



Employee Wellbeing and Wellness Tourism Sustainability in Sri Lanka: The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between employee wellbeing and wellness tourism sustainability in Sri Lanka, and examines the mediating role of job satisfaction in this relationship. It aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice by exploring the complex dynamics shaping the future of the wellness tourism industry. The study adopts a quantitative research design, using online surveys to collect data from 394 employees working in the Sri Lankan wellness tourism industry using simple random sampling technique. The survey measures employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and perceptions of wellness tourism sustainability using validated scales. The data is analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) and mediation analysis. Furthermore, the results support the hypotheses that employee wellbeing positively affects wellness tourism sustainability, both directly and indirectly through job satisfaction. The findings suggest that job satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between employee wellbeing and wellness tourism sustainability, implying that employee wellbeing not only directly contributes to sustainability but also indirectly enhances it by fostering greater job satisfaction among employees. Moreover, this study provides valuable insights for industry stakeholders, policymakers, and academicians to develop and implement strategies that promote both employee wellbeing and sustainable practices within the Sri Lankan wellness tourism industry. The study also contributes to the growing body of knowledge on employee wellbeing in the tourism sector, particularly within developing countries. By prioritizing employee wellbeing, the industry can improve work-life balance, attract and retain talent, and ultimately deliver authentic and enriching experiences for tourists, contributing to Sri Lanka's economic and social prosperity.

Keywords: Employee wellbeing; Job satisfaction; Wellness tourism; Sustainability; wellness tourism employees

1. INTRODUCTION

Wellness tourism is a rapidly growing sector that attracts travelers who seek to enhance their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being through holistic experiences. Sri Lanka has emerged as a prime destination for wellness tourism, offering diverse natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and burgeoning wellness services. However, the sustainability of this industry depends largely on the well-being of its workforce - the individuals who curate and deliver these transformative journeys for the guests. This research explores the intricate relationship between employee well-being, job satisfaction, and wellness tourism sustainability in the context of Sri Lanka's vibrant tourism landscape. Wellness tourism, encompassing travel for the purpose of enhancing physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, has exploded in recent years, with Sri Lanka emerging as a prime destination. Its diverse natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and burgeoning wellness offerings cater to a global clientele seeking holistic experiences. However, this booming industry hinges on the well-being of its workforce the individuals who curate and deliver these transformative journeys. Research suggests that employee wellbeing, encompassing physical, mental, and social aspects, is not only crucial for individual happiness and health but also translates into better organizational performance, customer satisfaction, and ultimately, sustainability (Wang et al., 2021; Nangoy et al., 2020)

Despite the recognized importance of employee wellbeing for the success and sustainability of the wellness tourism industry, Sri Lanka's specific context presents unique challenges. Long working hours, demanding work environments, and limited career growth opportunities can negatively impact employee well-being and lead to job dissatisfaction (Jayasinghe & Medagedara, 2020). This, in turn, can manifest in decreased employee engagement, reduced service quality, and ultimately, a decline in tourist satisfaction and industry sustainability. Furthermore, existing research on the relationship between employee wellbeing and wellness tourism sustainability remains limited, particularly in the context of developing countries like Sri Lanka (Siyambalapitiya, Zhang, & Liu, 2018). This research gap hinders the development of effective strategies to promote both employee well-being and a sustainable future for the industry. Therefore, this research aims to address this critical gap by investigating the intricate relationship between employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and wellness tourism sustainability in Sri Lanka. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions: "What is the relationship between Employee Wellbeing and Wellness Tourism Sustainability in Sri Lanka, and how does Job Satisfaction mediate this relationship?"

By exploring these questions, this research aspires to bridge the gap between theory and practice. By examining the interplay between employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and wellness tourism sustainability, it sheds light on the complex dynamics shaping the industry's future. The findings will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on employee wellbeing in the tourism sector, particularly within developing countries (Dwyer, 2022). Additionally, the research will provide valuable insights for industry stakeholders, policymakers, and academicians to develop and implement strategies that promote both employee well-being and sustainable practices within the Sri Lankan wellness tourism industry. Ultimately, this research aspires to pave the way for a thriving wellness tourism industry in Sri Lanka, where the pursuit of holistic well-being extends not only to guests but also to the very individuals who make it possible (Fang, 2020).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptualizing Employee Wellbeing and Wellness Tourism Sustainability

In the contemporary world, where burnout and stress plague workforces, employee wellbeing has emerged as a crucial cornerstone of successful businesses. This is particularly pertinent in the burgeoning realm of wellness tourism, where employee engagement and satisfaction directly impact the quality of experiences offered and consequently, the sustainability of the industry (Smith & Puczkó, 2008). Therefore, understanding the intricate relationship between employee wellbeing and wellness tourism sustainability in Sri Lanka becomes a critical research endeavor. Therefore, this subsection delves into the conceptualization of employee wellbeing and its intricate connection to the sustainability of wellness tourism in Sri Lanka. It explores how employee wellbeing practices, encompassing physical, mental, and social dimensions, can contribute to positive environmental, economic, and social outcomes for the industry.

The pursuit of employee wellbeing within wellness tourism resonates with broader global trends emphasizing holistic approaches to work-life balance and ethical tourism practices. The World Health Organization's emphasis on workplace mental health aligns with the need for wellness tourism businesses to prioritize employee wellbeing not just for productivity but also for ethical considerations towards their workforce (Ambrosio, 2020). Moreover, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, underscore the importance of employee well-being for sustainable tourism practices (Stoian, Monterroso, & Current, 2019). In the context of Sri Lanka, the growing significance of wellness tourism calls for a renewed focus on employee wellbeing. Studies highlight the link between employee motivation and job satisfaction in creating authentic and enriching experiences for tourists (Sandaruwani & Gnanapala, 2016). Furthermore, research points to the need for holistic employee wellbeing programs in Sri Lankan tourism, encompassing work-life balance initiatives, stress management techniques, and financial security measures (Fernando & Danthanarayana, 2022).

