

# Stitching Satisfaction: Determinants and Disparities in Job Satisfaction in Sri Lanka's Apparel Sector

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## **Abstract**

*The study examines the determinants of job satisfaction in Sri Lanka's apparel industry, a labor-intensive, export-oriented sector critical to the national economy. Despite its economic significance, employee well-being in this industry remains underexplored. Drawing on existing literature, the study identifies key factors influencing job satisfaction: pay and promotional opportunities, quality of work-life, supervisory support, and teamwork. Data were gathered from 177 employees representing multiple job categories in apparel firms. Spearman correlation analysis reveals that all identified factors exert a significant positive relationship with job satisfaction. The findings indicate notable disparities in satisfaction across hierarchical levels: non-executive and managerial staff report dissatisfaction or neutrality regarding pay, promotions, and teamwork, whereas junior executives demonstrate higher satisfaction. Supervisory support emerges as a particularly influential factor, underscoring its role in motivating employees. These structural and perceptual variations highlight the need for targeted human resource strategies and policy reforms to enhance satisfaction and organizational performance. The insights offer practical implications for managers, policymakers, and stakeholders committed to fostering sustainable workforce practices within Sri Lanka's apparel sector.*

**Keywords:** Job Satisfaction, Pay, Promotional opportunities, Supervision, Teamwork, Work-life quality

**JEL CODES:** E24, J3, J24, J28, M12, O15

## Introduction

Human resources are widely recognized as the most crucial asset of any organization, directly influencing productivity, efficiency, and overall performance. In labor-intensive industries such as apparel manufacturing, employee job satisfaction plays a pivotal role in shaping organizational outcomes. Job satisfaction, defined as an employee's emotional response to their job (Zhang et al., 2010), is closely linked with motivation, engagement, and retention, which are essential for sustaining competitive advantage. Thus, among human resource management (HRM) functions, investments and efforts on improving employees' job satisfaction have become imperative (Wang, 2024).

This is particularly applicable to Sri Lanka's apparel sector, which employs approximately 15% of the national labor force and has been the country's largest export-earning industry since 1986 (Sri Lanka Export Development Board, 2023). Although the apparel sector has been a significant contributor to foreign exchange in Sri Lanka over the past years, it has not yet been able to build a committed workforce (Gnanayudam & Dharmasiri, 2007). Despite its economic significance and global reputation, the sector faces persistent challenges, including high labor turnover (60% per factory annually), absenteeism (7.4% monthly), and a shortage of skilled labor (Dheerasinghe, 2009; Kottawatta, 2007). Thus, this industry faces logistical challenges, specifically the labor force shortage (Weerawansa & Hewage, 2023). These issues are largely attributed to inadequate attention to employee satisfaction, stemming from deficiencies in compensation, promotion opportunities, supervision, interpersonal relationships, and overall work-life quality (Gamlath, 2019).

Prior research underscores the critical role of job satisfaction in enhancing organizational citizenship behaviour, reducing absenteeism, and improving performance (Spector, 2012; Jayaweera, 2015). However, empirical studies within the Sri Lankan apparel sector remain sparse; they predominantly focus on discrete factors such as leadership (e.g., Wijesinghe, 2021), attitudes (e.g., Kottawatta, 2013), or aspects of well-being (e.g., Mathushan & Kengatharan, 2022). Given Sri Lanka's export target of USD 8 billion by 2025 (International Trade Administration, 2022), retaining a motivated and committed workforce is essential.

This research addresses a significant gap in the literature by examining the association of four key determinants (pay and promotion, quality of work life, supervision, and teamwork dynamics) with job satisfaction. These determinants have been emphasized as the significant factors affecting job satisfaction in prior studies (e.g., Wang, 2024; Ramachandran et al., 2024; Dilrukshi, 2017; Karuna & Reddy, 2018). The primary objective of this study is to investigate the determinants and disparities in job satisfaction within Sri Lanka's apparel industry, employing a quantitative research

framework. Data were gathered from 177 employees across garment factories in Sri Lanka.

This study makes several contributions to the literature on job satisfaction within the Sri Lankan apparel sector. Firstly, it enriches the contextual understanding of job satisfaction by focusing on a labor-intensive industry that plays a crucial role in the national economy. Secondly, it addresses a notable research gap by examining multiple determinants of job satisfaction and their disparities rather than isolating a single factor, as seen in much of the existing literature. Third, this study identifies disparities in job satisfaction levels among employees in the apparel industry across different hierarchies. Fourth, the study offers practical insights for human resource practitioners and industry stakeholders, highlighting actionable strategies to enhance employee well-being, reduce turnover, and improve organizational performance.

Given the sector's persistent challenges with employee retention and absenteeism, understanding the influence of these key satisfaction drivers is essential for developing effective workforce management strategies. By identifying the factors that most strongly associate with job satisfaction, this research provides a foundation of targeted interventions aimed at retaining skilled labor and minimizing recruitment and training costs.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the existing literature, Section 3 outlines the conceptual framework and operationalization, Section 4 delineates the dataset and research methodology, Section 5 presents the findings and discusses their implications, and Section 6 concludes the study, suggesting policy implications and directions for future research.

