

Prevalence of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress among Sri Lankan Undergraduates

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1. Introduction

While stress is an inevitable part of life, it is very present (Blanco et al., 2008) and becoming more prevalent among university students (Gallagher, 2008; Mackenzie et al., 2011). Therefore, depression, anxiety and stress or stressful life can be defined as reactions to what happen in daily lives and it can be seen from the students who are engaged in educational activities as their daily routine. Therefore, the mental health of the undergraduates has become an area of increasing concern worldwide. The topic was of interest because there was a huge gap between the contemporary understanding and the existing past ideas on the levels of depression, anxiety and stress among undergraduates. “In the USA, almost 10% of university students have been diagnosed with, or treated for, depression over the past 12 months” (Wolfram, 2010).

The objective of this study is to examine the prevalence of depression, anxiety and stress within undergraduates in Sri Lanka. The research question of this study is as follows: Do undergraduates in Sri Lanka have depression, anxiety and stress?

2. Literature Review

Stress, depression, and anxiety are three psychological conditions one may experience at once. A person may say that in a good time or in a bad time, these three things may interfere with their lives at least moderately. The chronic states of the stress, anxiety, and depression impact on our mental as well as physical health. At present, the students have become the victims of these three states. Therefore, this research problem was used to find whether undergraduates were depressed, anxious or stressed. The Oxford Dictionary (2019) has explained stress as a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances. Depression is perceived as a mental condition characterized by feelings of severe despondency, dejection, and anxiety because of feeling worried, nervous or uneasy about something with an uncertain outcome.

3. Research Methodology

Participants of this study were selected using the convenience sampling method and they were undergraduates at the University of Peradeniya. Prior to completing the survey, each student was given the necessary instructions and their verbal consent was taken. Depression, anxiety, and stress were measured by the 21-item Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS -21) Sinhala version, completed by 20 undergraduates; 10 females and 10 males. The projected time of administration and completion of the survey was approximately 10 minutes. The confidentiality of their responses was assured by the researcher. The survey consisted of the DASS-21 scale and a demographics section which inquired about the age, gender, marital status, household membership, economy, home location, current accommodation, etc. The research was administered by a relevant professor until the end.

4. Results and Discussion

When comparing the DASS 21 scores of male and female undergraduates, the anxiety and stress scores were higher among female undergraduates than male undergraduates. The average scores of depression of males and females were 6.4 and 7 respectively. Therefore, depression scores of both of them were at an average level. The reasons for these conditions were the pressure to succeed, post-graduation plans and financial concerns. This condition differed with regard to male undergraduates because they spent more hours on extra-curricular activities than the academic activities.

Also, it was indicated that undergraduates were ranked having the highest levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. The reasons for this can be shown as the homesickness, high amount of responsibilities, planning and preparing household activities without parents, problems with friends, and less extra-curricular activities.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The high prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms among university students is alarming. This shows the need for primary and secondary prevention measures such as providing adequate facilities to learn, reducing the workload, engaging in more extra-curricular activities and conducting workshops on relaxation, with the development of adequate and appropriate support services for this group. The reason for this condition is psychological as well as environmental.

The solution lies in being aware of it, intervening earlier and providing support with adequate and appropriate services. According to my point of view, undergraduates have stress, anxiety and depression and they must be given those necessary aids to prevent these conditions.

6. References

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