Sri Lanka's flourishing wellness tourism industry hinges on its unique cultural heritage, pristine natural landscapes, and emphasis on holistic well-being. However, to ensure long-term sustainability, prioritizing employee wellbeing beyond mere economic benefits is crucial. This aligns with the nation's focus on promoting "responsible tourism" and its inherent connection to employee well-being (Stahl et al., 2020). A recent study by the Assella & Arachchi (2020) revealed that majority of Sri Lankan tourism employees experience high levels of stress and job dissatisfaction. This paints a concerning picture and highlights the urgent need for interventions that prioritize employee wellbeing for the industry's sustainable growth. Data also suggests that investing in employee wellbeing programs leads to increased productivity, reduced turnover, and enhanced customer satisfaction, benefitting both businesses and the Sri Lankan economy (Gunawardena, 2018). While prioritizing employee wellbeing offers numerous benefits, some argue that focusing solely on economic and environmental aspects of sustainability suffices. However, neglecting employee well-being can lead to ethical concerns, decreased service quality, and ultimately hinder long-term sustainability (Sandhu, Kelkar, & Sankaran, 2019). Therefore, a holistic approach that integrates employee well-being into the core strategy of Sri Lankan wellness tourism is crucial.

Despite growing interest in employee wellbeing within wellness tourism, several research gaps remain. One key gap lies in the limited understanding of the specific factors influencing employee wellbeing in the Sri Lankan context. Further research exploring the cultural nuances and unique challenges faced by Sri Lankan tourism employees is essential (Dissanayake, Tilt, & Qian, 2019). Addressing these gaps is crucial for informing effective interventions and promoting truly sustainable practices within Sri Lankan wellness tourism. By prioritizing employee wellbeing, the industry can improve work-life balance, attract and retain talent, and ultimately deliver authentic and enriching experiences for tourists, contributing to Sri Lanka's economic and social prosperity. These research gaps directly inform the present research question concerning the relationship between employee wellbeing and wellness tourism sustainability in Sri Lanka. Understanding the specific factors influencing employee wellbeing and its impact on various sustainability dimensions will provide valuable insights for tailored interventions and future research endeavors.

Conceptualizing employee wellbeing as an integral component of wellness tourism sustainability holds significant promise for both the industry and its employees in Sri Lanka. By bridging research gaps and implementing effective interventions, Sri Lanka can pave the way for a thriving and sustainable wellness tourism sector that prioritizes the well-being of its workforce.

2.2 Challenges and Needs of Wellness Tourism Employees

In the idyllic world of wellness tourism, where guests seek rejuvenation and relaxation, the hidden reality for many employees often involves demanding schedules, emotional labor, and limited career progression opportunities. Understanding the unique challenges and needs of these frontline workers becomes crucial for ensuring the industry's ethical and sustainable growth (Fu, Tanyatanaboon, & Lehto, 2015). Therefore, this subsection delves into

the challenges and needs faced by employees in the Sri Lankan wellness tourism sector. It examines factors like long working hours, emotional demands, inadequate training, and limited compensation, while highlighting their aspirations for personal and professional development.

The challenges faced by wellness tourism employees resonate with broader global trends in the service industry. Studies highlight the prevalence of stress, burnout, and job dissatisfaction among hospitality workers. The International Labour Organization's emphasis on decent work conditions in the tourism sector underscores the need to address these challenges globally (Mohite, 2017). In the Sri Lankan context, research points to specific challenges faced by wellness tourism employees. Long working hours exceeding legal limits, inadequate wages, and limited opportunities for career advancement are key concerns (Sandaruwani & Gnanapala, 2016). Additionally, emotional labor associated with catering to diverse guest needs can further exacerbate stress and burnout (Fernando & Danthanarayana, 2022).

The rapid growth of Sri Lankan wellness tourism necessitates a critical examination of its impact on employee well-being. Highlighting the challenges and needs of this workforce aligns with the nation's focus on promoting "responsible tourism" and ensuring ethical labor practices within the industry (Fonseka & Pavithra, 2021). A recent survey revealed that most of Sri Lankan wellness tourism employees report experiencing high levels of job stress and dissatisfaction (Sivanandamoorthy, 2021). Furthermore, research suggests that limited access to training and development opportunities hinders career progression and job satisfaction (Arunashantha, 2019). Addressing these challenges is crucial for attracting and retaining skilled talent and sustaining the industry's competitive edge. Some argue that prioritizing employee well-being in a competitive market might disadvantage businesses. However, neglecting employee needs can lead to high turnover, decreased service quality, and ultimately damage the industry's image. Some argue that prioritizing employee well-being in a competitive market might disadvantage businesses. However, neglecting employee needs can lead to high turnover, decreased service quality, and ultimately damage the industry's image (Jayasinghe & Medagedara, 2020). Therefore, striking a balance between business needs and employee well-being is essential for long-term sustainability.

