific factors, e.g., economic hardship, family structure, or geographic location, correlated with changes in family resilience, well-being, and cohesion. This robust data set may serve as a foundation for further analysis, helping policymakers to comprehend the root causes of family instability and design targeted interventions to address both immediate and long-term needs.

In addition to the National Household Survey, we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with a smaller, more focused sample of families to capture a richer, more detailed understanding of their

experiences during the crisis. This qualitative approach involved selecting families from diverse backgrounds, including different geographic regions (urban and rural areas), socioeconomic statuses, and ethnic or cultural groups, ensuring a broad spectrum of perspectives. The method of semi-structured interviews allowed for more flexibility, giving participants the freedom to share their personal stories while ensuring that certain key topics, such as financial hardship, impacts of the pandemic, political instability, and social unrest, were consistently explored across the interviews. These interviews offered participants an opportunity to express not just the tangible effects of the crises, such as job loss or school closures, but also the emotional and psychological toll of living through such prolonged uncertainty. Through open-ended questions, the interviews made it possible to delve into how families adapted, what coping strategies they employed, and how their perceptions of the future evolved. This method also shed light on the interpersonal dynamics within households, i.e., changes in family roles, communication patterns, and conflict resolution, highlighting how external stressors like economic pressure and political instability affected family cohesion. By capturing these nuanced personal insights, the in-depth interviews complemented the quantitative data from the household survey, offering a fuller, more holistic understanding of the impact the crisis had on family life. The qualitative data also allowed us to identify some common themes and unique experiences that might not be fully captured through surveys alone, ultimately providing valuable context for designing more effective and empathetic policy interventions.

#### Reviewing scientific publications (secondary sources)

We conducted a comprehensive literature search using various academic databases and search engines. The search terms included *Sri Lanka*, *family stability*, *global pandemic*, *political crisis*, *social crisis*, and *economic crisis*. The inclusion criteria involved scholarly articles, reports, and studies published within the last four years (2019–2023) that specifically focused on the impact of the global pandemic and the recent crises on the family dynamics and stability in Sri Lanka.

#### Questionnaire survey

The Professionals' Questionnaire was circulated among professionals and religious leaders. The Family Questionnaire was prepared to gather data from the ground levels (fig. 1). The questionnaire was distributed in Sinhala, Tamil, and English to avoid language barriers. The questionnaire was endorsed by Faiz Marikar PhD, DSc.

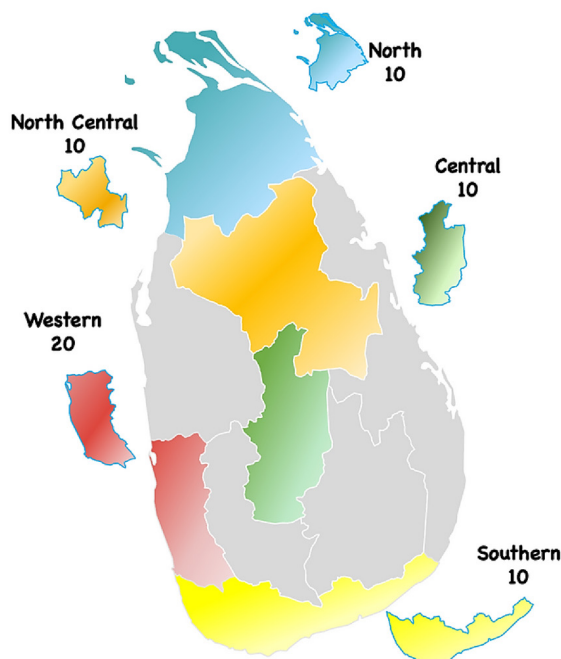


Fig. 1. Sample collection sites  
Рис. 1. Места сбора данных

## Limitations

The sample size had to be curtailed to 60 due to cost and time barriers (fig. 1). Certain statistics in relation to domestic violence are still being processed by relevant authorities. Besides, we were unable to interview prisoners who had committed heinous crimes (rape, murder, child abuse) as it sometimes takes years to deliver the verdict. For instance, a woman, 43, who committed child abuse in 2011 was convicted as late as in March 2023: it took nearly 12 years to deliver the verdict.