## **Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Literature**

Understanding employee job satisfaction requires a theoretical foundation, both the content of motivation and the process through which it operates. Theoretical frameworks on employee job satisfaction are broadly categorized into content theories and process theories, each offering distinct perspectives on what drives employee motivation and satisfaction. Content theories focus on what motivates individuals, while process theories explain how motivation occurs.

Content theories, including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Alderfer's ERG theory, and Herzberg's two-factor theory, offer a foundational lens for examining the interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic variables that influence job satisfaction. Maslow's theory (1943) posits that employees must first address fundamental needs such as compensation and job security before progressing toward higher-order needs like esteem and self-actualization, which can be fulfilled through opportunities for

promotion and engagement in meaningful work. Alderfer's ERG theory (1969) introduces a more flexible approach by allowing for the concurrent pursuit of existence, relatedness, and growth needs. This framework is especially pertinent in the apparel industry, where employees frequently navigate the dual imperativeness of financial necessity with desire for professional development and recognition.

Herzberg's Two-Factor theory is especially pertinent in this context. It distinguishes between hygiene factors, such as salary, working conditions, and supervision, that prevent dissatisfaction, and motivators such as recognition, advancement, and responsibility that actively enhance satisfaction (Herzberg, 1959). This dual structure aligns closely with the study's focus on both extrinsic (pay and promotion) and intrinsic (Teamwork, supervision, quality of work-life) determinants of job satisfaction.

Process theories provide a nuanced framework for comprehending how employees interpret and respond to various organizational conditions. Expectancy theory, posited by Vroom (1964), asserts that employee motivation is contingent upon the belief that their exertions will culminate in favorable outcomes. Within the apparel industry, where compensation structures frequently hinge on output-driven incentives, the perceived correlation among effort, performance, and reward becomes particularly critical. If employees perceive a mismatch, such as insufficient compensation relative to high effort, this misalignment can lead to a substantial decline in job satisfaction and overall organizational commitment.

Goal-setting theory by Locke (1968) emphasizes the importance of clear, attainable objectives in enhancing motivation and satisfaction. In production-driven environments, the presence of well-defined performance targets, coupled with supportive supervision and team collaboration, can significantly influence employees' sense of achievement and engagement.

Equity theory contributes to understanding dissatisfaction by highlighting the role of perceived fairness in the input-output balance. Employees assess their contributions against the rewards they receive (Adams, 1963). Perceived inequalities, such as limited advancement opportunities or unequal treatment, can lead to demotivation, absenteeism, and turnover, all of which are prevalent in Sri Lanka's apparel sector.

Additionally, recent models such as the job demands-resource (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001) serve as a relevant theoretical framework for this study. In labor-intensive environments like Sri Lanka's apparel sector, factors such as job resources, compensation, promotional opportunities, work-life quality, and teamwork are essential in alleviating high job demands and promoting employee motivation. Consistent with the JD-R framework, these resources are expected to enhance

*Stitching Satisfaction: Determinants and Disparities in Job Satisfaction in Sri Lanka's Apparel Sector*

employees' job satisfaction by mitigating strain and facilitating the achievement of goals.

Collectively, these theories provide a robust framework for analyzing how key organizational factors correlate with job satisfaction. They underscore the importance of aligning employee needs and expectations with organizational practices, particularly in high-pressure, labor-intensive industries. By applying these theoretical perspectives, this study examines how pay and promotion opportunities, quality of work-life, supervisory support, and teamwork dynamics shape job satisfaction and, by extension, organizational performance in the Sri Lankan apparel industry.

### **Empirical Literature**

Compensation and promotion are consistently identified as primary drivers of job satisfaction (Wang, 2024; Ramachandran et al., 2024). Adequate and fair pay not only fulfills basic needs but also signals organizational value and equity (Judge et al., 2000; Raza & Khan, 2019). McCausland et al. (2005) argue that both financial and non-financial rewards are essential for sustaining motivation and performance. Promotion opportunities further enhance satisfaction by fulfilling employees' aspirations for growth and recognition (Robbins, 2001; Andrew, 2007). Fringe benefits such as healthcare and paid leave also contribute significantly to satisfaction and retention (Shafi, 2020; Lizotte, 2018). These findings underscore the importance of a holistic and equitable reward system in fostering job satisfaction. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated.

*H<sub>1</sub>: There is a statistically significant relationship between the organization's pay and promotional opportunities and employees' job satisfaction in the apparel sector in Sri Lanka.*

Quality of work-life (QWL) is a multidimensional construct encompassing job security, workload, work stress management, and occupational health and safety, factors that significantly influence employee satisfaction. Job security is particularly crucial in uncertain economic contexts, as studies have demonstrated a strong positive correlation between job security and job satisfaction (Artz & Kaya, 2014; Abdullah & Ramay, 2012). While moderate time pressure may enhance engagement, excessive workload and stress are associated with burnout and dissatisfaction (Goldschmied & Spitznagel, 2020). Occupational health and safety also play a vital role, with evidence suggesting that safe working conditions and clear roles significantly enhance job satisfaction (Türkmenoğlu, 2021), thereby constructing the following hypothesis.