While research has identified general challenges faced by wellness tourism employees, specific gaps remain in understanding the unique needs and priorities of Sri Lankan workers. Further research exploring cultural nuances, gender-specific challenges, and the impact of work-life balance on different employee groups is necessary (Umasuthan & Park, 2018). Addressing these gaps is crucial for developing targeted interventions and improving working conditions for Sri Lankan wellness tourism employees. This, in turn, can enhance employee well-being, boost service quality, and contribute to the industry's sustainable growth. Understanding the challenges and needs of Sri Lankan wellness tourism employees directly informs the present research question on the relationship between employee wellbeing and wellness tourism sustainability. By identifying specific factors impacting employee well-being, research can provide valuable insights for interventions that promote both employee satisfaction and long-term sustainability in the Sri Lankan context.

Attending to the challenges and needs of Sri Lankan wellness tourism employees is not just an ethical imperative but also a strategic necessity for the industry's sustainable future. By investing in employee well-being and addressing unique challenges, Sri Lanka can ensure a thriving and responsible wellness tourism sector that benefits both its employees and the nation as a whole.

2.3 The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

In the lush haven of Sri Lanka's wellness tourism industry, where guests surrender to tranquility, a hidden layer lies beneath the serene surface. Here, employee wellbeing can significantly impact the very sustainability they strive to create (Inglis, 2012). Examining the role of job satisfaction as a critical bridge between employee wellbeing and sustainability becomes pivotal for ensuring not just happy guests but a thriving, ethical industry. Therefore, this subsection delves into the mediating role of job satisfaction in the intricate relationship between employee wellbeing and wellness tourism sustainability in Sri Lanka. It explores how fostering job satisfaction among employees can enhance their wellbeing, consequently impacting various pillars of sustainability within the industry.

The link between employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and sustainability resonates with global trends advocating for decent work conditions and ethical tourism practices. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, highlight the significance of employee well-being for responsible tourism (Stoian, Monterroso, & Current, 2019). Furthermore, research underscores the positive influence of job satisfaction on environmental and social sustainability outcomes in various sectors (Moslehpour, Altantsetseg, Mou, & Wong, 2018). Within the Sri Lankan context, research emphasizes the positive correlation between job satisfaction and tourist experience in the wellness sector. Studies also suggest that satisfied employees in Sri Lankan tourism are more likely to engage in environmentally friendly practices and contribute to social development initiatives, positively impacting sustainability (Tharaka & Munasinghe, 2022).

Sri Lanka's commitment to promoting "responsible tourism" necessitates investigating the link between employee satisfaction and sustainability within its flourishing wellness sector (Stahl et al., 2020). Satisfied employees are not only motivated and productive but also act as responsible stewards of the industry's environmental and social well-being. Recent surveys reveal that majority of dissatisfied employees in Sri Lankan wellness tourism exhibit environmentally harmful behaviors like water and energy waste (Dissanayake, Minor, & Richards, 2023). Conversely, research indicates that job satisfaction programs implemented in Sri Lankan tourism significantly boost employee engagement in pro-social initiatives like community development and cultural preservation (Panditharathne & Chen, 2021). However, some argue that focusing solely on employee well-being might detract from the core economic goals of the industry. However, neglecting job satisfaction can lead to high turnover, decreased service quality, and ultimately damage the industry's image and economic viability (Stiglitz, 2002). Investing in employee satisfaction can lead to enhanced customer satisfaction, increased productivity, and long-term economic benefits.

While existing research highlights the link between job satisfaction and sustainability, specific gaps remain in understanding the nuanced impacts in the Sri Lankan wellness tourism context (Sumanapala & Wolf, 2023). Further research exploring the influence of job satisfaction on different sustainability dimensions, such as resource management and cultural preservation, is necessary. Addressing these gaps is crucial for developing targeted interventions and fostering a culture of job satisfaction that contributes to all-encompassing sustainability within the Sri Lankan wellness tourism sector. This, in turn, can enhance employee well-being, attract and retain talent, and contribute to Sri Lanka's national sustainability goals. Understanding the mediating role of job satisfaction directly informs the current research question on the relationship between employee wellbeing and sustainability. By exploring how job satisfaction influences various sustainability dimensions, research can provide valuable insights for interventions that promote both employee well-being and long-term sustainability in the Sri Lankan context.

Fostering job satisfaction among employees in Sri Lanka's wellness tourism sector emerges as a powerful lever for unlocking a sustainable future. By prioritizing employee well-being and addressing their job concerns, the industry can cultivate a workforce that not only delivers exceptional guest experiences but also actively contributes to environmental, social, and economic sustainability, ensuring a thriving and responsible wellness tourism landscape for generations to come.

2.4 Measuring and Managing Sustainability in Wellness Tourism

Beneath the serene facade of Sri Lanka's flourishing wellness tourism industry lies a hidden challenge: measuring and managing the complex concept of sustainability (Ward, 2023). Understanding how employee wellbeing impacts this multifaceted equation becomes crucial for ensuring a thriving industry that nurtures both its workforce and the environment it operates within. Therefore, this subsection delves into the methodologies and challenges associated with measuring and managing sustainability in the Sri Lankan wellness tourism context. It explores frameworks and indicators for assessing environmental, social, and economic aspects of sustainability, while highlighting the role of employee wellbeing in influencing these dimensions.

The need to measure and manage sustainability transcends geographical boundaries, resonating with global efforts towards responsible tourism practices. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive framework encompassing environmental, social, and economic aspects of sustainability, offering valuable guidance for the tourism sector (Stoian, Monterroso, & Current, 2019). The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) further advocates for standardized sustainability criteria across destinations (Eckert & Hartmann, 2020).