## Data analysis

The quantitative data collected from the National Household Survey were analyzed using statistical software to uncover patterns, trends, and correlations between various socio-economic and demographic variables. The analysis focused on identifying how income levels, family structure, geographic location, and access to services interact with family stability, e.g., families in urban areas, where economic opportunities were more accessible, vs. those in rural areas. Similarly, correlations were drawn between the household income and the ability to access education and healthcare, or between the employment status and the mental health of family members. Such statistical techniques as regression analysis or factor analysis allowed us to identify relationships between these variables, providing insights into which factors are most strongly associated with family resilience or vulnerability.

This quantitative analysis provided a broad data-driven understanding of the impact the crisis had across the population and pinpointed the demographic or socio-economic groups at risk.

On the qualitative side, the data from the semi-structured in-depth interviews were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and narratives related to family stability in the context of Sri Lanka's multiple crises. The thematic analysis involved reading and coding the interview transcripts to identify common themes, phrases, and concepts. For example, recurring themes might include experiences of migration, the emotional toll of living through uncertainty, or coping mechanisms like community support or financial strategies. The thematic analysis allowed for a deeper exploration of the ways in which families interpreted and responded to the crises, providing context to the statistical findings. We looked for commonalities across different family types, geographical areas, and social backgrounds, as well as for any unique or divergent experiences that could offer insights into how different groups coped with adversity. This qualitative data provided a nuanced, more personal perspective on how families were managing the pressures of political instability, economic hardship, and social unrest. Ultimately, the integration of both quantitative and qualitative analysis offered a comprehensive view of the crisis, enabling us to draw more informed conclusions about the drivers of family instability and to develop a more effective, evidence-based policy recommendations.

## Combining the data

The findings from the quantitative and the qualitative data analyses were integrated to provide a holistic understanding of the issues threatening Sri Lankan families. This triangulation enhanced the validity and credibility of the research. The methodology provided valuable insights for policymakers seeking to develop effective interventions to strengthen Sri Lankan families and ensure their resilience in the face of adversity.

## Further research prospects

This study may be complemented by additional data sources, such as government reports and media analysis, to provide a broader context for the research findings. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants. By employing a mixed-method approach and addressing these considerations, we managed to offer some valuable insights into the precarious state of Sri Lankan families and pave the way for effective policy interventions.

**Results**

A staggering 65% of the population in Sri Lanka is unemployed, highlighting a massive economic downturn and an alarming scarcity of job opportunities (tab. 1). This high unemployment rate not only reflects a broader economic collapse but also signals a deep structural crisis that threatens the livelihoods of millions. According to the World Bank, elevated unemployment levels can trigger social unrest, poverty, and a decline in human capital [21].

**Tab. 1. Economic issues**

**Табл. 1. Экономические вопросы**

Issues	Percentages
<i>Employment</i>	
Unemployed	65
Employed (mostly government sector)	35
<i>Income loss</i>	
Yes (almost all)	29
Yes (most of it)	70
No	1
<i>Seeking job abroad</i>	
Yes	51
No	49
<i>Drug addiction</i>	
Escalated by	95
No	5
<i>Causes</i>	
Drug addiction due to isolation during the epidemic	23
Due to economic crisis	53
Both	22
Other	2

Furthermore, the fact that only 35% of the population are employed, with a significant proportion of these jobs concentrated in the government sector, raises additional concerns. This lack of economic diversification makes Sri Lanka vulnerable, particularly in the face of a shrinking public sector or changes in governmental policies. The concentration of employment in the public sector also implies that private sector growth is limited, which restricts the creation of new, sustainable jobs. The International Monetary Fund underscores the importance of economic diversification for achieving

sustainable economic growth, noting that reliance on a single sector or type of employment significantly limits a country’s ability to weather economic crises [22].

The concentration of employment in the government sector, combined with the overwhelming unemployment rate, highlights the fragility of Sri Lanka’s economy. This lack of diversification restricts opportunities for growth and exposes families to greater risks, as the country remains heavily dependent on the public sector employment. A diversified economy, which includes strong private and informal sectors, would be better positioned to offer more stable and varied employment opportunities, ensuring resilience against economic shocks. As such, the need for comprehensive reforms and investments in sectors beyond government employment is critical to foster long-term economic stability and address the pervasive unemployment crisis in Sri Lanka.