*H<sub>2</sub>: There is a statistically significant relationship between the Quality of work-life and employees' job satisfaction in the apparel sector in Sri Lanka.*

Supervisory support plays a pivotal role in shaping employee attitudes and satisfaction. Effective supervision, characterized by guidance, trust-building, and recognition, has been shown to enhance job satisfaction by fostering a supportive work environment (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Supervisors who provide technical assistance and demonstrate respect contribute to reduced grievance and improved morale. Wech (2002) further emphasizes that supervisory behaviour significantly influences trust, which in turn strengthens job satisfaction. In contrast, Dwumah et al. (2015) explored a statistically insignificant correlation between supervision and job satisfaction, suggesting the need for context-sensitive supervisory practices that align with employee expectations and organizational culture. Henceforth, the following hypothesis is formulated.

*H<sub>3</sub>: There is a statistically significant relationship between supervisory support and employees' job satisfaction in the apparel sector in Sri Lanka.*

Teamwork is increasingly recognized as a key driver of job satisfaction, particularly in collaborative and task-intensive environments. Studies have claimed that effective team dynamics, marked by open communication, mutual support, and shared goals, enhance both job satisfaction and productivity (Shujaat et al., 2014; Karuna & Reddy, 2018). Moreover, Gladstein and Bresman (2007) assert that job satisfaction is often an outcome of team effectiveness, reinforcing the interdependence between individual and group performance. In contrast, Benrazavi and Silong (2013) suggest a reciprocal relationship in which satisfaction also predicts willingness to engage in teamwork.

*H<sub>4</sub>: There is a statistically significant relationship between teamwork and employees' job satisfaction in the apparel sector in Sri Lanka.*

While job satisfaction has been widely acknowledged as a key determinant of employee retention and organizational performance (Pathmasiri et al., 2024; Spector, 2012), empirical research within Sri Lanka's apparel sector remains limited in scope and depth. Existing studies confirm that satisfied employees are more likely to demonstrate organizational citizenship behaviours, reduced absenteeism, and improved work quality, which are essential for sustaining performance in labor-intensive, high-pressure environments (Jayaweera, 2015). Moreover, job satisfaction has been shown to mediate the relationship between employee-organization congruence and job performance (Perera, 2014; Mansi et al., 2024), reinforcing its strategic importance. Notwithstanding this, the apparel industry in Sri Lanka has rarely been examined through the lens of productivity and satisfaction, in an integrated manner (Ullah et al., 2024). Most existing studies focus on isolated variables or general attitudinal factors, offering limited insight into how specific determinants, such as compensation, supervision, or work-life quality, interact to

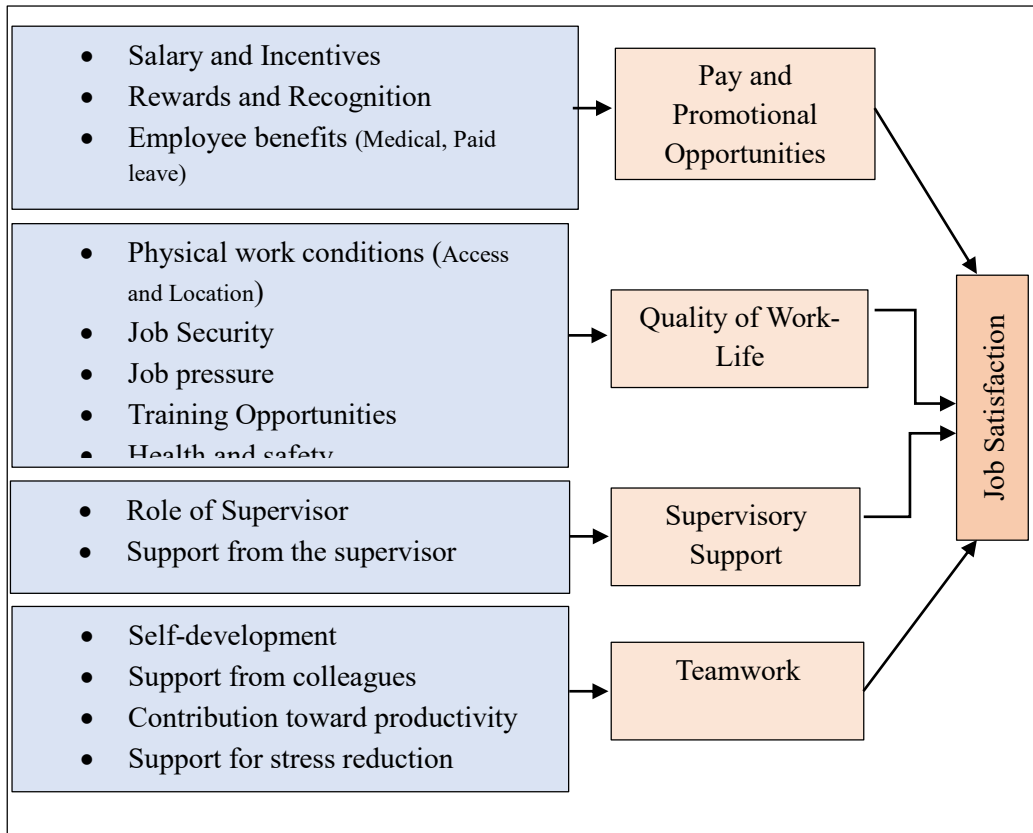
influence satisfaction. Noting the significant role played by the apparel sector in contributing to the national export targets, and its current challenges with labor retention, there is a pressing need for comprehensive, context-specific research that identifies the correlation between these determinants and job satisfaction, while examining the disparities of job satisfaction levels among employees within the apparel industry in Sri Lanka. Addressing this gap is essential for developing targeted HR strategies that enhance workforce stability and organizational performance.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in the premise that employee job satisfaction is a multidimensional construct influenced by both tangible and intangible organizational factors. Drawing on prior literature and empirical evidence, the framework identifies four key independent variables, pay and promotional opportunities, quality of work life, supervision, and teamwork, as crucial determinants of job satisfaction within the apparel sector in Sri Lanka.