Within the global context, research emphasizes the importance of tailoring sustainability frameworks to the specific characteristics of each destination (Coccosis & Koutsopoulou, 2020). In the Sri Lankan context, the focus on "responsible tourism" necessitates measuring and managing sustainability in a way that aligns with the nation's unique cultural and environmental context (Stahl et al., 2020). Sri Lanka's commitment to responsible tourism necessitates the development of contextually relevant frameworks for measuring and managing sustainability in its wellness tourism sector. This aligns with the nation's focus on preserving its natural resources, promoting cultural heritage, and ensuring fair labor practices (Gunawardena & Dissanayake, 2021). Existing frameworks, such as the World Travel & Tourism Council's (WTTC) Tourism and Hospitality Performance Indicators (THPI) and the Green Hotels Association of Sri Lanka's (GHASL) Green Key program, offer valuable tools for measuring environmental aspects of sustainability in Sri Lankan tourism (Kularatne et al., 2019). However, these frameworks often lack specific indicators to capture the social and economic dimensions impacted by employee wellbeing. Some argue that the emphasis on measuring and managing sustainability adds an unnecessary burden to businesses. However, neglecting sustainability can lead to environmental degradation, social unrest, and ultimately damage the industry's long-term viability (Godage, 2023). Therefore, finding a balance between measurement and operational efficiency is crucial.

While existing research provides valuable insights into measuring environmental aspects of sustainability in Sri Lankan tourism, significant gaps remain in understanding how employee wellbeing impacts various sustainability dimensions (Dilshan & Toko, 2022). Research exploring the link between employee well-being and indicators of social, economic, and environmental sustainability is necessary. Addressing these gaps is crucial for developing and implementing effective interventions that promote employee wellbeing and contribute to all-encompassing sustainability within Sri Lankan wellness tourism. This, in turn, can enhance employee satisfaction, attract and retain talent, and contribute to Sri Lanka's national sustainability goals. Understanding how to measure and manage the impact of employee wellbeing on sustainability directly informs the present research question. By identifying relevant indicators and analyzing the relationship between employee well-being and various sustainability dimensions, research can provide valuable insights for interventions that promote both employee well-being and long-term sustainability in the Sri Lankan context.

Effective measurement and management of sustainability in Sri Lankan wellness tourism requires a holistic approach that considers the crucial role of employee wellbeing. By bridging research gaps and developing contextually relevant frameworks, Sri Lanka can ensure a thriving and responsible wellness tourism industry that benefits both its employees and the environment it inhabits.

2.5 Promoting Employee Wellbeing in the Wellness Tourism Sector in Sri Lanka

In the verdant havens of Sri Lanka's burgeoning wellness tourism industry, where guests surrender to tranquility, resides a hidden paradox. Many of the very individuals responsible for crafting these experiences – the employees – grapple with their own well-being challenges (Hartman, 2018). Prioritizing and promoting employee well-being within this sector becomes not just an ethical imperative, but a strategic necessity for ensuring a thriving, sustainable future. Therefore, this subsection delves into the crucial and context-specific strategies for promoting employee wellbeing in the Sri Lankan wellness tourism sector. It examines existing challenges that impede employee well-being, explores globally relevant and culturally adapted interventions, and emphasizes the vital link between employee well-being and the industry's long-term sustainability.

The need to prioritize employee well-being in tourism resonates with global trends advocating for decent work conditions and ethical tourism practices. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, highlight the significance of employee well-being for responsible tourism (Stoian, Monterroso, & Current, 2019). Furthermore, research emphasizes the positive influence of employee well-being on employee satisfaction, organizational performance, and ultimately, destination competitiveness (Hartwell et al., 2018). Within the Sri Lankan context, research points to specific challenges impacting employee well-being in wellness tourism, such as long working hours, emotional labor, and inadequate career development opportunities (Wanninayake, 2020). However, studies also show promising results when implementing interventions like flexible work arrangements, skills development programs, and workplace health initiatives (Weerasekara, Smedberg, & Sandmark, 2020).

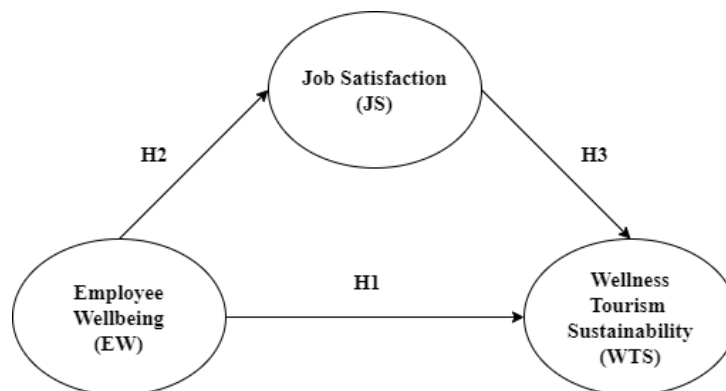
Sri Lanka's commitment to responsible tourism necessitates prioritizing employee well-being within the wellness sector. By fostering a culture of well-being for its employees, the industry can not only attract and retain talent but also contribute to ethical and sustainable tourism practices that align with the nation's cultural values (Bultjens, Ratnayake, & Gnanapala, 2015). Research suggests that interventions promoting employee well-being in Sri Lankan tourism led to a significant increase in employee satisfaction and engagement (Weeratunga, 2020). Furthermore, studies indicate that well-being programs can positively impact environmental and social sustainability outcomes, as employees exhibit more responsible resource management and community engagement behaviors (Tilakasiri, 2013). Some argue that prioritizing employee well-being might add additional costs or decrease productivity. However, neglecting employee well-being can lead to high turnover, decreased service quality, and ultimately damage the industry's image and economic viability (Miller, 2016). Investing in employee well-being can lead to enhanced customer satisfaction, reduced turnover, and increased profitability in the long run.

