

## Post-Pandemic Assessment of COVID-19's Impact on Tourist Accommodation Businesses in Tamale Metropolis, Ghana



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**ABSTRACT:** The study was carried out to ascertain the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourist accommodation businesses in the Tamale Metropolis. Simple random sampling techniques were employed to select 30 tourist accommodation facilities for inclusion in the study. Qualitative data were sourced using semi-structured interview guides and thus analyzed through putting same into themes and sub-themes. The findings revealed that the pandemic had “damming” impacts on tourist accommodation businesses due to travel bans and border closures. In order to control the effects of the pandemic, many hotel managers decided to cancel external contracts, ‘slash’ employees’ pay, terminate some employee appointments and raise or lower service prices to cut down costs. It was also revealed that hotels were often concerned with issues of health and safety and took several precautions to avoid viral infections. The study recommends the adoption of recent technologies such as facial scan, self-check-in and check-out including the use of automatic door technologies to improve safety. Government also needs to swiftly provide financial support for SMEs operating within the tourism and hospitality value chain aimed at revamping the industry.

**KEYWORDS:** COVID-19, pandemic, tourist accommodation, travel ban,

### INTRODUCTION

Numerous diseases have crippled the world economy in years past, with the accommodation sector being no exception. Indeed, three major pandemics have ravaged the globe in the 20th century and according to Barro, Ursula and Weng (2020), the "Spanish Flu" was estimated to have killed over 40 million people between 1918 and 1920. Furthermore, between the middle of the twentieth century and to present day, two weaker pandemics known as "Asian Flu" and "Hong Kong Flu" each claimed about 1-3 million lives while a new pandemic known as "Swine Flu" also afflicted the world between 2009 and 2010 (Kelly, 2011). Prior to COVID-19, the most recent influenza pandemic was first recognized in March, 2009 in Mexico and the United States. As a result, key tourist destinations, including hotels, saw a ‘free fall’ in occupancy of roughly 44.8% and with time, it was reported that occupancy fell to zero with some hotels put under lock and key (Schimanovich, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused some severe recessions in the worldwide economy at the beginning of 2020. The pandemic which started in Wuhan, China, swept over the world and affected all continents, severely causing havoc to travel, tourism and related industries. The disease began in December of 2019 and quickly spread to practically every country in the world within a short period of time (Schimanovich, 2021). Due to the rising number of infections worldwide, the World Health Organization declared it as a pandemic at the beginning of March, 2020 (WHO, 2020). The coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, was noted as a contagious illness that could spread from one person to another (FAO, 2020). This new strain of SARS thus known as COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) did spread globally and had become a big threat to businesses (tourism and hospitality related businesses inclusive) and thus became a concern for many people and families whose survival depended on such businesses (Davahli et al., 2020).

Large-scale travel restrictions, also known as lock-downs, social distancing orders, bans on social gatherings, and up-to-date instructions on how to use a mask and hand sanitizer even if one were healthy were crucial components of the global response to control the spread of the disease (WHO, 2020). These measures had a significant impact on the tourism and hospitality industry worldwide (Davahli et. al., 2020). Governments around the world are currently even still dealing with the pandemic but nevertheless, despite the fact that some nations were severely affected, others were just slightly hit, but all are still taking precautions to lessen the effects even till date (Rosemary, 2022).

In 2020, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) anticipated that more than 50 million jobs worldwide were at risk in the travel and tourism industry. Numerous players in the tourism and hospitality sector found it extremely challenging to continue paying employees in the face of a dramatic decline in sales and income as a result of the pandemic, which led to job losses. Due to

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low patronage and an inability to cover employee salaries and utility bills like electricity and water, many hotels had to close down while some were considering closing down (Jonjon, 2021). As a result of the high level of interpersonal interaction between staff and customers, hotel service delivery was compromised. The pandemic attacked the very foundation of hospitality as the term "social distancing," which has only recently entered popular usage, was the polar opposite of what we anticipate from hospitality and tourism. Creating one-of-a-kind experiences is at the heart of hospitality service, which is frequently built on proximity with clients and individualized interactions with staff and facilities. Hotels were thus forced to modify every step of their value creation in order to meet the new scenario's unfamiliar health regulations. In the current uncertain environment, hotels were "forced" to quickly adjust their entire service process by re-engineering operations to become contact-free or contactless (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2021; Kenny & Dutt, 2021). Since safety was now more important than ever in the light of the still-active COVID-19 pandemic, hotel occupancy in Ghana did see a severe dip. Travellers staying at hotels must feel secure (Schimanovich, 2021) as hotel managers also revised their plans as a result of the dip in bookings.

