

IMPACT OF PSYCHOSOCIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS ON EMPLOYEE TURNOVER INTENTION AT LARGE FIRM APPAREL INDUSTRY - SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

The Apparel Industry of Sri Lanka plays a vital role in the Sri Lankan economy, contributing more than 900 billion LKR to Gross Domestic Product. The industry faces contemporary challenges in the world market, with the growing trend of Employee Turnover. Understanding this red-hot management problem, the current study investigates the impact of Psychological Factors (PFs), Social Factors (SFs), and Organizational Specific Factors (OSFs) on Employee Turnover Intention (ETI) and the mediation effect of Employee Satisfaction (ES). The research was conducted based on six hypotheses. Primary data were collected from 425 ground-level workers through a well-structured questionnaire and 380 responses were selected through basic screening for further analysis. Through the analysis, it was found that PFs, SFs, and OSFs have a negative and significant impact on ETI. Further, findings explored the partial mediating effect of ES between the Independent Variables and the Dependent Variable. The study contributes to the literature by empirically grounding selected variables and providing insights to policymakers in the Sri Lankan Apparel Industry.

KEYWORDS: *Psychological Factors, Social Factors, Organizational Specific Factors, Employee Satisfaction, Employee Turnover Intention*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The apparel industry in Sri Lanka began in the 1960s to meet domestic needs, and it was expanded to become a major foreign income generator by the 1980s, following the economic liberalization in 1977. Throughout the 1980s, apparel exporting was developing rapidly; consequently, in 1986, the textile “selling overseas” became the most significant portion, 27 percent, of all exports of Sri Lanka (Kelegama and Epaarachchi, 2009). The apparel industry became the most significant foreign swap earner (US\$400 Mn) in 1992, overtaking the tea trade of the country. In 1992, the BOI presented the “Two Hundred Garment Factory” programme, which was a tempting package for all clothing manufacturers. This shift led producers to move to rural regions in the country, marking the “turning point” of the apparel industry in Sri Lanka. The programme aimed to establish 163 factories by 1995 (Silva, 2017). The Sri Lankan garment industry has become the prime employer of the country's manufacturing sector and provides nearly 15 percent of direct employment from the country's total industrial workforce (JAAFSL, 2020).

High ETI remains as a major concern across labour intensive industries globally, and it has been repeatedly surfaced in apparel industry. According to the Park *et al.*, 2020 and Zhu *et al.*, 2023, employee retention directly affects the productivity and quality measures in any industry. The competitive cost structure, market pressures, limited career development and many other factors resulted in a huge workforce instability in the South Asian context where ETI has become a major human resource problem (Ganewatta and Hiroshima, 2023). As explored by Gunathilaka and Rathnakara (2024) and Jayanthi and Arachchige (2024), ETI is still a major management problem in the Sri Lankan context despite recent developments in financial and demographic benefits by exploring the long-standing practice gap of the domain as Mathis and Jackson (2006) and Dess and Shaw (2001) have stated that turnover is a costly problem. Further, scholars have explored that aggregating labour costs (salary, training, recruitment, turnover, etc.) decreases a firm's profitability

and productivity.

According to Rajapaksha (2015), the Sri Lankan apparel industry is experiencing 6.6 percent of monthly employee turnover. Moreover, Wijebandara *et al.*, (2019) have also stated that the annual rate of employee turnover is 48 percent in the Sri Lankan context. Brown *et al.* (2009) highlighted that labour turnover affects both workers and firms. Workers are being affected by experience disruption, the need for extra effort to learn new job-specific skills, and the requirement to find different career prospects. Firms, on the other hand, lose job-specific skills, suffer disruption in production, and incur the costs of hiring and training new workers.

When scrutinizing the literature, numerous studies have been conducted to identify factors affecting ETI, with many highlighting rewards as a major ES factor. Depending on findings of research and industry developments, employees have been given considerable wage rates, bonuses, medical coverage, entertainment opportunities, transportation facilities, etc., to make them satisfied and to retain them for a long time as a solution for employee turnover (Madurawala, 2017; Rajapaksha, 2018; Godagampala, 2020).

It is revealed that factors already addressed through research and implemented by industry employers have not fully satisfied the employees, and other factors still need adequate research. Hence, this study focuses on investigating the impact of non-financial factors, such as psychosocial and organizational factors, on ETI at large firms in the apparel industry in Sri Lanka.