Interestingly, despite the staggering unemployment rate in Sri Lanka, only half (51%) of the population consider seeking work abroad (tab. 1). This fact suggests that, while many are struggling financially, migration is not necessarily viewed as a viable or desirable option for everyone. There are several possible reasons for this, such as limited job opportunities in other countries, a lack of specialized skills that meet the demand abroad, and strong family ties that anchor individuals to their home country. Research by the World Bank indicates that migration often becomes a coping mechanism for individuals and families facing economic hardship, offering a potential path to financial stability through remittances and better job prospects. However, the World Bank also acknowledges the challenges associated with migration, such as the emotional and social toll of leaving one’s home country, the difficulty in finding stable employment abroad, and the risk of exploitation [23]. These complexities likely influence the decision-making process for many individuals who, despite facing unemployment, may still opt to stay and endure the local economic challenges rather than seek work abroad.

Additionally, the economic hardship experienced by many Sri Lankan families has not only led to employment struggles but has also contributed to an alarming rise in substance abuse. According to the data, 53% of individuals identify economic hardship as a major factor contributing to addiction. This figure underscores the harsh reality that financial stress can exacerbate mental health issues and fuel destructive coping mechanisms, such as substance use. Moreover, 23% of individuals report that social isolation, particularly due to the social distancing measures and lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, has

worsened the situation. This isolation has created an environment in which individuals are more likely to turn to substances as a means of escaping stress and loneliness. Research by the National Institute on Drug Abuse in the United States supports this connection, emphasizing that economic hardship is strongly linked to higher rates of substance use disorders [24; 25]. This connection is particularly concerning in Sri Lanka, where the economic instability, political turmoil, and social isolation converge to create a toxic environment for mental health and family well-being. The compounded stress of financial struggles, social isolation, and lack of viable employment options exacerbates vulnerability to addiction, further deepening the crisis facing many Sri Lankan families.

The emergency hotline 1938 in Sri Lanka serves as a vital lifeline for individuals seeking help in cases of domestic violence and other forms of misconduct. The hotline allows victims of violence to report their experiences through various means, including phone calls, letters, or by directly visiting a police station. This accessibility ensures that individuals who are facing abuse, particularly women, have a platform to report and seek intervention. Alarming, domestic violence consistently tops the list of reported cases, with over 2,400 incidents recorded, followed by over 1,100 cases related to family disputes (tab. 2). These statistics underline the urgent need for more robust resources and support systems to tackle the growing issue of family violence. As economic hardship and social instability continue to strain family dynamics, incidents of domestic violence have become an increasingly common and disturbing feature of the crisis. This phenomenon highlights not only the prevalence of abuse but also the overwhelming toll it takes on individuals, particularly women and children, who are often the most vulnerable population category in domestic conflicts.

In addition to domestic violence, the emergency hotline records a range of other troubling social problems, including cybercrime, physical assault, sexual harassment, and even rape, suggesting a broader spectrum of issues affecting Sri Lankan society. The presence of these complaints reflects the significant social unrest that accompanies economic and political instability as individuals may resort to harmful behaviors, either as a form of coping or because of increasing desperation. Moreover, the number of miscellaneous complaints, which exceeded 1,000 cases, indicates that Sri Lankans are facing a variety of other issues that may not fit neatly into any one category but are equally important. These could include such issues as mental health challenges, financial fraud, or even