Due to COVID-19, cleanliness and hygiene in hotels became now more important than ever as visitors will favour staying at hotels that offered comfortable accommodation facilities and other secure associated products (Bonfanti et al., 2021). According to studies, when customers are making purchasing decisions in a service environment, hygiene and cleanliness conditions have an impact (Jiang & Wen, 2020). It is common knowledge that COVID-19 has had a considerable impact on hotel operations and service delivery, with dire repercussions for consumer usage and behaviour. Hotels started functioning with precautions in place, but they were never able to win over customers completely (Jiang & Wen, 2020). Hotels, bars and online businesses were among the worst affected in Ghana. It has been reported by Nuong et al., (2020) that hotel staff were sent home as occupancy rates fell from 70% to under 30% while international conferences that were scheduled to take place in Ghana were postponed, including the 4th African Union Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Finance, Monetary Affairs, Economic Planning and Integration meeting, which was scheduled for early March 2020. As a result, about 1000 potential hotel rooms were lost.

Thus, what were the impacts of such cancellations on hotel businesses in Ghana and in the Tamale Metropolis as a whole? It is against this backdrop that this study is deemed relevant and being conducted in the Tamale Metropolis in order to unearth the dire impact of the pandemic on the operations of tourist accommodation business facilities, the results of this study may give a clue as to what exactly transpired. The general objective of the study therefore is to undertake a post-pandemic assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on tourist accommodation in the Tamale Metropolis, while specifically seeking to: Ascertain the effects of the disease on tourist accommodation businesses, delving further into its impacts on bookings and its rollicking effects on revenue generation and employee retention.

### **Historical Antecedents of Pandemics and their Effects on World Economies**

The new H1N1 influenza virus's abrupt emergence and quick global spread in early 2009 confused many about what a "pandemic" is and how to identify one when it strikes (Morens, Folkers & Fauci, 2009). The disputes and discussions surrounding the pandemic in the popular media and in scientific publications swiftly destroyed any notion that the term pandemic had a universally accepted meaning. The terms were frequently used differently by scientists, the media and government health organizations. For instance, some claimed that explosive transmissibility alone was sufficient to declare a pandemic, while others insisted that infection severity should also be taken into account (Morens et al., 2009).

Referring to Last (2001), a pandemic is defined as an epidemic happening worldwide, or across a very wide area, crossing international boundaries, and frequently impacting a significant number of people. The word "pandemic" comes from the Greek words pan, which means "all," and demos, which means "the people." Therefore, rather than focusing on the severity of the illness, pandemics are classified according to their geographic scope. Much of the time, pandemics do not spread in the same manner, but they do have some fundamental characteristics in common, including: a large geographic scope, movement, originality, severity, frequency of attacks and explosiveness of a disease; poor population immunity; and being contagious and infectious (Schimanovich, 2021; Qiu, Rutherford, Mao & Chu, 2017). Over the years, there have been numerous pandemics that have crippled the global economy, with the accommodation sector not exempt from their wrath. Most often, pandemics are disease outbreaks that spread widely as a result of human-to-human infection. Smallpox, cholera, plague, dengue, AIDS, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), West Nile Disease, Tuberculosis, Spanish flu, Hong Kong flu, H7N9, Ebola, and Zika are just but a few of the notable disease outbreaks and pandemics that have been documented throughout history (Qiu et al., 2017).

