



LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE, AND ATTITUDE OF ECO-TOURISM AMONG THE LOCAL TOURISTS AND HOTEL MANAGERS IN SELECTED ECO-TOURISM AREAS IN IMBULPE DIVISIONAL SECRETARIAT

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Ecotourism was introduced to Sri Lanka in the 1980 and is aligned with the preservation and conservation of nature and sustaining tourism. However, the current eco-tourism practices in Sri Lanka have many grey areas. This study was mainly aimed at assessing the level of knowledge and attitude of local tourists and hotel managers and to assess the related factors. A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted using a pre-tested interviewer administered questionnaire survey among 246 tourists and 35 hotel managers in Imbulpe Divisional Secretariat, Ratnapura district. Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package (SPSS 22.0) presenting descriptive statistics and correlations. Knowledge and attitudes were measured using a scoring system and later categorized into “Good” and “Poor” depending on the score distribution. Correlation was tested between the obtained scores and the socio-demographic factors using a Logistic Regression Model for tourists, Chi square test for managers. Of the local tourists 53.7% (n=132) had good knowledge while 88.6% of the managers (n=31) had good knowledge. Moreover, 51.2% (n=126), tourists had “good” attitudes while 91.4% (n=32) of the managers had “good” attitudes. Independent samples T test found that total knowledge score is significantly higher among tour managers than tourists (T=4.726, P<0.001), while total attitude score is significantly higher among tour managers than tourists (T=2.434, P<0.001). A significantly higher number of tourists with a tertiary education had a “good” knowledge when compared to the other two categories (OR=2.567, P=0.014). Similarly, the tourists with secondary education (OR=2.328, P=0.039), and tertiary education (OR=2.423, P=0.022), had good attitudes when compared with the respondents with elementary education. The managers’ knowledge and attitudes were not significantly related to any of the tested socio-demographic factors (χ^2 .test; P>0.05). Pearson correlation test found that there is a significantly positive correlation between knowledge and attitude where, higher the knowledge, better the attitudes among both tourists (r=0.299, p<0.001), and tour managers (r=0.418, p=0.012) where higher the knowledge better the attitudes. As seen during the study, as better knowledge results in better attitudes, increasing knowledge will pave the way for a sustainable ecotourism. Moreover, information related to eco-tourism, like responsible environmental handling for economic purposes and environmental protection can be included into school syllabi probably into environmental science. In future research it would be interesting to assess the practices/behaviors thus the actual status of the eco-tourism practices can be fully understood.

Keywords: attitudes, destinations, ecotourism, knowledge, tourists

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INTRODUCTION

One of the sectors with the fastest growth rates in the world is tourism. Gaining foreign exchange and exchanging mutual cooperation with the international community offers the local economy a number of benefits. Ecotourism is a relatively new subset of the tourism industry. The definition of ecotourism by Ceballose, 1987 states that “Traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objectives of studying, admiring and enjoying the sceneries and wild plants and animals as well as any existing cultural manifestation (both past and present) found in this area”. Ecotourism was introduced to Sri Lanka in the year of 1980, aligned with preservation/ conservation of nature and sustaining tourism (Gunawardana, Aloysius, and Chandrika.,2022). Moreover, according to Bandra's 2009 research, while Sri Lankan ecotourism companies have acknowledged the value of having policies in place, there is a dearth of implementation. Thus, in any location, the habits and expertise of travellers, and hotel managers, are vital to the development of sustainable ecotourism practices. There are many distinct ecotourism locations in Sri Lanka, such as forest reserves, diverse ecosystems, waterfalls, historic ruins, and much more. Among the locations, Beluhuloya is a well-known tourist destination. As Baker (1855) notes, tea plantations and the culture surrounding them have created a foundation for tourism that offers cozy and reasonably priced accommodations since the beginning of the colonial era in the eighteenth century. Within the Sabaragamuwa Province, the study's chosen locale was a well-liked ecotourism attraction (Sampath Pathikada, Imbulpe Divisional Secretariat, 2022/2023). Prominent lodging options for both domestic and international travellers include hotels, cottages, and outdoor camping areas. This study aimed to assess the level of knowledge and attitude towards eco-tourism among the local tourists and hotel managers in selected areas in the Imbulpe Divisional Secretariat (DS), Ratnapura district.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out on selected eco-tourism destinations in the Imbulpe DS area in Ratnapura district. The tourists who visited tourist attractions and hotels in Imbulpe DS and the managers of the hotels in the same area were interviewed using an interviewer who administered a detailed questionnaire to collect information about knowledge and attitude towards eco-tourism and its socio-economic information. The areas were visited daily for one month to collect 246 and 35 questionnaires from tourists and managers. Using the Krejcie and Morgan table equation, the sample size was calculated to be 273. However, due to logistic constraints, only 246 questionnaires were collected.

