




## Emotional Response to the Economic Crisis in Sri Lanka: From Fight or Flight to Action

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### Abstract

The financial crisis in Sri Lanka is escalating day by day with grave consequences on public life. Suffering at community, family, and individual levels is immense. Comprehensive macroeconomic and microeconomic solutions are needed to solve the financial crisis. Further, drastic improvements are needed in the areas of governance, transparency, and accountability at all levels in order to put the country back on track. The hard truth is that suffering will be a characteristic feature of the lives of the people of Sri Lanka in the future. This paper examines three possible pathways that the emotional response to the financial crisis could take at the community, family, and individual levels. It argues that the natural fight or flight emotional pathways could lead to withdrawal or violence, and further aggravate suffering. An action-oriented solution-focused emotional pathway could not only minimize suffering, but also could promote well-being at the community, family, and individual levels.

**Keywords:** *Economic Crisis, Emotional Response, Compassion*

## 1. Introduction

Sri Lanka is experiencing an unprecedented economic crisis due to many factors (acaps 2022). Exceedance of domestic expenditure than the country's national income has made the country dependent on external debt and reliance on foreign currency, ultimately defaulting on the payments on its all foreign debt (AFP 2022). In addition, the Easter Sunday attacks and the COVID-19 Pandemic have paralyzed many aspects of the economy, including tourism (Selvachandran 2021). Fertilizer bans by the government, which affected the production of rice and tea, two of the country's main exports, and the Ukraine war also have contributed to the worsening of the condition factors (acaps 2022). Poor financial management has been claimed as the main reason behind this economic downfall (Silk Road Briefing 2022).

The economic crisis in Sri Lanka has created enormous suffering at the individual, family, and community levels (Wipulasena 2022). Lack of fuel, escalating living expenses, and shortage of medical supplies are evidence of the widespread suffering in Sri Lanka (Perera 2022). There is a widespread public outcry against corruption, demanding systems change and permanent solutions to the current crisis (acaps 2022). In addition, a series of events of violence has erupted in the country, causing loss of life and property damage (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2022). The economic crisis does not seem to end soon, which means a likely continuation of suffering soon (acaps 2022). The emotional response to the economic crisis at the individual, family, and community level is critical during such a crisis. This paper aims to examine the possible pathways that the

emotional response to the current economic crisis could take and propose a favorable alternative that individuals, families, and communities should adapt.

## 2. Flight or Fight Responses

The fight-or-flight response has been used to describe the physiological reaction that an individual's body mounts when faced with a stressor (McCarty 2016). Extrapolating this concept to include the family and community level in addition to the individual, we propose that during the current economic crisis, two natural emotional responses, "flight" or "fight," could be mounted (Figure 1).

The black pathway in Figure 1 could lead to sadness, hopelessness, and helplessness, calling for flight or running away from the situation. The ultimate result of this response would be withdrawal from social and political life with a sense of apathy and nihilism. The emotional response in the red pathway would lead to fear, mistrust, and anger. These emotions may lead to a fight reaction that could result in violence. The black and red pathways could aggravate the suffering through positive feedback in the long run, though they may perceive some temporary relief.

Both the dark and red pathways are natural responses to suffering. These pathways are not abnormal. We must be aware of the operation of these pathways, directly and indirectly, at the individual, family, and community levels. These feelings have been practiced over generations, normalizing and justifying them as appropriate societal behaviors.

