

CURRENT STATUS OF IVORY TRADE IN SRI LANKA: KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES OF LOCAL VENDORS

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The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) banned the international trade of elephant ivory in 1976. However, until recently, tourist shops sold items made of ivory, and Sri Lankan ports served as a transit point in ivory trafficking. In this research, a semi-structured, questionnaire-based survey was carried out in 2017 to assess the status of the ivory trade in Sri Lanka. The shops were selected in major tourist cities (Kandy, Matara, Galle and Colombo) using a snowball sampling method. Interviews were conducted in vernacular after their informed consents. Ninety outlets were visited, of which 40% were more than 30 years old. The respondents (sale associates, owner or the manager - 55%) were mostly above 30 years old (69%) and males (65%). Sixty percent had secondary education and 48% had more than ten years of experience in the profession. All claimed that currently they are not selling any ivory products, but 23 shops (26%) carried items made out of ivory or fake products (souvenirs and jewelry). Some (38%) claimed that they had been involved in ivory trade more than ten years back and their suppliers were mostly from Galle (52%). About one fourth (26%) of the respondents were unaware that selling ivory was illegal, and 35% claimed that there is still demand from customers for ivory products. The respondent's awareness and practices on ivory trade did not depend on the sex, age, education or sales experience. However, higher number of older shops used to sell ivory products in the past compared to new outlets (Fisher's exact test, $p < 0.05$). The results of the survey show that ivory trade can no longer be considered a pervasive threat to elephant conservation efforts. However, continued vigilance is required to assess whether clandestine trade still remains substantial.

Keywords: Ivory trade, Sri Lanka, Tourist cities