The framework posits that pay and promotional opportunities represent extrinsic motivators that directly affect employees' perceptions of fairness and career progression, thereby influencing their satisfaction levels. Quality of work life encompasses elements such as job security, work-life balance, safety of working conditions, and growth opportunities, which collectively enhance employees' psychological well-being and organizational commitment. Supervision reflects the role of managerial support and leadership effectiveness in shaping employee attitudes, while teamwork captures the collaborative dynamics that foster social support, reduce stress, and improve performance outcomes.

Thus, this study operationalizes five core concepts: pay and promotional opportunities, quality of work life, supervisory support, teamwork, and job satisfaction to examine the relationship between these factors and job satisfaction among employees in the Sri Lankan apparel sector. Each component is defined through specific dimensions and measurable elements (presented in the blue boxes of the conceptual framework) derived from established literature, ensuring both theoretical grounding and empirical relevance. Collectively, these elements capture employees' perceptions of compensation and promotional opportunities, workplace conditions, supervisory relationships, team dynamics, and overall job satisfaction.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

*Source: Author's Compilation*

To capture the different aspects encompassed within each key component, the questionnaire was designed to include multiple items under each of the determinants. The corresponding question numbers illustrate how each concept is translated into observable survey items for the correlation analysis. This approach ensures a comprehensive measurement of the constructions, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how each dimension contributes to overall job satisfaction.

### **Data and Methodology**

This study adopts a descriptive research design, primarily aimed at systematically characterizing prevailing phenomena within a specific context, rather than engaging in interpretation or evaluation analysis (Creswell, 1994). The principal objective of descriptive research is to empirically validate hypotheses that elucidate the current state of the situation, thereby facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the observed scenario. This type of study emphasizes analysis of both past and present scenarios, offering insights into various aspects.

Data for this study were collected through a structured, self-administered questionnaire. The target population comprised employees from various apparel-sector organizations in Sri Lanka. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed, of which 177 were duly completed and returned, yielding an effective response rate of 88.5%. The sample strategy employed was non-probability convenience sampling, as delineated by Babin and Zikmund (1997/2016). This method was selected for its practicality in accessing a large number of respondents within a limited timeframe, thereby ensuring efficient data collection from readily available participants. The demographic and personal characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Profile of the Respondents**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Gender	Male	97	54.80
	Female	80	45.20
Age	18-25	28	15.82
	26-30	34	19.21
	31-35	59	33.33
	36-40	32	18.08
	Above 41 Years	24	13.56
Income	Below 25,000LKR	13	07.34
	25,001-50,000LKR	50	28.25
	50,001-75,000LKR	32	18.08
	75,001-100,000LKR	23	12.99
	100,001-125,000LKR	22	12.43
	125,001-150,000LKR	24	13.56
	Above 150,000LKR	13	7.34
Marital Status	Single	45	25.43
	Married	111	62.71
	Divorced/Widowed/Separated	21	11.86
Designation	Non-Executive (Machine Operators)	46	25.99
	Junior Executive	50	28.26
	Senior Executive	44	24.86
	Assistant Manager	21	11.86
	Manager	9	05.08
	Senior Manager	7	03.95

*Source: Authors' Calculations*

The sample comprises a majority of male participants (54.8%), while females account for 45.2%. The most represented age group is 31-35 years, whereas the 18-25-year category reflects the lowest participation. In terms of income distribution, a significant proportion of respondents (28.5%) report earnings between LKR 25,001 and LKR 50,000.