$$n = \chi^2 N p (1-p) / e^2 (N-1) + \chi^2 p(1-p)$$

n = sample size

N = population size

e = acceptable sampling error

χ = chi-square of degree of freedom 1 and confidence 95% = 3.841

p = proportion of population (if unknown 0.5)

Data was entered into Microsoft Excel and transferred to the Social Sciences Statistical Package (SPSS 22.0). Ethical clearance for the protocol was obtained from the Institute of Biology Sri Lanka. Knowledge and attitude were given a total score and using the median split method (as the score



distribution was not normal), the scores were divided into “Good” and “Poor”. The relationship of scores of tourists with the socio-demographic factors was analyzed using Binomial Logistic Regression Model, while to compare the same in managers Chi squared test was utilized as the sample size was smaller (n=35). The correlation of knowledge and attitude among the groups were analyzed using Pearson Correlation Test. A T test was used to compare the scores between tourists and managers. A p value of <0.05 was considered as significant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Knowledge of the tourist on eco-tourism

The range of knowledge scores received by the tourists was 0 and 16, with a mean total knowledge score of 13.19 ± 2.764 (Figure 1). Since the dispersion of the data does not represent a normal distribution, the Median (14) Split method was used to categorize the tourists' knowledge level into good and poor knowledge. Of the tourists, 132 (53.7%) had “good” knowledge (scores from 14 – 16) while 114 (46.3%) had “poor” knowledge (scores from 0 -13).

Knowledge of the hotel managers on eco-tourism

The range of scores received by the managers was 8 – 16, with a mean total knowledge score of 14.91 ± 1.82 (Figure 2). Mean splits were used to categorize the knowledge into “Good” and “Poor.” Of the managers, 88.6% (n=31) had good knowledge (Scores from 14-16), while 11.4% (n=4) had poor knowledge (scores from 8 -13).

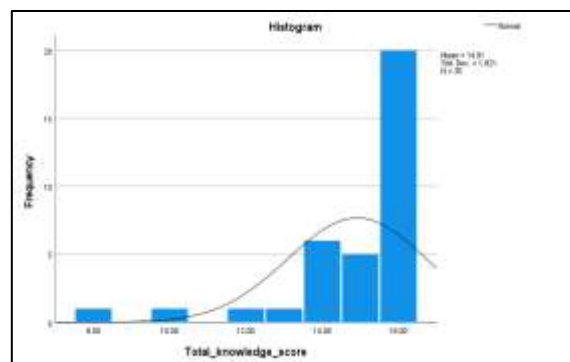
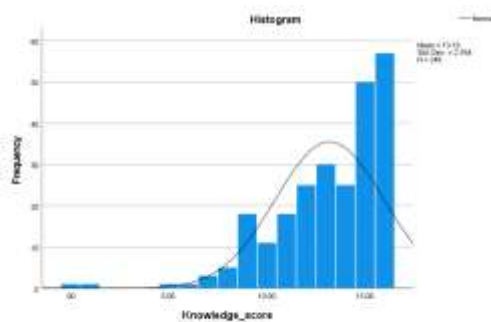