This study aims to have a holistic approach with two research questions. The first question is: “*How do psychological, social, and organizational-specific factors influence employee turnover intention in large apparel firms in Sri Lanka?*” Then, the second question is: “*To what extent does employee satisfaction mediate these relationships?*”

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Initially, Researchers conducted a comprehensive literature survey to understand the knowledge

domain's existing theoretical and empirical landscape. Researchers rigorously scrutinized the existing literature to explore variables, dimensions, and items of the current study.

The current study is theoretically underpinned with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which explores three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The first independent variable in this study, PFs was derived with SDT. Then the second and third independent variables of the study, SFs and OSFs operate as contextual mechanisms that facilitate or hinder their fulfillment. The literature provides evidence that the satisfaction derived from these needs negatively influenced in ETI in different contexts (Ryan and Deci, 2020; Olafsen *et al.*, 2021).

Many scholars in this domain have studied and found that the psychological well-being of employees is a critical factor and helps organizations to retain qualified and experienced workers (Fotiadis *et al.*, 2019). To analyze the psychological well-being of employees, scholars have repeatedly used basic psychological needs. SDT has explored three basic psychological needs of Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness, where many scholars have conducted research in different disciplines referring to these needs (Haski-Leventhal *et al.*, 2019; Asi, 2021; Olafsen *et al.*, 2021; Wilson, 2022).

Povey and Tomaszewski (2015) explored that the quality of employees' work is affected by SFs such as living standards, social bonds, social conflicts, and economic consequences. When scrutinizing the literature, social recognition (Bradler *et al.*, 2014; Nayak *et al.*, 2020), Work Life Balance (WLB) (Kasau, 2017; Mendis and Weerakkody, 2018; Divisekara, 2019), and socialization (Özdemir and Ergun, 2015; Pennaforte, 2016) have been identified as strong determinants to measure SFs.

During the current literature survey, researchers understood that OSFs such as organizational culture, organizational image, and management philosophy are strong dimensions (Fouad, 2019; Younis and Hammad, 2021)

Scholars explored that a satisfied employee has a good perception about the company (Dziuba, Ingaldi and Zhuravskaya, 2020), performs better in his/her job (Abraham, 2014), feels safe about his/ her future in the workplace (Bhargava, Bester and Bolton, 2021), feels happy at the job (Yoocharoen and Aungabsee, 2018), feels as part of the enterprise (Dziuba, Ingaldi and Zhuravskaya, 2020). Most delighted employees have achieved their expectations up to an acceptable level through the job (Saha, Kabi, and Nazrul, 2020). For the purpose of the current study, researchers use perception of organization, perception of job security, happiness at work, employee expectation, and better performance dimensions of job satisfaction.

ETI is the likelihood of someone leaving or quitting the job in the near future. There are two types of employee turnover in a firm: voluntary and involuntary (Nawas *et al.*, 2009). For the purpose of the current study, researchers derived dimensions for ETI as Search for Job Opportunities (Ngo-Henha, 2017), Perception on Contribution of Organization (Nawas, Rahman and Siraji, 2009), Easiness of Movement, Value of Organizational Relationships (Zhang, Fried and Griffeth, 2012), and Compatibility with Job Role (Ngo-Henha, 2017).

When scrutinizing recent studies, SDT framework has been extended to different industrial settings, highlighting that supportive organizational culture and recognition significantly predict employee retention (Li, 2024; Park *et al.*, 2020; Perera, 2024). A meta-analysis by Zhu *et al.* (2023) confirmed that job satisfaction consistently mediates the relationship between workplace factors and ETI. However, the extensive literature survey of the current study confirmed that the impact PFs, SFs and OSFs on ETI and mediating role of ES have not been empirically tested in Sri Lankan apparel industry context. These contemporary findings reinforce the relevance of testing psychosocial and organizational predictors of ETI within emerging economies such as Sri Lanka.

After a rigorous literature survey, researchers derived variables, dimensions and items for the purpose of operationalization as tabulated at Table 1.