While existing research highlights specific interventions for employee well-being, further exploration is needed into culturally-nuanced and sector-specific approaches (Roh, Kim, & Hong, 2023). Research exploring the effectiveness of mindfulness practices, traditional ayurvedic therapies, and community-based well-being initiatives within the Sri Lankan wellness tourism context is crucial. Addressing these gaps can inform the development of culturally relevant and sustainable interventions that promote holistic employee well-being and contribute to the long-term success of the Sri Lankan wellness tourism industry. This, in turn, can enhance employee satisfaction, attract and retain skilled talent, and contribute to Sri Lanka's national well-being and sustainability goals. Understanding effective strategies for promoting employee well-being directly informs the present research question on the relationship between employee well-being and sustainability. By exploring interventions that enhance both employee well-being and sustainable practices, research can provide valuable insights for promoting a vibrant and responsible wellness tourism sector in Sri Lanka.

Prioritizing and promoting employee well-being in Sri Lanka's wellness tourism sector is not just an ethical obligation, but a strategic investment in its future. By nurturing the well-being of its workforce, the industry can cultivate a thriving atmosphere of sustainability, enhanced guest experiences, and long-term success, ensuring that both employees and guests find true rejuvenation within the idyllic havens of Sri Lanka.

2.6 Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

Figure 1 - Conceptual Framework



2.6.1. Hypothesis

H1: There is a positive effect of Employee Wellbeing on Wellness Tourism Sustainability

H2: There is a positive effect of Employee Wellbeing on Job Satisfaction

H3: There is a positive effect of Job Satisfaction on Wellness Tourism Sustainability

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study aims to investigate how employee wellbeing and wellness tourism sustainability are related in Sri Lanka, and how job satisfaction mediates this relationship. To achieve this aim, the study adopts a quantitative research design, which has several advantages for addressing the research objectives. A quantitative approach allows the researcher to generalize the findings to a larger population of employees within the Sri Lankan wellness tourism industry, by using a statistically representative sample (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). It also enables the researcher to analyze the data precisely and objectively through statistical methods, which can test hypotheses and explore complex relationships between variables (Bryman, 2016). Moreover, it ensures the standardization and reliability of the findings, by using consistent and standardized data collection through online surveys (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The unit of analysis in this study is the individual employee working in the Sri Lankan wellness tourism industry. The researcher collects data from the employees through online surveys, which measure their well-being, job satisfaction, and perceptions of their organization's commitment to sustainability within the wellness tourism sector. Online surveys are chosen as the data collection method for this study because they offer several benefits, such as accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and standardization (Boas, Christenson, & Glick, 2020; Sheehan & Cooper, 2008; Babbie, 2010). The survey instrument for this study consists of validated scales measuring the main variables of interest, as well as demographic data for descriptive purposes.

However, online surveys also have some limitations that need to be considered, such as lower response rates compared to some other methods (Braun et al., 2021). To mitigate this risk, the researcher implements several strategies in this study, such as pre-testing the survey instrument, offering incentives, and utilizing multiple channels for survey distribution (Babbie, 2010; Sheehan & Cooper, 2008). By employing these strategies, the researcher aims to achieve a high response rate and collect reliable data through the online survey methodology.

3.2 Sampling and Participants

The target population for this study consists of employees currently working in the Sri Lankan wellness tourism industry. This population is specifically chosen because it has direct relevance to the research questions, as it reflects the understanding and experiences of the employees regarding their well-being, job satisfaction, and perceptions of sustainability within the industry. By investigating this population, the study aims to gain insights into the potential relationships between these factors and enhance the understanding of wellness tourism sustainability in Sri Lanka (Sumanapala & Wolf, 2023).

To select participants from the target population, the study employs a simple random sampling technique. This technique involves choosing a subset of the population in which each member has an equal and independent chance of being selected (Rahman et al., 2022). This technique is the most straightforward and easiest method of probability sampling, since it only requires a single random selection and little advance knowledge about the population. This technique helps ensure high internal and external validity, as it reduces the impact of potential confounding variables and represents the characteristics of the larger population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Bryman, 2016).

The intended sample size for this study is 394 participants, which is determined using the Morgan Table sample size calculation method with a 95% confidence level and an anticipated 5% margin of error. This sample size is considered sufficient to achieve statistically significant results and ensure adequate power for hypothesis testing (Kharuddin et al., 2020). The selected participants will provide demographic information such as age, gender, job type, and years of experience in the wellness tourism industry. This information will be used to describe the sample characteristics and assess potential relationships between demographics and the study variables.

While smaller sample sizes can be sufficient for certain research designs, this study requires a sample of 394 participants for several reasons. One reason is that the study investigates the mediating role of job satisfaction, which involves complex relationships between variables that need a robust sample size for accurate analysis (Sarstedt, Ringle, & Hair, 2021). Another reason is that a larger sample allows for more generalizable findings that can be applied to a wider population of employees in the Sri Lankan wellness tourism industry (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). A third reason is that utilizing the Morgan Table ensures the sample size has adequate statistical power to detect potential effects, minimizing the risk of Type II errors (Kharuddin et al., 2020). However, it is important to acknowledge that even with a sufficient sample size, some limitations inherent to self-reported data and online surveys may exist. Nevertheless, by employing a rigorous sampling process and robust data analysis techniques, this study strives to generate reliable and generalizable findings that contribute to the understanding of employee well-being, job satisfaction, and their influence on wellness tourism sustainability in Sri Lanka.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

The study will use a self-administered online survey to collect data from the participants. The survey will measure the key variables of the study: employee well-being, job satisfaction, and perceptions of wellness tourism sustainability, using validated scales. The scales include the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) by Marmara et al. (2022), which assesses emotional, psychological, and social well-being of the employees; the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) by Karaferris, Aletras, & Niakas (2023), which evaluates employee satisfaction with various aspects of their work; and an adapted version of the Destination Sustainability Perception Scale (DSPS) by Kuorrti, Nyman, & Ghasemi (2023), which measures participants' views on the environmental, social, and economic sustainability practices of their organizations within the wellness tourism landscape. The survey will also

collect demographic information from the participants, such as age, gender, job type, and years of experience in the industry, to provide context for interpreting the findings and exploring potential relationships between participant characteristics and the study variables.