Three influenza pandemics known as the "Spanish flu" in 1918–1919, the "Asian flu" in 1957–1958, and the "Hong Kong flu" in 1968–1969 occurred in the 20th century. Each of these had negative impacts on human life and economic growth. For instance, the influenza pandemic of 1918–1919, claimed the lives of more than 20 million people worldwide and is regarded as the most catastrophic epidemic in world history (Qiu et al., 2017). The first pandemic influenza of the twenty-first century was caused by the influenza H1N1 2009 virus (A/2009/H1N1). It has had an impact on the entire planet and led to more than 18,000 fatalities. According to estimates from the World Bank, Ebola claimed the lives of more than 11,000 individuals and cost the global economy more than USD \$2 billion. In 2016, the Zika virus persisted in its spread, endangering the health of people in close to 34 nations

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(Ramon, Vinod & Troncoso, 2016). Scientists and governments were concerned about a repeat of the 1918 Spanish flu's devastation due to these outbreaks (Qiu et al., 2017).

Since pandemics have infected millions of people, they have led to numerous fatalities and widespread serious sickness in vast populations. For the world's economy, it represents a significant threat as well as to its population. Economic loss can have a negative influence on the economy through immediate expenses, long-term burdens, and indirect expenses. The societal effects of pandemics were severe, resulting in restrictions on travel, the closure of schools, marketplaces and sporting events, among other things. If a pandemic with a serious potential for significant morbidity and mortality emerges, all of these scenarios are likely to come to pass. Pandemics pose a threat to global security in terms of human lives and economic stability (Qiu et al., 2017). In addition to extending these effects, Hiscott et al.,(2020) also included psychological effects connected to lock-downs and social isolation. They characterized lock-downs and social isolation as the last line of defense to contain the infection, which had a particularly negative impact on tourist accommodation because it involves direct contact with guests and staff (Schimanovich, 2021).

The hotel industry was severely impacted by the current pandemic as exemplified in China where it was revealed that the average room occupancy fell from about 68% in November 2019 to roughly 12% in February 2021(Hao, Xiao & Chon, 2020). This illustration is not strange and is therefore found to be prevalent all around the world. The European hotel sector nearly came to a complete halt in February 2020, after less than a month. Rome reported a decline in occupancy rates from an alarming 60% on average to only 6% and from roughly 70% to 24% as reported in Vienna. According to the American Hotel and Lodging Association, the pandemic has had the worse impact on America than the September 11, 2001 attacks and the 2008 recession as a 150-billion-dollar loss was disclosed (Schimanovich, 2021) while in Ghana, hotel occupancy rates decreased from 70% to about 30% according to studies done by Nuong et. al., (2020).

### **Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism and Hospitality Industry**

Along with the energy sector, the hospitality industry is one of the largest employers in the world. Since the pandemic began, the world had to engage in actions that had never previously been required (Fernandes, 2020). Given that demand had reached an all-time low in for instance, India as a result of COVID-19 outbreak, the hospitality industry may still have been suffering a significant loss. The COVID-19 virus, which is still spreading over the world, has had a severe detrimental impact on the tourism and hospitality industry. This was due largely to countries imposing travel restrictions, quarantining travellers and citizens, as well as isolating infected individuals in an effort to stop the spread of the pandemic. This had severe impacts on hotel occupancy and revenues that hotels around the world were not able to achieve per available room{RevPAR} (Ozdemir et. al. (2021) The global cancellation of flights and hotel reservations, the closure of airports and borders and the prohibition of public gatherings all had austere impacts on the hospitality industry's economic activity (Nuong et. al., 2020).

According to many government sources, there were complete travel ban at the national and international levels and as a result, the hotel and restaurant industries were severely hit. This is because these industries relied heavily on tourists. The major hotel chains' occupancy rates drastically fell (Kapoor, 2021). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, cancellations of hotel reservations did result in a loss of 12–14% of jobs worldwide, or close to 50 million jobs. Room rates were slashed by 50%, and the future became bleak as the virus was still being reported across the globe (Kapoor, 2021). Major hotel companies like Marriott International and Hyatt Hotels saw a reduction of close to 16% in their occupancy. The Mobile World Assembly, a big informational trade show, was also postponed. Walt Disney, one of the major corporations, estimated that the pandemic caused it to lose as much as \$2.6 billion (Whitten, 2021).