**Tab. 2. Complaints to the 1938 helpline, January 2020 – May 2021**

**Табл. 2. Обращения, поступившие на телефон доверия для женщин (1938), январь 2020 г. – май 2021 г.**

Complaint category	Cases
Domestic violence	2,442
Family dispute	1,119
Cyber crime	404
Hurt (physical)	283
Sexual harassment	79
Rape	16
Maintenance and divorce	137
Land dispute	28
Child abuse	13
Employment promotion	33
Guardianship	4
Miscellaneous	1,002
Violation of human rights	1
<i>Total</i>	5,561

the impact of prolonged isolation and uncertainty during the pandemic. Economic distress and social upheaval are key contributors to social problems, including domestic violence and criminal behavior. A report by the United Nations Development Program highlights that the correlation between economic strain and violence, particularly against women, becomes more pronounced during times of crisis, such as the one Sri Lanka is currently experiencing. These numbers reveal the deep social fractures caused by the ongoing crises and underscore the critical need for comprehensive intervention strategies to address the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of families and individuals in Sri Lanka.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that globally, 35% of women have experienced either physical or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence during their lifetime. This figure is striking as it highlights the pervasive nature of gender-based violence worldwide, with millions of women subjected to abusive experiences in both intimate and non-intimate relationships. Sri Lanka's reported domestic violence of more than 2,400 incidents recorded in the Emergency Hotline data provides a glimpse into the severity of the issue. Yet these cases are likely only a fraction of the true scale of violence in the country. The WHO's statistics suggest that Sri Lanka's domestic



violence cases represent a smaller proportion in comparison to the global prevalence. However, it is crucial to recognize that the underreporting of domestic violence is a well-documented problem not only in Sri Lanka but worldwide. In many societies, cultural stigmas, fear of retribution, and a lack of awareness of legal protections prevent victims from coming forward, making it difficult to capture the full extent of abuse. Thus, the actual number of women and children experiencing violence in Sri Lanka is likely much higher than what the statistics show.

In Sri Lanka, the most reported type of abuse is neglect, followed by physical abuse. These forms of violence are often visible and can lead to severe physical injuries or even death. However, the issue of emotional abuse is also prominent, although it is harder to quantify and more difficult to address, given the invisible nature of psychological harm. Alongside these forms of abuse, the reports include other issues, such as trafficking, child disappearance, abduction, and drug abuse, pointing to a broader range of social and familial problems that are interconnected with domestic violence. It is especially concerning that child abuse cases are often underreported as many victims are either too young to speak out or fear retaliation from perpetrators. Figure 2 illustrates this gap between reported and unreported cases, emphasizing that the true scale of child abuse in Sri Lanka is likely much higher. A lack of proper mechanisms for reporting abuse, coupled with societal reluctance to discuss sensitive issues like child mistreatment, means that many victims remain invisible, unable to access the help they need.

For a regional comparison, a 2021 report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) highlights

that intimate partner violence is a major concern throughout South Asia, not just in Sri Lanka. The report emphasizes that intimate partner violence is a persistent issue in many countries in the region, driven by cultural norms, gender inequalities, and limited access to legal and psychological support. This regional context provides a valuable insight into the societal and structural factors that perpetuate domestic violence. In many South Asian countries, including Sri Lanka, domestic violence is often normalized or overlooked, and gender-based violence is not adequately addressed in public policy or law enforcement. The UNODC report suggests that violence against women is not only a violation of human rights but also a significant barrier to social and economic development. As such, addressing domestic violence in Sri Lanka requires a multi-faceted approach that includes legal reform, public awareness campaigns, support for survivors, and a broader cultural shift towards gender equality. Only by confronting both the immediate and structural causes of violence can the country hope to reduce domestic abuse and protect the most vulnerable members of society.

In this research, a significant percentage of participants reported experiencing at least one side effect following the vaccination against COVID-19, with 70% of people indicating they encountered at least one adverse reaction after receiving the first dose (fig. 3). This finding aligns with broader global trends observed in vaccine trials and real-world data, where a notable proportion of individuals experience mild to moderate side effects, especially after the initial dose of vaccines. Commonly reported side effects include localized pain at the injection site, fatigue, mild fever, headaches, and muscle aches. These side effects are generally