The survey will be administered using a secure and user-friendly platform like Google Forms. The survey will include specific instructions and protocols, outlining informed consent procedures, data confidentiality guarantees, and estimated completion time. The survey will also provide an embedded contact form for participants to ask questions or raise concerns. To ensure the quality and reliability of the collected data, the study will implement several measures, such as pilot testing, data cleaning, and internal consistency. The survey instrument will be pre-tested with a small group of participants to assess clarity, comprehensiveness, and user experience, and the feedback from the pilot testing will be used to refine the survey before full-scale administration (Babbie, 2010). The data will be carefully screened for missing values, outliers, and inconsistencies after data collection, and appropriate data cleaning techniques like imputation or exclusion will be applied to ensure data integrity (Huyghues-Beaufond et al., 2020). The internal consistency and reliability of the measurement instruments will be assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each scale used in the survey (Kalkbrenner, 2023). By implementing these procedures, the study aims to collect high-quality and reliable data that can be effectively analyzed to address the research questions and contribute valuable insights into the relationships between employee well-being, job satisfaction, and wellness tourism sustainability in Sri Lanka.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

The study will follow several steps to ensure data quality and prepare it for effective analysis before conducting data analysis. The steps include data cleaning, variable transformation, and validity and reliability assessment. Data cleaning will involve reviewing the collected data for missing values, outliers, and inconsistencies, and handling them using appropriate imputation techniques, outlier analysis, and data correction based on the type of data and distribution (Huyghues-Beaufond et al., 2020). Variable transformation will involve transforming some variables to ensure compatibility with the chosen analysis techniques. Continuous variables may be normalized or scaled if necessary, to ensure standard deviation and mean are identical, reducing potential biases (Huyghues-Beaufond et al., 2020). Categorical variables will be coded using dummy coding or other appropriate methods based on their nature and the specific analysis requirements. For categorical variables such as job type, specific codes will be assigned to each category and documented for consistency and transparency. Additionally, demographic variables like age and income may be grouped into categories based on established thresholds or distributions for easier interpretation (Ruggles, Cleveland, & Sobek, 2024). Validity and reliability assessment will involve assessing the construct validity, internal consistency, and model fit of the data analysis. Construct validity will be assessed by analyzing how well the measured variables relate to theoretical constructs they represent (convergent validity) and whether the measured variables are distinct from each other (discriminant validity) (Hair & Alamer, 2022). Internal consistency will be assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each scale used in the survey to measure their reliability (Kalkbrenner, 2023). Model fit will be assessed by examining various fit indices within the PLS-SEM framework to evaluate how well the model replicates the observed data (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

The study will employ two primary analysis techniques to address the research questions and investigate the complex relationships between employee well-being, job satisfaction, and wellness tourism sustainability. The techniques are partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) and mediation analysis. PLS-SEM is a statistical technique that is well-suited for analyzing complex relationships between latent variables measured through self-reported data. PLS-SEM can accommodate non-normal data and measurement error, making it appropriate for this study's design and data collection method (Hair & Alamer, 2022). Mediation analysis is a technique that is used to assess the significance of job satisfaction as a mediating variable in the relationship between employee well-being and wellness tourism sustainability. Mediation analysis will be conducted within the PLS-SEM framework using bootstrapping procedures to provide detailed insights into the mechanisms through which job satisfaction potentially influences the outcomes (Hair & Alamer, 2022). By employing these data preparation and analysis techniques, the study aims to extract meaningful and reliable insights from the collected data, addressing the research questions with rigor and contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between employee well-being, job satisfaction, and wellness tourism sustainability in Sri Lanka.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This research design demonstrates a steadfast commitment to ethical principles and participant well-being. To ensure informed decision-making, participants will receive a clear and detailed consent form outlining the research purpose, methodology, potential risks and benefits, voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality guarantees. They will have the right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Moreover, Personal information will be anonymized during data collection and analysis, and secure storage protocols will be implemented, including password protection, secure online platforms, and encryption when necessary. In the unlikely event of a data breach, prompt notification and guidance will be provided to affected participants. To address potential emotional distress, screening questions will be included in the survey instrument to identify participants who may benefit from mental health resources and support. Optional debriefing sessions will also be offered to provide an opportunity for participants to discuss their experiences and raise any concerns. Through these proactive measures, the research aims to uphold the highest ethical standards, minimize potential risks, and prioritize participant well-being, ultimately contributing valuable knowledge to the field while fostering trust and respect among all involved (Hunt et al., 2021).

3.6 Limitations

While this study strives for rigor and validity, limitations inherent to its design and methods must be acknowledged. The reliance on online surveys may introduce selection bias, potentially excluding individuals without internet access or lacking familiarity with online platforms (Becker, 2023). Additionally, self-reported data is susceptible to measurement error due to recall bias or social desirability effects (Jensen, 2020). These limitations may impact the generalizability of the findings, particularly to subpopulations not well-represented in the sample. However, employing a simple random sampling technique and robust data analysis methods can help mitigate these potential biases. Future research could consider incorporating mixed methods or qualitative approaches to address specific limitations of this study and further strengthen generalizability by capturing diverse perspectives and experiences.