Table 1: Operationalization

Variable	Dimension	Items
PFs	Autonomy	Decision Making Authority
		Responsibility and Accountability
	Competence	Job Competence
		Self-competence
	Relatedness	Feel Connected
		Team Approach
SFs	Recognition	Willing to Company
		Expertise
		Moral Responsibilities
		Supportive Environment
	WLB	Flexible Policies
		Collaborative Approach
		Early Socialization
	Socialization	Formal Socialization
		Post Socialization
		People Orientation
OSFs	Organizational culture	Control
		Projected Image
	Organizational image	Interpreted Image
		Working Environment
	Management philosophy	Communication
		Better Performances
ES	Perception of Organization	
	Perception of Job Security	
	Happiness at Work	
	Employee Expectation	
	Better Performances	
ETI	Search for Job Opportunities	
	Perception of Organization Contribution	
	Easiness of Movement	
	Value of Relationships	
	Compatibility with Job Role	

3. METHODOLOGY

This work behaves as an explanatory study, and empirical validation was executed based on primary data collected in quantitative form. Researchers utilized a well-structured questionnaire developed to align with the operationalization table.

3.1 Conceptual Framework

Under this section, researchers conceptualized selected variables by developing a Conceptual Framework, which is shown in Figure 1.

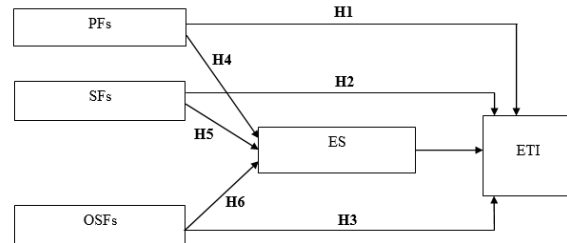


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

As per Figure 1, PFs, SFs, and OSFs can be identified as Independent Variables. Further, ES can be categorized as a Mediating Variable of this study, whereas ETI is the Dependent Variable.

Having established the conceptual framework of the study, researchers developed the following hypotheses for empirical validation.

H1 - PFs negatively and significantly impact on ETI in the Sri Lankan Apparel Industry.

H2 - SFs negatively and significantly impact on ETI in the Sri Lankan Apparel Industry.

H3 - OSFs negatively and significantly impact on ETI in the Sri Lankan Apparel Industry.

H4 - ES significantly mediates between PFs and ETI in the Sri Lankan Apparel Industry.

H5 - ES significantly mediates between SFs and ETI in the Sri Lankan Apparel Industry.

H6 - ES is a significant mediating factor between OSFs and ETI in the Sri Lankan Apparel Industry.

3.3 Sampling Plan, Data Collection, and Method of Analysis

For the purpose of operationalization, ground-level garment workers were selected as the target population. Then, a simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure equal opportunity and 425 workers were selected. Then, researchers

distributed close-ended structured questionnaires to collect empirical data. However, only 380 responses were selected for further processing, as 45 were removed during initial screening due to multiple selections, incompleteness, and outliers. Researchers used SPSS and AMOS for data analysis.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Initially, researchers assessed the Reliability, Validity, Sample Adequacy, and Fitness of the current study's model for further processing.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	CR
PFs	.820	0.529	0.870
SFs	.926	0.631	0.939
OSFs	.933	0.751	0.948
ES	.963	0.872	0.971
ETI	.973	0.905	0.979

Table 3 : KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.969
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	14456.613
	Df	465
	Sig.	.000

According to Table 2, all Cronbach's Alpha values are above 0.80, indicating that the operationalization of all selected variables, the questionnaire's internal consistency, and the questionnaire's interdependencies are at an acceptable and satisfactory level. Further, Table 2 shows that all AVE values are above 0.5, whereas all CR values exceed the norm of 0.7. The results show that the selected dimensions under each study variable are representative of operationalizing the variable, and the study's accuracy is high.

Then, researchers tested the adequacy of the selected sample using the KMO and Bartlett's Test of

Sphericity, and the results in Table 3 indicate that the sample adequately reflects changes in the population.

Table 4: CMIN Test

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default model	79	1422.384	297	.000	2.338
Saturated model	496	.000	0		
Independence model	21	6171.260	465	.000	11.272

Table 5: RMR, GFI Test

Model	RMR	GFI	AGFI	PGFI
Default model	.038	.911	.832	.709
Saturated model	.000	1.000		
Independence model	.171	.218	.166	.204

Table 6: Baseline Comparisons

Model	NFI Delta1	RFI rho1	IFI Delta2	TLI rho2	CFI
Default model	.921	.873	.920	.928	.918
Saturated model	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Independence model	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Table 7: RMSEA Test

Model	RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90	PCLOSE
Default model	.054	.049	.058	.000
Independence model	.180	.176	.184	.000