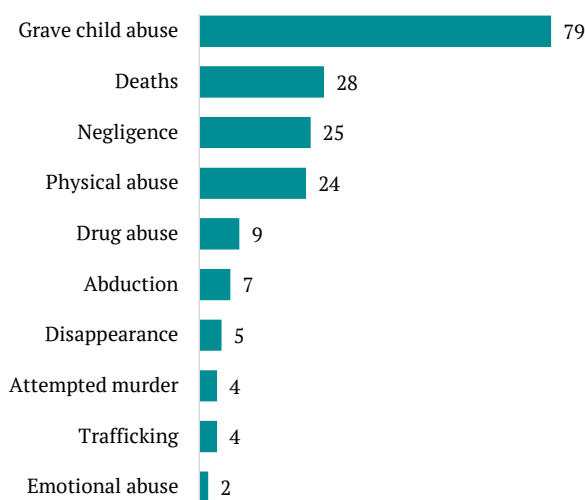


Fig. 2. Child abuse in Sri Lanka, 2019–2021, %  
Рис. 2. Жестокое обращение с детьми в Шри-Ланке, 2019–2021 гг., %

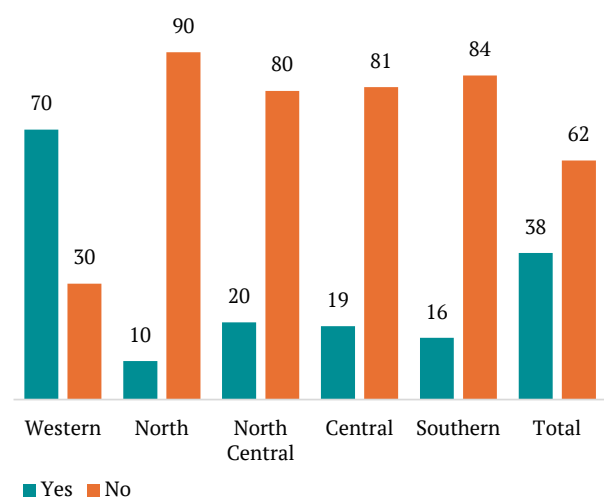


Fig. 3. Side effects of COVID-19 vaccination, %  
Рис. 3. Побочные эффекты вакцинации против COVID-19, %

short-lived and are typically considered a normal response to vaccination, signaling that the immune system is reacting to the vaccine.

The high percentage of individuals reporting side effects in this study reflects the body's natural immune response as it begins to develop protection against the virus. However, it is essential to distinguish between the expected side effects and any unusual or severe reactions that might require medical attention. The fact that 70% of participants experienced side effects after the first dose may indicate that the vaccine is effective in triggering an immune response, but it also highlights the importance of clear communication with the public about potential side effects. Understanding the likelihood and nature of side effects can help manage vaccine hesitancy and encourage higher vaccination rates by setting realistic expectations. Additionally, the side effects observed in this study could provide valuable data for healthcare professionals to improve the monitoring and management of adverse reactions in future vaccination campaigns, particularly as new variants of the virus emerge. As vaccines continue to play a critical role in public health efforts worldwide, further research into the types, frequencies, and severity of side effects will be crucial in ensuring both safety and efficacy in vaccine distribution.

A pandemic crisis refers to widespread disruptions caused by a global health emergency, such as COVID-19, impacting public health, economies, and social stability. In Sri Lanka, the pandemic crisis severely affected families, worsening financial hardships, increasing mental stress, and weakening social support systems. Many households faced job losses, rising inflation, and reduced incomes, making it difficult to afford basic necessities. The prolonged lockdowns and school closures also disrupted children's education, creating long-term learning gaps. Additionally, the crisis led to a rise in mental health issues, including anxiety, stress, and domestic conflicts. When combined with Sri Lanka's ongoing political and economic instability, the pandemic has created a complex web of challenges that families still struggle to navigate. Addressing these issues requires strong policy interventions, such as financial aid, mental health support, education programs, and strengthened social safety nets, to help Sri Lankan families recover and build long-term resilience.

## Conclusion

Sri Lanka is grappling with a multitude of interconnected challenges that are exacerbating the already difficult living conditions for its citizens. The ongoing economic hardship, marked by a significant decline in household

incomes, is one of the primary drivers pushing people to seek employment abroad. With limited local job opportunities and an unstable economy, many individuals view migration as a potential solution to secure better financial prospects. However, this economic strain is not only creating financial instability but also contributing to a rise in social isolation, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has further distanced individuals from their communities and support systems. The stress and emotional toll caused by these pressures are leading to an increase in drug addiction as individuals seek ways to cope with the overwhelming uncertainty and anxiety.