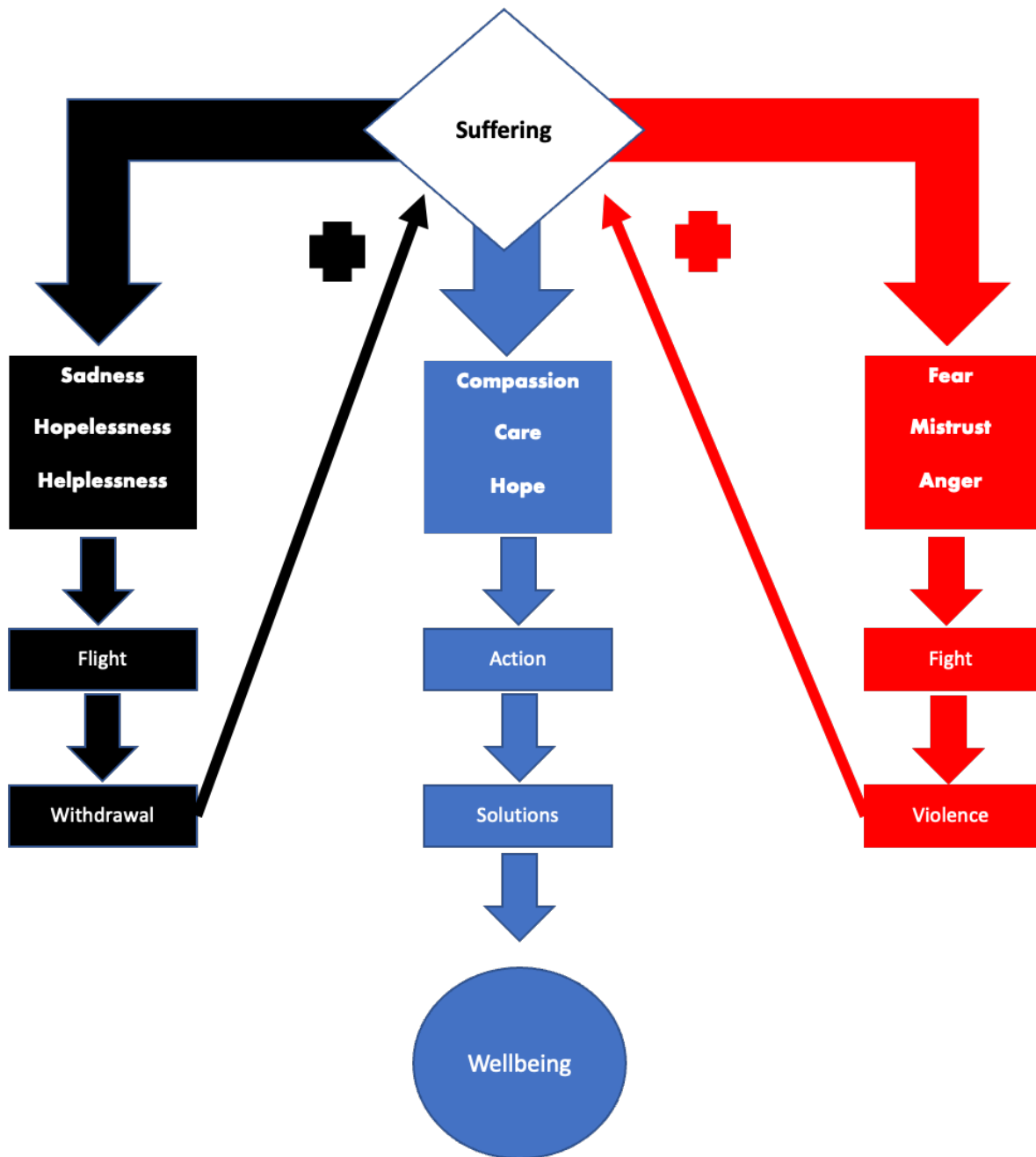


Figure 1: Emotional Response Pathways to the Economic Crisis in Sri Lanka

The flaws in governance, justice, participation, and manipulation of the emotional responses of the individuals, families, and communities by opinion leaders have created environments for such emotional responses to be understood as the only options available.

### 3. The Desired Pathway of Action

We propose that the desired response pathway to the suffering during the economic crisis should be none of the above two. Instead, a blue pathway is needed: an intentional pathway where the response to the suffering is based on compassion, care, and hope. This desired intentional emotional response should ignite corrective action, leading to the innovation, testing, and scaling up solutions to the crisis at the individual, family, and community levels. By doing so, it will be possible to alleviate suffering and promote the well-being of communities. It should also be noted that the blue pathway will invariably be based on nonviolence because any form of violence will add to the aggravation of suffering.

### 4. Desired Pathway and Community Resilience

Community resilience is the ability of systems to prepare, face, and recover from challenges using their resources (Disaster Management Center 2015). A favorable emotional response to a crisis is a critical component of community resilience. Therefore, the challenges of the current economic crisis in Sri Lanka must promote positive emotional responses in favor of compassionate action to address the suffering, which could promote community resilience.

Desired Emotional Pathway and the Community Leadership

Community and opinion leaders have a critical role in promoting the desired emotional response to the economic crisis. In addition, religious and faith leaders, youth leaders, social media activists, civil society leaders, and professionals have a significant duty to promote the desired emotional pathway as a legitimate and feasible alternative. A compassionate, solution-oriented emotional response to the current economic crisis by the individuals, families, and communities is critical until a sustained solution to the problem is curated.

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