Regarding marital status, 62.71% of the respondents are married. Occupationally, the largest segment (28.26%) consists of junior executives, followed by non-executive employees, particularly machine operators (25.99%). The data further indicates that the majority of respondents hold positions below the assistant managerial level, with only 9.03% occupying roles above this tier. These demographic insights provide a contextual foundation for interpreting job satisfaction patterns within the apparel sector.

The study is structured in three phases, with the overarching aim of evaluating employee job satisfaction and examining its association with key organizational factors. Based on an extensive literature review, four independent variables were identified as potential determinants of job satisfaction: pay and promotion, quality of work life, supervision, and teamwork. Job satisfaction, the dependent variable, was assessed using four specific items.

Each independent variable was operationalized through multiple questionnaire items, resulting in a total of 23 items across all four components. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Dissatisfied) to 5 (Strongly Satisfied). To ensure reliability and internal consistency of the measurement instruments, a reliability analysis was conducted. This step was critical in validating the suitability of the items for subsequent statistical analysis.

The average satisfaction score for each item was computed using the following formula:

$$\text{Average Score } i = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^n S_{ij}}{n} \quad (1)$$

where  $S_{ij}$  denotes the satisfaction score reported by the respondent  $j$  for item  $i$ , and  $n$  is the total number of respondents.

Subsequently, the average satisfaction score for each component was calculated as:

$$\text{Average Satisfaction Score } c = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^m \text{Average Score } i}{m} \quad (2)$$

Where  $m$  represents the number of items under the component  $c$ .

To analyze the distribution of satisfaction levels, the percentage of respondents at each Likert scale level was computed using:

$$\text{Percentage of Satisfaction Level}_l = \frac{\text{Number of Respondents at Level}_l}{\text{Total Number of Respondents}} * 100 \quad (3)$$

Given the ordinal nature of Likert scale data, normality tests, specifically the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, were conducted to assess the distributional properties of the dataset. In the next phase, the study employed Spearman's correlation technique to examine the relationship between job satisfaction and its hypothesized determinants. This non-parametric technique was chosen due to the ordinal nature of the data and the results of the normality tests.

The use of descriptive statistics and correlation analysis provides valuable insights into organizational dynamics, highlighting areas of strength and potential improvement. By understanding the distribution of satisfaction levels across key dimensions, organizations can formulate strategies to enhance employee engagement and overall performance.

## **Results and Discussion**

The analytical process commenced with estimating descriptive statistics, followed by an evaluation of the reliability of the survey instruments utilized in this study. This was followed by an assessment of data distribution through normality testing, which informed the selection of appropriate statistical techniques for correlation analysis. The following subsections detail the results obtained from each phase of the analysis.

The descriptive statistics provide an overview of employees' perception of key factors influencing job satisfaction within the Sri Lankan apparel sector. Table 2 details the summary statistics of the analysis. The mean scores for all variables range from 3.19 to 2.55, reflecting generally moderate to moderately high levels of satisfaction. Among the predictors, supervision (Mean=3.42) and teamwork (Mean=3.41) exhibit the highest satisfaction levels, suggesting that employees perceive these aspects more positively. In contrast, pay and promotion (Mean=3.23) and quality of work life (3.20) reveal comparatively low satisfaction. Overall job satisfaction records the highest mean score (3.55), indicating that, despite mixed perceptions regarding individual factors, employees tend to report a moderately positive sense of overall job satisfaction.

Standard deviations (ranging from 0.51 to 0.85) indicate moderate variability, with job satisfaction demonstrating the greatest dispersion among respondents. The minimum and maximum values reveal a broad spectrum of responses, from low to high satisfaction, emphasizing the diversity of employee experiences. These findings

suggest that while employees generally appreciate their teamwork environment, support from supervisors, and work-life balance, enhancing pay and promotional opportunities could further improve overall job satisfaction.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics**

<b>Statistics</b>	<b>Pay and Promotion</b>	<b>Quality of Work Life</b>	<b>Supervision</b>	<b>Teamwork</b>	<b>Job Satisfaction</b>
N Valid	177	177	177	177	177
Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.2252	3.1969	3.4195	3.4102	3.55
Median	3.286	3.286	3.500	3.400	3.358
Mode	3	3	4	4	4
Std. Deviation	0.5364	0.5332	0.6448	0.5073	0.845
Minimum	1.5714	1.4286	1.5000	2.0000	1.2500
Maximum	4.1429	4.2857	5.0000	4.8000	4.500

*Source: Author-generated through SPSS*

A reliability test was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. A summary of reliability statistics for each variable is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Results of the Reliability Test**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Value of Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>No of items</b>
Pay and Promotion	0.716	7
Quality of Work Life	0.751	7
Supervision	0.833	4
Teamwork	0.650	5
Job Satisfaction	0.688	4

*Source: Author-generated through SPSS*

The overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to be 0.914, indicating a high level of reliability across the instrument. Furthermore, each variable exhibited a Cronbach's alpha value exceeding 0.6, which is considered the minimum acceptable threshold for reliability in social science research. These results confirm that the questionnaire items are statistically sound and suitable for further analysis.