The Olympics, one of the biggest sporting events in the world, was also postponed for a year. Up to 25% of international travel suffered a negative impact, which is the same as missing three months' worth of travel (Nuong et. al., 2020). The hospitality sector in India for instance provides over 10% of the country's GDP, or roughly 275 billion US dollars, and with the continuous spread of the virus at the then rates, the GDP was expected to continue to decline, creating a dangerous situation in the days to come. The fact that between 30 and 40 % of workers at hotels are employed on a contract or casual basis became one of the biggest issues facing India's hospitality sector. Thus, it was necessary for the industry to pay them even if the hotels closed down in the future so that the staff could take care of themselves at that period of difficult (Kapoor, 2021).

Indeed, the hotel industry has been impacted by pandemic in a substantial way. Most municipal and federal governments made an effort to stop the spread of the virus by imposing emergency restrictions on pubs, cafes and hotels. In Europe, estimated losses to the hotel industry stood at 33% (Dogra, 2020; Gautam, 2021). Four million jobs were anticipated to be lost as a result of hotel booking cancellations in the USA. Meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE), among other events, were severely impacted, postponed, or cancelled around the world. Nearly 30 airlines, including German Airways and Thai Airways, declared for bankruptcy as the pandemic reached its height. Numerous carriers, including Indigo and Emirates, were forced to reduce salaries and “eliminate” some staff (The Indian Express, 2020; Gautam, 2021). The global aviation industry's 2020 revenue went down by 44% from the previous year (The Economic Times, 2020).

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According to a study by Oruonye and Ahmed (2020) in Nigeria, several hotels had to be shut down in that country due to low patronage and an inability to pay staff salaries, energy, and water bills. Many businesses reduced their employee workforce, and others had to slash employee pay by 50%. Year 2020 industry income predictions indicated a considerable fall due to majority of hotels being closed or operating at very low occupancy levels. For example, US hotel revenue per available room was predicted to decline by 50.6% while in Ghana, by 70% to around 30% (Nuong et. al., 2020). According to the UNWTO, 2020 became the worst year in tourism and hospitality history due to the ravages of the pandemic (Schimanovich, 2021). Guests were more hesitant to travel than ever due to the global COVID-19 outbreak as Deloitte (2020) wrote about how consumer behaviour changed prior to, during, and after the pandemic. Nearly 40% of respondents who were questioned desired no longer to eat at restaurants, thus affecting the hotel industry. Similarly, the study also found an appreciable decline in international travel (Deloitte, 2020; Schimanovich, 2021).

In all impacted areas when there is a pandemic outbreak, further measures have oftentimes been taken, such as suspending foreign contracts, decreasing pay, promoting the use of employee leave or unpaid leave and pleading with the government to develop a relief fund (Pine & McKercher, 2004). These practices are frequently reinforced by advertisements directed at domestic travellers (Henderson & Ng, 2004). Salem (2022), shows how chain-managed five-star hotels in Egypt handled the COVID-19 global health pandemic through a number of serious practices, including adopting the appropriate cleanliness guidelines and disinfection standards, putting in place new cleaning technologies, being flexible with booking and cancellation policies, training staff members on new cleanliness standards, giving discounts and competitive prices for customers and following safety measures in order to prevent infection.

### METHODOLOGY

#### Study Area

This study was carried out on hotels in the Tamale Metropolis of the Northern Region of Ghana. According to the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA), Tamale, there are 53 registered tourist accommodation facilities in Tamale city as at 2022 with the highest rated grade hotel being 2-star and the least being budget accommodation with only 1 guesthouse while the other ratings are six (6) 2-star rated hotels, nine (9) 1-star rated hotels and 37 budget hotels in the metropolis. Some of the popular accommodation facilities include; Radach Lodge and Conference Centre, Gaanah Hotel, Global Dreams Serviced Apartments, Nim Avenue Hotel, Picorna Hotel, Alhassan Hotel, Heritage Hotel, J-Salem Guesthouse, Oboye Azimah Lodge, A-WAN Guesthouse, Tiyumba Lodge and Mole Lodge. Figure 1 shows a map of the metropolis where the facilities are located.