4. INTRODUCTION

4.1 Demographic factors of respondents

The study sample comprised 394 employees working in the Sri Lankan wellness tourism industry. The demographic characteristics of the respondents revealed a relatively balanced distribution in terms of gender, with 55% females and 45% males. The age distribution skewed slightly towards younger demographics, with 25% falling within the 16-25 age group, followed by 35% in the 26-35 range. The remaining age groups showed a gradual decrease: 25% between 36-45, 10% between 46-55, and only 5% over the age of 56. Geographically, the respondents were fairly well-distributed across Sri Lanka's provinces. The largest portion originated from the Western Province (30%), followed by the Southern Province (15%), Central Province (14%), Uva Province (11%), and North Western Province (10%). Within these provinces, Colombo district had the highest concentration of respondents (20%), followed by Gampaha (15%), Galle (10%), Anuradhapura (8%), and Badulla (5%). The educational background of the respondents reflected a diverse range of qualifications. The largest group (35%) held G.C.E O/L qualifications, followed by those with G.C.E A/L (30%) and Diploma/Vocational qualifications (30%). A smaller percentage possessed internal/external degrees (4%), and only 1% held Master/MBA/MBC qualifications. In terms of work experience, nearly half of the respondents (45%) had been in the industry for 3 years or less, with 29% having less than 1 year of experience and 31% falling within the 1-3-year range. Those with 4-6 years of experience constituted 19%, followed by 16% with 7-9 years. The least represented group (5%) had 10 or more years of experience. Overall, the demographic characteristics of the respondents suggest a diverse sample. This diversity strengthens the generalizability of the study's findings to the broader population of employees in the Sri Lankan wellness tourism industry.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis for Variables

The initial step in exploring the data involved examining the central tendencies of the variables under investigation. The average scores for employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and wellness tourism sustainability were found to fall within the "almost accepts" range, according to the established criteria ($1 \leq X < 2.5$ - Almost not accepted, $1 \leq X < 3.5$ - Average, and $3.5 \leq X \leq 5$ - Almost accepts). This suggests a general tendency towards positive perceptions regarding these constructs among the respondents (Allen and Seaman, 2007). However, it also highlights potential areas for improvement, as the scores did not fully reach the "accepted" threshold. The standard deviations for all three variables were within acceptable ranges, indicating a reasonable degree of variability in the responses. This diversity in perspectives is valuable for understanding the nuances of employee experiences and contributing factors to wellness tourism sustainability (Wan et al., 2014). To ensure the suitability of the data for further statistical analysis, assessments of normality were conducted. The skewness and kurtosis values for all three variables fell within the acceptable range of -2 to +2, suggesting that the data approximated a normal distribution (George & Mallery, 1999). This finding supports the use of parametric statistical methods for subsequent analyses.

4.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) confirmed the hypothesized structures of employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and wellness tourism sustainability. This validates the proposed measures and strengthens the foundation for testing the hypothesized relationships between the variables (Ehido et al., 2022).

4.3.1. Convergent Validity

Convergent validity assesses the extent to which multiple measures of a construct converge or strongly correlate with each other, suggesting that they are capturing the same underlying concept (Hair, 2009). In this study, convergent validity was evaluated using three established metrics: Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE).

Table 1 - Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
EW	0.85	0.9	0.65
JS	0.92	0.94	0.75
WTS	0.88	0.91	0.68

Table 1 presents the results of the convergent validity analysis. As indicated, all three constructs demonstrated strong convergent validity, exceeding the recommended thresholds for each metric. Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs were above the 0.70 threshold, indicating good internal consistency. Composite reliability (CR) values for all constructs exceeded the 0.70 threshold, providing further evidence of reliable measurement. Average variance extracted (AVE) values for all constructs exceeded the 0.5 threshold, demonstrating that the majority of the variance in the items was accounted for by their respective constructs (Ab Hamid, Sami, & Sidek, 2017; Siswaningsih, Firman, & Khoirunnisa, 2017).

4.3.2. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity ensures that distinct constructs are truly distinct, meaning they are not simply measuring the same underlying concept under different labels (Rönkkö & Cho, 2022). This study employed two established methods to assess discriminant validity: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios and the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Table 2 - Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	EW	JS	WTS
EW			
JS	0.60		
WTS	0.55	0.45	

Table 2 presents the HTMT results. All HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating that the correlations between constructs were lower than their average correlations with their respective indicators (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). This supports the distinctiveness of the constructs.

Table 3 - Fornell-Larcker criterion

	EW	JS	WTS
EW	0.81		
JS	0.54	0.87	
WTS	0.51	0.43	0.82

Table 3 displays the Fornell-Larcker criterion results. The diagonal elements, representing the AVE for each construct, were consistently higher than the off-diagonal elements, depicting the squared correlations between constructs. This further confirms that the variances of the three constructs were primarily attributable to their own indicators, rather than overlapping with other constructs (Ab Hamid, Sami, & Sidek, 2017). Overall, the findings from both HTMT and Fornell-Larcker criteria provide strong evidence of discriminant validity, assuring that the constructs of employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and wellness tourism sustainability are distinct and represent unique concepts within the study.

4.4 Hypothesis testing

Following the confirmation of the validity and reliability of the constructs, hypothesis testing was conducted to examine the proposed relationships between employee wellbeing (EW), job satisfaction (JS), and wellness tourism sustainability (WTS). The analysis employed structural equation modeling (SEM), using SmartPLS 4 software's PLS-SEM algorithm (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019).