Given the ordinal nature of data from Likert-scale responses, it was essential to evaluate the dataset's distribution before choosing a suitable statistical method for correlation analysis. Thus, a normality test was conducted to determine whether the sample data conformed to a normal distribution. This study employed two widely recognized statistical tests for normality: the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test and the Shapiro-Wilk (SW) test. These tests provide a robust evaluation of the distributional properties of data. The results of both tests are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Normality Test**

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pay and Promotion	0.212	177	0.000	0.917	177	0.000
Quality of Work Life	0.183	177	0.000	0.927	177	0.000
Supervision	0.188	177	0.000	0.911	177	0.000
Teamwork	0.159	177	0.000	0.951	177	0.000
Job Satisfaction	0.196	177	0.000	0.904	177	0.000

*Source: Author-generated through SPSS*

In accordance with Field (2009), the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was prioritized due to the sample size exceeding 50 ( $n=177$ ). The outcomes of the KS test indicate that all variables have a p-value of 0.000 ( $p < 0.5$ ), indicating that the data did not follow a normal distribution. These results justify the use of non-parametric statistical techniques in subsequent analyses; therefore, Spearman's correlation technique was employed.

The study employed Spearman's correlation techniques to examine the relationships between the dependent variable (job satisfaction) and the independent variables (pay and promotion, quality of work life, supervisory support, and teamwork).

Spearman's correlation analysis is particularly suitable for ordinal data and is utilized to examine both the strength and direction of monotonic relationships between variables. The resulting correlation coefficient, represented by  $\rho$  (rho), ranges from -1 to +1. The sign of the coefficient indicates the nature of the relationship, positive or negative, while the magnitude signifies the strength of the association (Frost, 2021). According to common guidelines, a coefficient correlation exceeding 0.5 suggests a strong relationship between variables. The outcomes of Spearman's correlation analysis are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5: Spearman's Correlation Analysis**

Variable	Correlation Coefficient	Significance (2-tailed)
Pay and Promotional Opportunities	.546**	0.000
Quality of work-life	.565**	0.000
Supervisory Support	.569**	0.000
Teamwork	.650**	0.000

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Author-generated using SPSS

The results of Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis reveal a statistically significant and positive association between pay and promotional opportunities and employee job satisfaction. Specifically, the Spearman's rho coefficient ( $\rho$ ) was calculated as  $\rho = 0.546$ , indicating a moderately strong positive correlation. The corresponding p-value ( $p = 0.000$ ) is well below the conventional significance threshold of  $\alpha = 0.05$ . This confirms that pay and promotional opportunities are significantly associated with job satisfaction among employees within the apparel industry in Sri Lanka, supporting hypothesis 1 ( $H_1$ ).

These findings align with prior empirical research that underscores the importance of financial compensation and career advancement in shaping employee satisfaction. Studies by Akhter (2010), Ramachandaran et al. (2024), Ullah et al. (2024), and Islam (2023) consistently report a positive relationship between remuneration, promotional prospects, and job satisfaction. Moreover, Kostea (2011) argues that promotions may exert a greater influence on job satisfaction than salary increments, as they signal recognition and career progression. This perspective is further supported by Vani and Janani (2016) and Chandrasekara (2019), who emphasize that promotional opportunities contribute significantly to employees' perceptions of career development and organizational commitment.

Spearman's correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between quality of work life and job satisfaction, with a correlation coefficient of  $\rho = 0.565$ . This value indicates a moderately strong positive correlation. The corresponding p-value ( $p = 0.000$ ) is significant at 1% level, confirming that the quality of work life within an organization has a significant impact on employee job satisfaction in Sri Lanka's apparel sector, supporting hypothesis 2 ( $H_2$ ).

This finding is consistent with prior research emphasizing the critical role of work-life quality in shaping employee attitudes and behaviours. Thus, enhanced quality of

work life positively influences job satisfaction, which in turn contributes to improved job performance and stronger retention intentions (Gomathi & Swapna, 2012; Raibul et al., 2023). Consequently, there is an established high degree of association between job satisfaction and work-life quality within the textile industry (Rajesh and Manoj, 2011), reinforcing the relevance of this relationship in labor-intensive sectors.

Further empirical evidence suggests that when employees experience a positive work-life balance, safe and supportive working conditions, and opportunities for personal and professional growth, they are more likely to report higher levels of job satisfaction. This, in turn, leads to improved organizational outcomes such as increased productivity, reduced turnover, and enhanced employee engagement (Deepika & Reddy, 2024; Gope & Ali, 2023). The results emphasize the critical role of creating a high-quality work environment to optimize employee satisfaction and drive organizational performance within the apparel industry.