Figure 1-Knowledge of tourist on eco-tourism Figure 2-Knowledge of managers on eco-tourism

Attitude on eco-tourism

Attitude of the tourists on eco-tourism

22 statements were utilized to assess the level of attitude. The tourists had a mean attitude score of 62.08 ± 11.504 with a range of (22 – 83). Since the dispersion of the data does not represent a normal distribution the Median (64) Split method was used to categorize the level of attitudes of tourists into “good” and “poor”. Of the tourists, 126 (51.2%) had a “good” attitude (scores from 64 – 83), while 120 (48.8%) had a “poor” attitude (scores from 22 - 63) (Figure 3).

Attitude of the managers on eco-tourism

The same 22 statements were utilized to assess the level of attitude among hotel managers. The managers had a mean attitude score of 69.4 ± 6.422 , with a range of 51 – 84 (Figure 4). Since the dispersion of the data does not represent a normal distribution, the Median (71) Split method was used to categorize the level of attitudes of hotel managers into “good” and “poor”. Of the managers, 32 (91.4%) had “good” attitudes (scores from 71 – 84), while 3 (8.6%) had “poor” attitudes (scores from 51 - 70). (Figure 4)

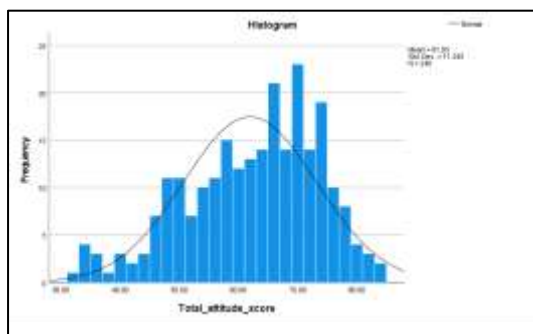


Figure 3- Attitudes of tourist on eco-tourism

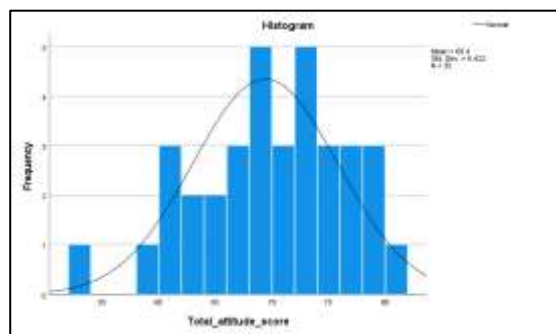


Figure 4 - Attitudes of managers on eco- tourism

Socio-demographic factors associated with knowledge and attitude of tourists.

Of the analyzed socio-demographic factors, the level of the education is the only factor which was significantly related to the knowledge and the attitudes. A significantly higher number of respondents with a tertiary education had a “good” knowledge when compared to the other two categories (OR=2.567, P=0.014). Similarly, the respondents with secondary education (OR=2.328, P=0.039) and tertiary education (OR=2.423, P=0.022) had good attitudes when compared with the respondents with elementary education.

Socio-demographic factors associated with knowledge and attitude of hotel managers.

None of the tested socio-economic factors such as gender, education, income level ect., were correlated significantly with managers attitudes or the knowledge.

Correlation between Knowledge and Attitudes.

Pearson correlation test revealed that there was a statistically significant weak positive correlation between knowledge and attitude among both tourists (Pearson correlation test; $r=0.299$, $P<0.001$) and tour managers (Pearson correlation test; $r=0.418$, $P=0.012$).

Relationship of knowledge and attitudes among the tourists and managers.

Independent samples T test found that total knowledge score is significantly higher among tour managers than tourists ($T=4.726$, $P<0.001$). Independent samples t-test found that the total attitude score is significantly higher among tour managers than tourists ($T=2.434$, $P < 0.001$).