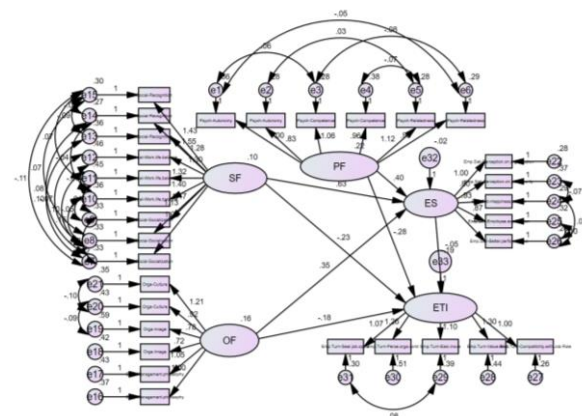


Figure 2: Output view of SEM

According to Table 4, the Chi-Square (df) value is 2.338, the value falls below the norm value of 3, and the value is significant ($P = .000$). Table 5 shows the GFI value as 0.911 and the AGFI value as 0.832, both of which are at an acceptable level. Table 6 shows NFI and IFI values of 0.921 and 0.920, respectively, and both values are within an acceptable level. Finally, Table 7 shows the RMSEA value of 0.054, which is lower than the accepted maximum value of 0.08.

Considering all the statistical outputs described above, it can be concluded that the model in the current study is absolutely fit.

After confirming the initial statistical suitability of the current study, researchers used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to examine the relationships among the selected variables and test the study's hypotheses. Figure 2 and Table 8 show the output of the SEM analysis.

Table 8: Total Effect, Direct Effect and Indirect Effect

	PFs		SFs		OSFs	
	Estimate	P Value	Estimate	P Value	Estimate	P Value
Total Effect	-.355	.010	-.349	.006	-.250	.008
Direct Effect	-.282	.010	-.233	.033	-.185	.016
Indirect Effect	-.074	.041	-.117	.045	-.065	.048

Table 8 shows that all P-values are less than 0.05, confirming significance at the 95% confidence level.

The current analysis revealed that PFs negatively impact ETI (total impact -0.355). Meanwhile, the direct effect is -0.282, whereas the indirect effect appears as -0.074. The output shows that the direct effect is lower than the total effect, the gap between the total effect and the direct effect is represented by the indirect effect. This confirms the partial mediating effect of ES between PFs and ETI. Therefore, H1 and H4 of the study can be accepted.

The total impact of SFs on ETI is -0.349, whereas direct and indirect effects values are -0.233 and -.117 respectively. This condition has confirmed the partial mediating effect of ES between SFs and ETI. Therefore, H2 and H5 of the current study can also be accepted.

According to Table 8, the total effect of OSFs on ETI is -0.250, whereas the direct impact and indirect effect are -0.185 and -0.065, respectively. These values confirm the partial mediating effect of ES between the OSF and ETI. Therefore, this output confirms H3 and H6 of the study, and it was accepted.

5. DISCUSSION

According to the H1 and H4 of the study, PFs significantly and negatively impact the ETI directly

and indirectly in the Sri Lankan apparel industry, where basic psychological needs were used as dimensions of the predictor. Since autonomy is one of the psychological needs according to the SDT (Ryan and Deci, 2020; Olafsen *et al.*, 2021), facilitating and encouraging autonomy is important to reduce ETI in the apparel sector. Autonomy is also reflected indirectly in recognition and organizational culture, which collectively foster a participative environment and will become a culture within the organization. Moreover, since autonomy enables operators to make decisions regarding their work, it will increase productivity and quality. Operators can operate more efficiently and effectively when they have the freedom to change machine settings, solve issues, and control their own workload (Ahakwa *et al.*, 2021; Lee and Kim, 2023). Autonomy also instills in operators a sense of ownership and responsibility, which can contribute to higher job satisfaction and retention. Furthermore, autonomous operators are better suited to respond to changing production demands and technological improvements, ensuring the sector's competitiveness and agility, where the apparel sector is highly competitive and keeps changing. Therefore, autonomy has a positive impact on the operations of the organization directly and indirectly, and managers can consider the findings of the current study for their decision-making process.

According to the SDT, competence is another basic psychological need that was selected and proven through the current study. Competence affects employee turnover intention and ensures high-quality production and efficient resource use since skilled and competent operators are more effective and efficient (Deci *et al.*, 2017). These findings align with recent literature evidence that skill development and perceived competence strongly predict employee satisfaction and retention in labour-intensive sectors (Zhu *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, continuous training and empowerment are vital managerial interventions in Sri Lankan apparel industry.