The analysis further revealed a significant positive correlation between supervision and job satisfaction, with a Spearman's coefficient of  $\rho=0.569$  and a p-value of 0.000, demonstrating a statistical significance at the 1% level. The finding reinforces hypothesis 3 ( $H_3$ ), that supervisory support plays a crucial role in influencing job satisfaction in the apparel sector.

In line with this finding, Chandrasekara (2019) identified a significant positive association between supervisory practices and job satisfaction in the Sri Lankan apparel industry. Effective supervision, characterized by clear communication, support, and recognition, has been shown to enhance employee morale and engagement. Thus, supervision, as a key component of organizational leadership, directly contributes to improved job satisfaction and, by extension, overall organizational performance (Dissanayake and Wijesingha, 2017).

Among the four independent variables examined, teamwork exhibited the strongest positive correlation with job satisfaction, as evidenced by a Spearman's rho coefficient of  $\rho=0.650$ . This result indicates a strong monotonic relationship between teamwork and employee satisfaction. The associated p-value ( $p=0.000$ ) is statistically significant at the 1% level, thereby supporting hypothesis 4 ( $H_4$ ), that teamwork substantially influences job satisfaction within the apparel sector in Sri Lanka.

Empirical literature also supports this conclusion, highlighting that effective teamwork enhances both job satisfaction and employee productivity (Shujaat et al., 2014). Collaborative work environments foster mutual support, reduce occupational stress, and improve confidence and performance outcomes (Karuna & Reddy, 2018; Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). These dynamics contribute to a more engaged and

satisfying workforce, essential for sustaining operational efficiency and employee retention in labor-intensive industries such as apparel manufacturing.

Employee satisfaction level was assessed by calculating the average satisfaction score for each item and component, as outlined in the methodology. The results are illustrated in Table 6.

**Table 6: Job Satisfaction of the employees**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Strongly Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Strongly Satisfied</b>
Pay and Promotion	0.000	22.600	38.410	38.990	0.000
Quality of work life	1.131	9.040	50.281	39.548	0.000
Supervisory Support	0.000	6.215	29.944	59.321	4.520
Teamwork	0.000	6.780	45.198	45.762	2.260

*Note: Data is presented in frequency (percentage of high satisfaction).*

*Source: Author-generated through SPSS*

Despite the recognized importance of pay and promotional opportunities in motivating and retaining employees, the findings reveal a relatively weak perception among apparel sector workers in Sri Lanka. Notably, 34% of respondents expressed neutrality regarding satisfaction with advancement and remuneration opportunities, suggesting a broader sense of disengagement or inconsistency. This observation aligns with Herzberg's Two-Factor theory (Herzberg, 2003; Hackman & Oldham, 1976), which classifies salary and promotion as hygiene factors that prevent dissatisfaction but do not necessarily enhance motivation when present. The substantial proportion of neutral responses may indicate that these provisions are perceived as adequate but lack exceptional value, resulting in a plateau effect on motivation.

Further analysis reveals that only 38.99% of respondents reported satisfaction with pay and promotional opportunities, leaving over 60% either indifferent or dissatisfied. Hierarchical disparities are evident, with 39.13% of satisfied employees being junior executives, while dissatisfaction is pronounced among senior executives (40%) and managerial-level employees (29.73%). This suggests a misalignment between managerial expectations and organizational reward structures, indicating

that dissatisfaction is not confined to lower-level employees but extends to higher tiers with greater advancement expectations. Such dissatisfaction may have broader implications for organizational performance, including reduced motivation and increased turnover. These findings resonate with the critiques of the Sri Lankan apparel industry having rigid hierarchies and limited development programs (Wijayasiri & Dissanayake, 2008), as well as regional evidence of wage stagnation and restricted upward mobility in South Asian labor-intensive industries (Lopez-Acevedo & Robertson, 2012). Both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards significantly influence job satisfaction and organizational effectiveness (Sankalpana & Jayasekara, 2017; Gamlath, 2019). Therefore, implementing fair compensation and structured strategies remains critical for improving satisfaction related to pay and promotion (Vani & Janani, 2016; Chandrasekara, 2019).

Regarding quality of work life (QWL), the analysis indicates that 39.55% of employees are satisfied with key components, including work-life balance, job security, and workplace well-being. Among satisfied respondents, 62.86% are married, suggesting that supportive work-life arrangements are particularly valued by individuals managing professional and familial responsibilities (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Occupational disparities are evident, as non-executive employees, particularly machine operators, report significantly lower satisfaction (13.04%), reflecting potential job stress, limited autonomy, and unfavorable working conditions. These findings align with prior studies highlighting the challenges faced by lower-tier workers in labor-intensive industries, including rigid schedules, repetitive tasks, and minimal variety, which contribute to physical and mental fatigue (Brough et al., 2014; Dilrukshi, 2017). Conversely, employees in higher job categories report greater satisfaction, with junior executives reporting the highest level (66%), likely due to increased autonomy, flexible conditions, and clearer career pathways (Voydanoff, 2005). Notably, 50.28% of respondents remain neutral regarding the quality of work-life, which may reflect limited feedback and autonomy, as suggested by Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model (1976). Improving the Quality of work-life is essential for reducing occupational stress and enhancing retention, as evidenced by the negative correlation between stress and job satisfaction in Sri Lanka's apparel sector (Dilrukshi et al., 2023). Strategies such as adequate rest breaks, health and safety measures, and flexible scheduling for non-executive employees are recommended to improve the quality of work-life, thereby increasing productivity and organizational performance (Anushi et al., 2022).