DISCUSSION

Nearly half the tourists had good knowledge, while more than 90% of the managers had good knowledge in this study, with an overall mean knowledge score of 13.19 ± 2.764 and 14.91 ± 1.82 . The highest a respondent could have obtained was 16 marks. Thus, the mean score indicated better knowledge among both groups. The knowledge was especially lacking only in certain aspects, like tourists had less knowledge of their responsibilities while managers thought manipulating natural ecosystems for the benefit of humans was inevitable. Different research in the literature revealed that according to different communities’ knowledge among the general public was different. In many populations, it’s scarce, at least in several aspects (Cini *et al.*, 2015).

Of the attitudes of the tourists and managers who participated in the questionnaire survey, half the tourists had good attitudes as ($n=126$, 51.2%) with a mean total attitude score of 62.08 ± 11.50 . while 91.4% ($n=32$) of the managers had good attitudes with a mean total attitude score of 69.40 ± 6.42 . The rights of the controlling abilities of other animal populations for human survival and the damage for the wildlife and habitats due the eco-tourism activities which were the strong negative attitude presented by hotel manager through the questionnaire survey. These are sensitive aspects of eco-tourism where the tourists and the managers should have the best practices to protect the wildlife



while offering the ecotourism services. It's crucial for the managers to have better attitudes towards wildlife protection and safeguarding as their actions will directly impact the ecosystem.

According to Arroyo in 2012, in a study done in the Philippines, the majority of the students knew a fair amount about ecotourism, and they were especially informed about how ecotourism affects the local ecology. On the other hand, they knew virtually little about how it affected the neighbourhood. Less than half of the respondents were aware that ecotourism entails using neighbourhood services like meal preparation and tour guides, while the majority were aware that taking an ecotour meant learning about the local flora and fauna while consistently adhering to environmentally friendly practices. Further, the majority of the students had a favourable attitude towards ecotourism (Arroyo, 2012). Other studies indicate opposite patterns where the knowledge and the attitude were scarce with respect to eco-tourism and its practices (Cini *et al.*, 2015). Thus, the level of knowledge and attitude are variable across different populations.

Knowledge and attitudes of eco-tourism found to be multifaceted. In this study the only significantly associated factor was higher education, where the respondents with a secondary or tertiary education showed a better knowledge and a better attitude both in tourists and managers. Tertiary education was found to be a significant predictor of good knowledge ($p=0.014$) and secondary education ($p=0.039$) and having tertiary education ($p=0.022$) were identified as significant predictors of good attitude of tourists. The knowledge and the attitudes were seemingly higher in the respondents with a higher education level, indicating that probably the knowledge gained from school levels on the environment at least would have increased the knowledge and attitudes of the respondents.

There was a weak positive relationship between knowledge and attitudes (Tourists: $r=0.299$, $p<0.001$) (Managers; $r=0.418$, $p=0.012$). Some other research done in various countries has revealed the same findings regarding knowledge and attitudes. It may be observed that there is a positive relationship between environmental behaviour and attitude, environmental knowledge and behaviour, and environmental attitude and knowledge (Fang *et al.*, 2018) During the current study the independent samples T test found that total knowledge and attitude score was significantly higher among hotel managers than tourists. This can be attributed to the fact that the hotel managers are practicing some sort of eco-tourism practices as their livelihood thus it's obvious for them to have better knowledge and attitude than the tourists, who in this case are not really "eco-tourists".

In this research only half the tourists had good knowledge. It's crucial to take steps to educate them, especially on the responsibilities of the tourists. In terms of the managers, even though their knowledge and attitude were far better than that of the travellers, they should improve their attitude in terms of utilization of the ecosystem for the benefit of the humans. As seen during the study, as better knowledge results in better attitudes towards eco-tourism it's crucial to increase the knowledge among the general public on eco-tourism. In future research it would be interesting to assess the practices/behaviours thus the actual status of the eco-tourism practices can be fully understood.

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