The third dimension of the PFs is Relatedness, which is a crucial factor that can impact the job performance and well-being of apparel flow workers according to the existing literature and findings of the current study

(Løvaas, 2020; Hood and Patton, 2021; Gunathilaka and Rathnakara, 2024). In the apparel industry, workers often work in teams or groups, and a sense of relatedness can help to strengthen teamwork and collaboration. When workers feel connected and valued by their colleagues and supervisors, they are more likely to be motivated, engaged, and committed to their jobs. This can improve job performance, job satisfaction, and overall well-being for apparel flow workers.

The study confirmed that social factors—recognition, WLB, and socialization—negatively and significantly influence turnover intention, and findings align with Rajapaksha, (2015) and Athukorala (2017). Many scholars have noted that the persistent social stigma surrounding garment work undermines the recognition of workers. This highlights the need for positive employer branding and community engagement a finding that is also empirically supported by the current study. Therefore, policy makers and managers need to pay more attention to uplift recognition of workers since it mitigates the employee dissatisfaction and ETI in the industry.

The apparel industry is known for its long working hours and high-pressure environments, which can lead to work-related stress and burnout, where both theoretical and empirical literature have shown that dissatisfaction in one role can have a destructive impact on the other roles (Kasau, 2017; Mendis and Weerakkody, 2018; Perera, 2024). The current study has found that WLB is a significant SF that impacts the ES and ETI, where Mendis and Weerakkody (2018) have found the positive impact of WLB on ES in the Sri Lankan context. The demographic statistics of the current study explored that most apparel employees are young married women; family responsibilities heighten the importance of WLB initiatives to reduce stress and enhance satisfaction.

Moreover, despite time pressures, structured onboarding and peer socialization can mitigate depersonalization and enhance engagement, as confirmed by the findings of this study, and bring to the attention of HR professionals.

H3 and H6 of the current study found a significant negative impact of OSFs on ETI. According to the literature, and consistent with SDT's emphasis on contextual support for autonomy and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2020; Li, 2024), such supportive environments enhance employees' motivation and engagement. Since the existing literature and statistics have proven the excessive employee turnover and dissatisfaction (Rajapaksha, 2015; Wijebandara *et al.*, 2019), establishing and improving a positive organizational culture is important in the Sri Lankan apparel industry. Further, Rajapaksha (2018) shows that Sri Lankan garment workers' social identity is questionable.

Organizational image is also a crucial determinant of employees' satisfaction and attachment to the organization. The current study used organizational image as a strong predictor of OSFs and found a negative correlation with the ETI. According to the surveyed literature, the Sri Lankan apparel industry has not created a good image for its workers in the general society, where the majority of workers are reluctant to openly say that they are working in the apparel sector (Wijesekara, 2017). Therefore, uplifting the industry image is much important to attract and retain employees within the industry.

Management philosophy, though classified under OSFs, underpins all organizational management practices. Effective management philosophies encourage participation and support employee needs, enhancing satisfaction and retention. Conversely, the prevalent target-driven management style in Sri Lankan apparel firms (Rajapaksha, 2015) warrants re-evaluation in light of current findings.

Overall, the results demonstrate that fulfilling employees' psychological and contextual needs simultaneously improves satisfaction and reduces ETI in Sri Lankan apparel firms.

6. CONCLUSION

The current study was conducted to investigate the impact of Psychosocial and Organizational Factors on ETI. Researchers conducted this work using empirical evidence collected from 380 respondents, which was

analyzed to test six predetermined hypotheses. With extensive statistical analysis, researchers accept all the six hypotheses of the study and contribute to existing knowledge of this domain.

Having understood the significant impacts of selected predictors directly and indirectly, the findings suggest that the Sri Lankan Apparel Industry should immediately take possible counteractions to satisfy the PFs, SFs, and OSFs of employees and retain them.

Finally, researchers acknowledge several limitations during the current work. First, researchers tested only the impact of PFs, SFs, and OSFs on ETI, whereas many other factors may be present. Therefore, researchers propose that future studies conduct more exploratory work in this domain to identify additional factors that impact ETI. Further, the current study did not focus on the causes behind the ETI of employees. Hence, researchers recommend conducting more descriptive studies on specific cases. Furthermore, the current study is empirically grounded in the Sri Lankan context, where findings can differ in other geographical areas. Therefore, it is recommended that the study's conceptual framework be validated across different contexts to enhance generalizability.

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