The findings underscore the pivotal role of supervisory support in shaping employee satisfaction within Sri Lanka's apparel sector. Specifically, 63.84% of respondents reported being satisfied or strongly satisfied with the support provided by their supervisors, reflecting a generally positive perception of supervisory practices. This

observation aligns with Chandrasekara (2019), who emphasized the significant influence of effective supervision on job satisfaction in the apparel industry. Supervisors serve as critical intermediaries between management and frontline employees, and their ability to provide guidance, constructive feedback, and emotional support can substantially enhance morale and engagement (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Furthermore, optimal supervisory support has been linked to improved performance outcomes (Pathirage et al., 2012).

However, 6.21% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with supervision, notably among senior executives and assistant managers. This suggests potential gaps in upward communication, recognition, and autonomy, factors that are particularly salient for highly skilled or leadership-level personnel (Kuvaas, 2006). Such dissatisfaction may impede cross-level collaboration and strategic alignment, ultimately affecting organizational effectiveness.

Concerning teamwork, the results indicate that 45.76% of employees are satisfied, while 2.26% are highly satisfied, suggesting that most employees perceive adequate support from colleagues. Nevertheless, 45.2% of respondents reported a neutral stance toward teamwork, signaling ambivalence or disengagement. This neutrality may stem from mixed experiences, such as appreciation for team support coupled with concerns over unequal task distribution or limited decision-making authority (Halford & Cohen, 2003). In apparel manufacturing, where line production necessitates strong team coordination, such indifference could undermine productivity, communication, and quality outcomes. Therefore, understanding the underlying causes of neutral perceptions toward teamwork is critical for managers and policymakers seeking to enhance team dynamics, motivation, and overall job satisfaction.

### **Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

This study provides an empirical assessment of the determinants of job satisfaction within Sri Lanka's apparel sector, highlighting the influence of pay and promotional opportunities, quality of work-life, supervisory support, and teamwork. Findings reveal that while teamwork and supervisory support exhibit the strongest positive association with job satisfaction, significant proportions of employees, particularly non-executives and managerial staff, report dissatisfaction or neutrality regarding compensation, career progression, and work-life quality. These patterns underscore structural and relational gaps that may hinder engagement and productivity. Thus, these findings highlight the need for tailored human resource strategies that address the distinct needs of diverse employee categories.

The substantial dissatisfaction and neutrality regarding compensation, especially among non-executives and managerial staff, indicate a need to reassess wage

structures to improve both internal equity and external competitiveness. First, organizations should consider adopting transparent pay frameworks, regular wage benchmarking against industry standards, and establishing performance-linked incentive schemes. Clear communication surrounding salary decisions can help alleviate perceptions of inequity and enhance trust in organizational processes. Second, establishing clear and merit-based career progression pathways, supported by structured performance appraisals and targeted professional development, can mitigate concerns regarding limited promotional opportunities. Additionally, sector-wide capacity-building initiatives, supported by public institutions or industry associations, could further strengthen managerial and technical skills, enhancing long-term mobility.

Third, improvements to work-life quality are essential. Flexible work arrangements and welfare and mental-health services should be integrated into routine HR practices. Fourth, given the strong influence of supervisory support, companies need to invest in leadership development programs that have effective communication, fairness, and supportive managerial behaviour.

Fifth, teamwork can be further strengthened through team-based incentives, structured team-building initiatives, and inclusive decision-making processes. Finally, HR strategies must account for differences across employee categories, adopting tailored interventions that reflect distinct needs and expectations. Sector-level institutions and policymakers should reinforce those organizational efforts by promoting compliance with labor standards and supporting capacity-building initiatives that enhance workforce well-being and industry competitiveness. Future research should focus on the study's primary limitation of relying on convenience sampling, as this may restrict the generalizability of the findings to a wider scope. Additionally, incorporating mediating factors such as organizational culture and leadership styles could further illuminate satisfaction dynamics in labor-intensive industries. Furthermore, future research in Sri Lanka's apparel sector should consider longitudinal analysis to better capture changes in job satisfaction over time. Overall, the insights presented here are valuable for practitioners and policymakers who seek to improve employee well-being and organizational performance in Sri Lanka's apparel sector.

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*Stitching Satisfaction: Determinants and Disparities in Job Satisfaction in Sri Lanka's Apparel Sector*

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- Stitching Satisfaction: Determinants and Disparities in Job Satisfaction in Sri Lanka's Apparel Sector*
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