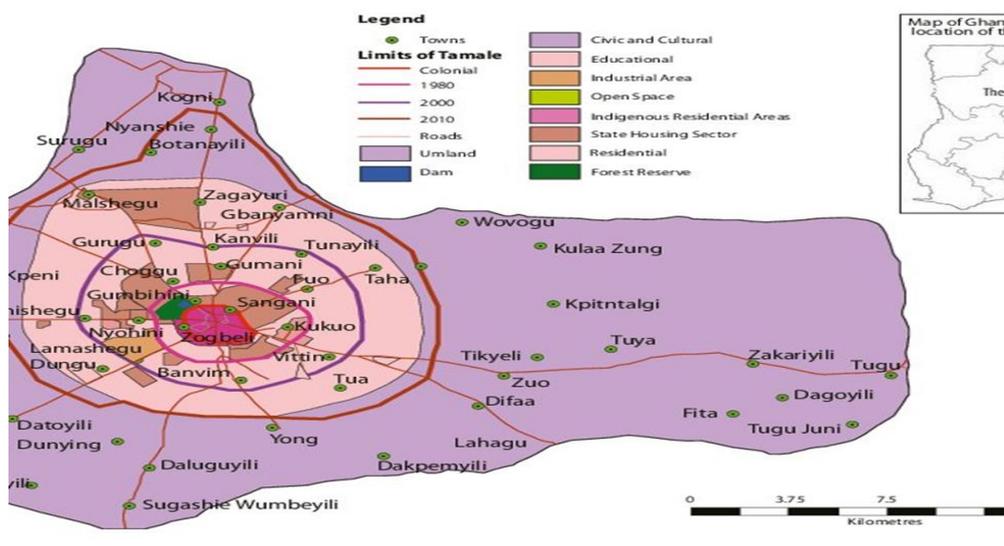


Figure 1: Map of the study area (Tamale Metropolis) Source: TAMA (2019)

The study utilized a case study (descriptive design) method making use of the qualitative approach. Data is therefore typically expressed here in words rather than numbers (Strobl, 2021). Qualitative method was used because it allows one to maintain the order of events, identify precisely which actions result in which effects, and comes up with useful explanations (Strobl, 2021).

The sample frame for the study consisted of all the 53 tourist accommodation facilities in the metropolis, comprising of 6 two-star hotels, 9 one-star hotels, 1 guesthouse and 37 budget hotels. Three (3) two-star hotels, 5 one-star hotels, 1 guesthouse and 21 budget hotel facilities were sampled. In total 30 accommodation facilities were selected from 53 listed facilities with the GTA for observation and interview sessions using simple random sampling. Table 1 shows the number of tourist accommodation listed with

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the GTA in Tamale and the number sampled. This was done by writing all names of the 53 tourist accommodation facilities by categories and mixing them (according to category) in a box from where each had an equal chance of being selected in a category. Since the guesthouse was just one facility, it was included in the study. This brought the sample picked to be 30.

**Table 1: Accommodation ratings vis a vis number sampled**

Accommodation Ratings	Total	Number Sampled
2-Star Hotel	6	3
1-Star Hotel	9	5
Guesthouse	1	1
Budget	37	21
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>30</b>

**Source:** GTA, Tamale Office 2022

An integration of interview and observation were used to collect data from the various tourist accommodations under study. Semi-structured interview was used to elicit information on the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on the selected tourist accommodation facilities within the Tamale Metropolis. Based on the structured in-depth interviews, questions were prepared and administered. The interviews were generally semi-structured, but occasionally the interviewer added questions to probe further. Interviews help in the flexibility of the collection of data and an opportunity to assess the mood of the respondents and for reliability and validity of the data. The questions were open-ended to allow a wide range of answers from respondents and to avoid possibly leading their answers making the data biased. With the interviewees' permission, all conversations were voice-recorded in order to be transcribed. Only a few of the interviews had notes recorded in order to appropriately organize the data.