Children are highly vulnerable in this context. The economic pressures and social disintegration are reflected in the disturbing rise in child abuse cases, with neglect, physical abuse, and emotional harm becoming more prevalent. The lack of economic stability often forces families into desperate situations where children suffer most. In addition to the direct impact on family structures, Sri Lanka is also witnessing a surge in public health concerns. Malnutrition rates are climbing as families struggle to afford nutritious food, further compromising the health and well-being of children and vulnerable adults. Furthermore, despite the global availability of COVID-19 vaccines, vaccine hesitancy remains a significant challenge in Sri Lanka, fueled by misinformation, mistrust, and concerns about side effects. This hesitancy complicates efforts to achieve widespread immunity and protect public health, underscoring the need for better communication strategies to rebuild trust in vaccines and encourage higher vaccination uptake.

In summary, Sri Lanka is facing a complex crisis with economic, social, and public health dimensions. The economic downturn is pushing individuals to seek opportunities abroad, contributing to drug addiction and social isolation. The effects of this hardship are disproportionately felt by children, who are facing increased abuse and neglect. Public health issues are compounded by a growing malnutrition crisis and vaccine hesitancy, which threatens to undermine efforts to combat COVID-19. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach that includes economic recovery initiatives, social support programs, public health education, and targeted interventions to protect vulnerable populations. Only through such integrated efforts can Sri Lanka hope to stabilize and begin recovering from the cascading crises it faces.

A number of policy initiatives should be put into place to assist Sri Lankan families in the midst of recurring problems. First, households can experience less financial

burden if they participate in economic support programs, e.g., food subsidies, cash transfers, and job assistance. Addressing the growing stress levels requires increasing access to mental health services, such as counselling and community-based support systems. Children can continue their education without interruption with stronger education and child welfare programs, e.g., school meal assistance and digital learning programs. Programs for employment and livelihood, such as small business assistance and vocational training, can also increase the stability of family income. For Sri Lankan families, these initiatives seek to offer both short-term respite and long-term resilience.

**Conflict of interests:** The authors declared no potential conflict of interests regarding the research, authorship, and / or publication of this article.

**Конфликт интересов:** Авторы заявили об отсутствии потенциальных конфликтов интересов в отношении исследования, авторства и / или публикации данной статьи.

**Contribution:** The author declared no potential conflicts of interest in relation to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

**Критерии авторства:** Авторы в равной степени участвовали в подготовке и написании статьи.

## References / Литература

1. Patrick R., Power M., Garthwaite K., Kaufman J., Page G., Pybus K. *A year like no other: Life on a low income during COVID-19*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2022, 192. <https://doi.org/10.56687/9781447364719>
2. Ryff C. D. Meaning-making in the face of intersecting catastrophes: COVID-19 and the plague of inequality. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 2023, 36(2): 185–203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10720537.2022.2068707>
3. Kominis G., Dudau A., Favotto A., Gunn D. Risk governance through public sector interactive control systems: The intricacies of turning immeasurable uncertainties into manageable risks. *Public Money & Management*, 2022, 42(6): 379–387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2021.1965729>
4. Bonjean Stantonand M. C., Roelich K. Decision making under deep uncertainties: A review of the applicability of methods in practice. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 2021, 171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.120939>
5. Arenas-Arroyo E., Fernandez-Kranz D., Nollenberger N. Intimate partner violence under forced cohabitation and economic stress: Evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Public Economics*, 2021, 194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2020.104350>
6. Zhang H. The influence of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on family violence in China. *Journal of family violence*, 2022, 37: 733–743. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-020-00196-8>
7. Malik M., Munir N., Ghani U., Ahmad N. Domestic violence and its relationship with depression, anxiety and quality of life: A hidden dilemma of Pakistani women. *Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences*, 2021, 37(1). <https://doi.org/10.12669/pjms.37.1.2893>
8. Calvano C., Engelke L., Di Bella J., Kindermann J., Renneberg B., Winter S. M. Families in the COVID-19 pandemic: Parental stress, parent mental health and the occurrence of adverse childhood experiences – results of a representative survey in Germany. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 2022, 31(7): 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-021-01739-0>
9. Haynes M. The impacts of school closure on rural communities in Canada: A review. *The Rural Educator*, 2022, 43(2): 60–74. <https://doi.org/10.55533/2643-9662.1321>
10. Samarasinghe S. *Political economy of internal conflict in Sri Lanka*. Netherlands: Clingendael Institute, 2003.
11. Liyanagunawardena T., Williams S. A. Emergency remote education: Experience from Sri Lanka during COVID-19. *Asian Journal of Distance Education*, 2021, 16(1): 207–229.
12. Marwah R., Ramanayake S. S. Pandemic-led disruptions in Asia: Tracing the early economic impacts on Sri Lanka and Thailand. *South Asian Survey*, 2021, 28(1): 172–198. <https://elibrary.ru/mduisf>
13. Bhowmick S. *Understanding the economic issues in Sri Lanka's current debacle*. New Delhi; India: ORF; Observer Research Foundation, 2022. URL: [https://savearchive.zbw.eu/bitstream/11159/12457/1/1809283078\\_0.pdf](https://savearchive.zbw.eu/bitstream/11159/12457/1/1809283078_0.pdf) (accessed 10 Jan 2025).
14. Cooray N. S., Rankaduwa W. Political economy perspectives on the current economic crisis in Sri Lanka. *Politics & International Relations Series*, 2022. URL: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362014246> (accessed 10 Jan 2025).
15. Whiteside H., McBride S., Evans B. Insecurity and Poverty. In: Whiteside H., McBride S., Evans B. *Varieties of Austerity*. Bristol: Bristol University, 2021, 135–156. <https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781529212242.003.0006>

