

OP 3

Comparison of psychological wellbeing among undergraduates of University of Sri Jayewardenepura

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Objectives: Psychological distress is an increasingly important public health problem and 12.3% of the population suffers from some form of mental illness. It is experienced as sadness, anxiety, fear and in extreme cases as psychotic symptoms. Psychological distress among university students is more compared to general population. This study was conducted to determine psychological distress and predictive factors in medical undergraduates and to compare them with two other main streams of undergraduate education, in University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

Methods: A surveying method was adapted to select 408 final year students from all three faculties using the General Health Questionnaire 30 (GHQ - 30), an internationally accepted, nationally validated to determine psychological distress. Frequency tabulation and Chi-squared tests were used for analysis by SPSS (15). GHQ score of six (6) or more indicated distress.

Results: Among the undergraduates, 240 (58.8%) had a score more than 6. The prevalence of stress was higher among medical students 95(62.5%), than Applied Sciences 69(60%) and Management students 76(53.5%). Age of students ($p=0.015$), effect of studies on personal life ($p=0.025$), responsibilities as a group leader ($p=0.05$) and transport and meals ($p=0.006$) were found as independent significant risk factors for distress. Student's gender ($p=0.10$), oral presentations ($p=0.36$) and continuous assessments ($p=0.35$) were not significantly associated with psychological distress. Specific tasks during clinical appointments were identified as stressful by majority of medical students.

Conclusions: High prevalence of psychological distress in undergraduates, especially among medical students is identified. The need for detailed assessment of stressors and coping strategies is highlighted and emphasizes the necessity of early interventions to prevent, long term psychological sequelae.