Additionally, observation was used to elicit information in the study area especially in those places and facilities that could be accessed and could be seen more easily. The observational method was useful in assessing whether indeed there was serious business ongoing in the facility or not. The data was recorded, coded and edited. Hence, all responses were compared, the notes were examined and the similarities and differences were highlighted. The entire transcriptions were scanned through to identify common themes, topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that appeared repeatedly which formed the basis for the use of the qualitative data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Impact of the Pandemic on Tourist Accommodation Businesses

The impact of pandemic on the study tourist accommodations have been presented in sub-themes and these sub-themes focus on impacts of the disease on bookings, revenue generation and employee retention rates.

#### *Impact of the Pandemic on Bookings*

The impact of COVID-19 on bookings as reported by the hotels under study were severe. Bookings, thus reservation for a service in these hotels went down drastically especially during the lockdown when government restrictions such as social distancing and ban on social gatherings were enforced to control the spread of the virus. Reservations and booking for conferences done before the outbreak were all cancelled as a result of the restrictions and fear of both guests and employees contracting the disease became rife. These revelations were expressed by all three respondents from 2-star rated facilities thus two managers and one managing director. According to the respondents, the pandemic really affected their bookings as the number of guests they previously received within a week went down to almost below 20 guests and sometimes to zero compared to before the outbreak. The following reports came from the three respondents as follows: *In terms of bookings, we had the best in the previous years since the commissioning of our hotels and then in March 2020, the entire business year was 'crippled' in just two weeks. We had already signed for some conferences worth more than a million cedis. These big conferences also came with "bulky" room reservations but all had to be cancelled because of the pandemic. We were set to make record sales that year but the pandemic led to a complete flop. Within two weeks, we went from 90% occupancy to 0% [Respondents 1, 2 and 3: IDI, May, 2022, from 2-star rated hotel facilities].* All respondents also opined that the pandemic led to a decrease in international tourist arrivals leading to a dramatic drop in bookings. A revelation was made as follows: *In 2020, when the virus spread became serious, all international guests could not travel as the borders of most countries were closed, which also led to a decline in bookings [Respondents 1, 2 and 3: IDI, May, 2022, from 2-star rated hotel facilities].*

Four respondents from 1-star rated facilities disclosed the ensuing:

*Reservations sharply decreased. The occupancy rate dropped to a very low level within a short period of time. Prior to the pandemic's onset, the preceding months were buoyant. Business however completely collapsed when the virus began to spread around the world. Due to its global spread and with the government travel restrictions, international tourists were unable to come leading to a decline in bookings [Respondents 1:2:3 and 4: IDI, May, 2022, from 1-star hotel facilities].*

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From the foregoing responses, it is thus clear that the pandemic, according to sources from the UNWTO, made 2020 the worst year in tourism and hospitality history with regard to its ravaging impacts on the sector (Schimanovich, 2021).

With the budget hotels, three of the managers revealed that they had to close down their facilities in order to cut down cost because income for workers and utility bills were constantly rising. They commented as follows:

*Because guests no longer patronized our facilities, we had to shut down since we were “wasting” money on utility bills and had to pay staff while no business activity was going on [Respondents 10, 17 and 21: IDI, May, 2022, Budget hotel Category].*

This response seems to be in sync with a study done by Oruonye and Ahmed (2020), in Nigeria, where several hotels had to shut down due to low patronage leading to inability to pay staff salaries including energy and water bills that were accruing even when guests absent.

### **Impact of the Pandemic on Revenue Generation**

The pandemic was also reported to have affected revenue inflows. As it affected bookings, automatically, revenue generated also went down as guests did not patronize the hotel facilities anymore. All the respondents said revenue decreased drastically when the lockdown begun. The following reports came from all three respondents from 2-star rated facilities:

*Indeed, revenue decreased automatically when the occupancy rate dropped from 90% to close to zero within weeks. As conferences and reservations were cancelled, no revenue also came in. Even the profits we made from the previous years were used to procure gloves, temperature guns, face masks, disinfection sprays or wipes and hand sanitizers for staff and guests. All these costs led to declines in revenue [Respondents 1:2 and 3: IDI, May, 2022, from 2-star hotel facilities].*