16. De Figueiredo C. S., Sandre P. C., Portugal L. C. L., Mázala-de-Oliveira T., da Silva Chagas L., Raony Í., Ferreira E. S., Giestal-de-Araujo E., Dos Santos A. A., Bomfim P. O. S. COVID-19 pandemic impact on children and adolescents' mental health: Biological, environmental, and social factors. *Progress in Neuro-Psychopharmacology and Biological Psychiatry*, 2021, 106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pnpbp.2020.110171>
17. Jayasinghe N., Fernando S., Haigh R., Amaratunga D., Fernando N., Vithanage C., Ratnayake J., Ranawana C. Economic resilience in an era of "systemic risk": Insights from four key economic sectors in Sri Lanka. *Progress in Disaster Science*, 2022, 14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pdisas.2022.100231>
18. Creswell J. W., Plano Clark V. L. Revisiting mixed methods research designs twenty years later. In: *The sage handbook of mixed methods research design*, ed. Poth C. N. SAGE, 2023, 21–36. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529614572.n6>
19. Mistry R. S., Elenbaas L. It's all in the family: Parents' economic worries and youth's perceptions of financial stress and educational outcomes. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 2021, 50(4): 724–738. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-021-01393-4>
20. Arthi V., Parman J. Disease, downturns, and wellbeing: Economic history and the long-run impacts of COVID-19. *Explorations in Economic History*, 2021, 79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eeh.2020.101381>
21. Ikejiaku B.-V. The relationship between poverty, conflict and development. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 2009, 2(1): 15–28. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jsd.v2n1p15>
22. Suberu O. J., Ajala O. A., Akande M. O., Olure-Bank A. Diversification of the Nigerian economy towards a sustainable growth and economic development. *International journal of Economics, Finance and Management Sciences*, 2015, 3(2): 107–114. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijefm.20150302.15>
23. Sengupta S., Jha M. K. Social policy, COVID-19 and impoverished migrants: Challenges and prospects in locked down India. *International Journal of Community and Social Development*, 2020, 2(2): 152–172. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2516602620933715>
24. Leza L., Siria S., López-Goñi J. J., Fernández-Montalvo J. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and substance use disorder (SUD): A scoping review. *Drug and alcohol dependence*, 2021, 221. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2021.108563>
25. Stöckl H., Sardinha L., Maheu-Giroux M., Meyer S. R., García-Moreno C. Physical, sexual and psychological intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence against women and girls: A systematic review protocol for producing global, regional and country estimates. *BMJ Open*, 2021, 11(8). <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-045574>