

## RESTRICTED

### ABSTRACT

Wildlife tourism is increasingly expanding with many benefits to the spectators as well as to other sectors in the community. The Sri Lankan wildlife tourism sector provides experiences mostly within the country's protected areas such as the Minneriya National park. However, the lack of appropriate management may cause deleterious impacts which may exceed its potential benefits. This study aims at investigating the impacts of jeep safari tourism on the health of wildlife as well as the environment in the Minneriya National Park.

Questionnaires were distributed to Wildlife Department Authorities, visitors and vendors (60 participants in total), in order to gather primary data. The questionnaire was administered to a random sample of 40 respondents. In addition, officials of the Wildlife Department were interviewed in a semi structural manner and observations were carried out within the park. Primary data were further analyzed by applying a Chi square test of association by using IBM – SPSS® statistical software. The level significance ( $\alpha$ ) was set to 0.05. The contingency table and other calculations were done by 'cross-tab' function. Secondary data were collected from various relevant documents and websites.

According to the results, the dust produced by safari and speed of the jeeps could irritate the animals while speed of the safari jeeps directly affect animals to move them away from their original positions as a result of disturbance. This study also showed that feeding done by visitors resulted in animal attacks/responses. It concluded that certain activities of jeep safaris can affect wildlife in the national park. In order to minimize those impacts, proper law enforcement should be made, alongside creating awareness through trainings for drivers and trackers.

**Key Words:** Department of Wild life Conservation, Tourism, Jeep Safari, Minneriya National Park.