Serious devastating effects regarding revenue and cash reserves were also reported from 1-star rated facilities since bookings had dropped drastically. The meagre monies left in their coffers were used for renovations to make their facilities look beautiful and tidy to attract more customers during recovery. This was reiterated by a manager as follows:

*Since we had guests already in our facility as at when COVID-19 became serious, we had to provide them with gloves, face masks, disinfectant sprays and wipes, sanitizers and Veronica buckets. We had to buy more cleaning detergents and disinfectants since the housekeepers had to clean their rooms twice a day and even more leading to a decline in revenue by 30% as government did not support us in any way [Respondent 5: IDI, May, 2022, 1-star hotel facility].*

Within the guesthouse category, it was also observed that the pandemic affected revenue since they recorded zero bookings during the lock-downs. The manager made a comment as follow:

*Since we did not receive any guests during the lockdown, our revenue went down drastically. We had to spend money on utility bills and pay workers without getting anything in return. Money was also spent on buying gloves, Veronica buckets, face masks, sanitizers, disinfectant sprays and wipes for guests and staffs leading to a decline in revenue. The percentage loss can be estimated to be 70% or above [Respondent 1: IDI, May, 2022, Guesthouse facility].*

For the budget facilities, all respondents opined that, the pandemic affected their revenue as bookings reduced. With no bookings, revenues will also decline. Three of the respondents indicated their facilities were closed down since they could not generate revenue from anywhere for their utility bills and payments of workers. Their responses were captured as follows:

*Our facilities were closed down because, we could not generate money since both international and domestic tourists no longer booked our facilities. Business dropped totally, as a results of low income to run the facility. We can say it's about 80-90 percent decrease in revenue [Respondents 10:17 and 21: IDI, May, 2022, from Budget facilities].*

The situations explained above by respondents in all categories can be likened to a study done by Nuong et al. (2020) and Courtney (2020), who reported that due to countries imposing travel restrictions, quarantining travellers and citizens, as well as isolating infected individuals in an effort to stop the spread of the pandemic, it had an impact on hotel occupancy and revenues to the extent that hotels around the world were not able to achieve per available room (RevPAR). Also, it has been estimated that the hotel industry lost about 33% of its revenue in jurisdictions such as Europe (Gautam, 2021).

### **Impact of the Pandemic on Employee Retention**

The pandemic also affected the accommodation facilities to the extent that they had to lay off some of their workers in order to be able to stay in business. The low income resulted in the inability to meet up with payment of workers' salaries resulting in laying offs, while others slashed their workers' salaries by 50%. In a 'riposte' from two managers on COVID-19 impact on workers during IDI, the following views were expressed:

*Yes, for our employees, we had to lay some off and reduce the remaining workers' salaries so that we could stay in business. During the lockdown, we could not generate money anymore since both international and domestic guests no longer patronized our facilities again. Even for the remaining staffs, they had to rotate to reduce the number of people in the facility [Respondents 3 and 2: IDI, May, 2022, from 2-star rated hotel facilities].*

It was also realized from this study that only one hotel from the three 2-star rated facilities did not terminate workers' appointments at the point when business was down. They had contingency plans available at that time and so they had to pay workers for six months which helped them to maintain their workers. The manager shared his views on this as follows:

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*For my facility, we had contingency plans available during the pandemic, which helped us to avoid laying off workers. We had to pay them for six months but if the pandemic had lasted longer, it would have created a problem for us. Although some were sent home but they still received their salaries and during recovery some returned to their positions to work. [Respondent 1: IDI, May, 2022, 2-star hotel facility].*

With the low occupancy rate and the government restrictions, a few 1-star rated facilities decided to lay some workers off whilst others slashed their salaries by 50% to enable them stay in business. A manager shared his view as seen below:

*For us, our facility was not closed down because we had guests already in our hotel during the pandemic. We however sent seven workers out of seventeen home to reduce the number of workers in the facility and also to avoid anyone contracting the disease but the remaining workers' salaries were not touched [Respondent 5: IDI, May, 2022, 1-star hotel facility].*