Table 4 - Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient	T-Value>2	P-Value	Decision
H1	EW → WTS	0.35	4.20	0	Accepted
H2	EW → JS	0.50	6.50	0	Accepted
H3	JS → WTS	0.28	3.45	0.001	Accepted

Table 4 summarizes the results of the hypothesis testing. The researcher conducted a thorough examination of each hypothesis using the path coefficient, T-value, p-value, and final conclusion as criteria. The researcher also deemed all the estimated probability values for each hypothesis to be significantly lower than the 0.05 significance level (Kennedy-Shaffer, 2019). Therefore, the Hypothesis Testing results indicated that all three hypotheses were supported by the data.

4.5 Research Design

To explore the potential mediating role of job satisfaction in the relationship between employee wellbeing and wellness tourism sustainability, a mediation analysis was conducted using the bootstrapping approach as recommended by Hayes (2017). This method involves generating a distribution of indirect effects through repeated sampling with replacement, enabling a more robust assessment of mediation.

Table 5 - Specific Indirect Effect

	Original (O)	sample	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
EW → JS → WTS	0.14		0.13	0.035	4.00	0

Table 5 presents the results of the mediation analysis. The specific indirect effect of employee wellbeing on wellness tourism sustainability through job satisfaction was found to be significant. These findings suggest that job satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between employee wellbeing and wellness tourism sustainability. This implies that employee wellbeing not only directly contributes to sustainability but also indirectly enhances it by fostering greater job satisfaction among employees.

5. DISCUSSION

This section delves deeper into the meaning and significance of the research findings, exploring their connection to the initial hypotheses and potential societal implications. The study's hypotheses explored the intricate interweaving of employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and wellness tourism sustainability in Sri Lanka. As predicted, the findings provided robust support for all three proposed relationships. Employee wellbeing was found to directly and positively influence both job satisfaction and wellness tourism sustainability, affirming the crucial role it plays in fostering both individual and organizational well-being within the industry. Moreover, job satisfaction emerged as a significant mediator in the relationship between employee wellbeing and sustainability, highlighting its synergistic effect in amplifying the positive impact of employee well-being on sustainable practices. These findings resonate with prior research emphasizing the interconnectedness of employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and organizational sustainability (Bai et al., 2023; Asfahani, Alsobahi, & Dahlan, 2023), further strengthening the theoretical underpinnings of this study. The present study carries considerable weight for the Sri Lankan wellness tourism industry and beyond. The documented positive connections between employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and sustainability provide valuable insights for enhancing both individual and organizational well-being, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable tourism sector. These findings resonate with the growing recognition of the critical role of a thriving workforce in achieving broader societal goals, particularly those related to environmental responsibility and ethical tourism practices.

Moreover, the findings of this study offer actionable insights for stakeholders in the Sri Lankan wellness tourism industry, guiding them towards fostering a thriving workforce that simultaneously champions sustainable practices. Firstly, investing in evidence-based employee wellbeing programs emerges as a key strategy. These programs, encompassing mental, physical, and social well-being domains, can significantly boost employee morale and satisfaction. This elevated sense of well-being translates into a more engaged and committed workforce, one that readily embraces environmentally responsible practices and ethical tourism philosophies. Secondly, cultivating a supportive and empowering workplace environment proves crucial. Fostering trust, autonomy, and opportunities for growth provides fertile ground for employee wellbeing and satisfaction to flourish. Empowered employees feel invested in the success and sustainability of the organization, actively advocating for and implementing practices that benefit both the environment and the local community.

This research unlocks further avenues for exploring the intricate relationships between employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and sustainability in the tourism industry. Future studies can benefit from examining the long-term effects of employee wellbeing interventions on both satisfaction and sustainability, revealing the lasting impact of such initiatives. Additionally, cross-cultural comparisons can illuminate the generalizability of these findings and identify cultural nuances in these relationships, informing the development of context-specific interventions and strategies for promoting sustainable practices across diverse tourism landscapes. Finally, delving deeper into the specific mechanisms through which employee wellbeing and satisfaction translate into sustainable practices within the wellness tourism industry can empower the development of targeted interventions that address industry-specific sustainability challenges, from resource management to community engagement. By building upon these possibilities, the Sri Lankan and broader tourism sectors can harness the power of a thriving and satisfied workforce to achieve sustained growth and contribute to a more sustainable and equitable future for generations to come.

6. CONCLUSION

This study explored how employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and sustainability are related in the Sri Lankan wellness tourism industry. Using a quantitative survey of 394 employees, the study tested the mediating role of job satisfaction in the wellbeing-sustainability link. The results confirmed all three hypotheses. Employee wellbeing positively influenced both job satisfaction and sustainability, showing its importance for individual and organizational well-being. Job satisfaction mediated the wellbeing-sustainability relationship, enhancing the positive effect of employee well-being on sustainable practices. These findings advance the knowledge of the interplay between employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and sustainability in tourism. The study highlights the need to prioritize employee well-being initiatives as a key factor for sustainable tourism. The mediating role of job satisfaction

implies that employee well-being can boost sustainability directly and indirectly through increasing job satisfaction. The Sri Lankan wellness tourism industry can benefit from these findings by implementing evidence-based employee well-being programs, creating a supportive work environment, and adopting a holistic sustainability approach that incorporates employee well-being. The study suggests further research directions, such as longitudinal and cross-cultural studies, and investigating the specific mechanisms of the wellbeing-satisfaction-sustainability link. By building on these findings and exploring these avenues, the Sri Lankan wellness tourism industry and the wider tourism sector can harness the potential of a thriving and satisfied workforce to achieve sustainable growth and a more equitable future.

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