Another manager's response from a 1-star rated facility was also relayed as follows:

*Well, for us to stay in business we terminated the appointments of ten of our workers and reduced the remaining workers' salaries by 50%. Since guests no longer booked the facility. Even the remaining workers came to work on rotational basis. As at now, we have employed more workers and also accepted those whose appointments were terminated to be called back [Respondent 4: IDI, May, 2022, 1-star hotel facility].*

The manager of the only guesthouse understudy herein stated that, they laid off four employees and retained two and even with the two left behind, their salaries were reduced by 50% to enable them stay in business. His response was stated as follows:

*We had six employees before the pandemic, but we had to terminate the appointment of four leaving behind only two to manage the facility. Even with the two left, we had to cut down their salaries by 50% for like 6 months since there was no money due to reduced bookings. Currently, we have only three workers in the facility since we have not fully recovered [Respondent 1: IDI, May, 2022, Guesthouse facility].*

It was realized that, the pandemic impacted hotels differently depending on their star ratings. The "bigger" hotels felt the impact more since they employed more staff than the "smaller" ones. For the budget hotels, since their workers were not many, most of them did not lay off their staff or even reduce their salaries. Some also revived weekly-shift system to avoid laying off workers completely. A few however sent off some of their staff home or reduced their salaries since they could not pay them anymore as guests no longer booked their facilities.

Three budget facilities also went ahead to terminate appointment of workers as well as reduce their salaries to cut down cost, for their businesses to recover. Three managers' opinions were sourced as follows:

*The COVID-19 pandemic affected us to the extent that, we had to lay off half of our workers and cut down salaries of those retained so we could stay in business and reduce cost [Respondents 5:7 and 9: IDI, May, 2022, Budget facility].*

Three budget facilities were closed down during the pandemic since they could not afford to meet up with payment of workers' salaries and utility bills. The response recorded are as follows:

*We sent all our workers home since our facilities were closed down leaving behind one or two workers to keep the place clean. No guests visited during the lockdown, but for now, we have resumed but business is not thriving as the period before COVID-19 struck [Respondents 10:17 and 21: IDI, May, 2022, Budget facility].*

The aforementioned reports on low revenue generation resulting in the inability of hotels to meet up with payment of workers' salaries culminating in laying off their workforce, while others slashed their salaries by 50% seems to exemplify the literature as reported by Oruonye and Ahmed (2020), in Nigeria, where several hotels had already shut down due to low patronage and inability to pay staff salaries, energy and water bills. Many businesses had already reduced their staff numbers while others slashed employee pay by 50%. Similarly, according to the Forbes (2020) cancellations of hotel reservations did result in a loss of 12–14% of jobs worldwide, or close to 62 million jobs in the hospitality sector alone.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It came to the fore that every hotel selected in the study had been adversely affected by the pandemic as they suffered greatly from unexpected difficulties. Governmental restrictions across the globe rendered domestic and international travel almost difficult since the pandemic began in March 2020; as a result, hotels were forced to deal with a severe dearth of guests and were unable to carry on their usual businesses successfully due to zero or low bookings which culminated in lack of income. Moreover, these hotels also implemented measures to cut down costs such as laying off employees, implementing salary cuts of employees, and also through closure of some facilities. Furthermore, the results also revealed that the government of Ghana and other stakeholders did not do much to support the study hotels in alleviating the impact of the pandemic.

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The study thus made the following recommendations: The government should move quickly to provide financial support for SMEs operating within the tourism and hospitality value chain as even up to date some are struggling to gain their feet on the ground to make smooth operations. The study hotels should do their best to invest in adopting recent technologies to improve safety and contamination free practice such as facial scan self-check-in and check-out, procure robots that deliver foods in the form of room service, encourage mobile payments, the use of face and voice recognition technologies including automatic door and self-service kiosks. Hoteliers need to focus on advertising their facilities by regularly updating information on their websites about how their services are provided taking safety precautions as a priority for guests to be acquainted with so that they can attract more domestic and nearby markets.

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