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Level of Physical Activity and Perceived Barriers among Nurses in COVID-19 Wards, National Hospital Sri Lanka: A Cross-sectional Study

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Background: Physical activity is a known positive reinforcement for health and an effective coping behaviour against pandemic-related stressors. Physical activity and self-care routines of the nurses were disturbed due to the heavy workload and intense responsibilities of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, it is instrumental to assess the level of physical activity of Sri Lankan nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic since the data are sparse.

Objectives: To evaluate the level of physical activity and perceived barriers to engage in physical activity among nurses who work in COVID-19 wards, at National Hospital Sri Lanka (NHSL).

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among conveniently selected 123 nurses who work in COVID-19 wards (12 wards) at NHSL. The nursing officers were invited via a Google form using social media platforms. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire which consisted of International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) and questions to assess the perceived barriers. Levels of physical activity were categorized as inactive (<600 MET-minutes per week), minimally active (600-2999 MET-minutes per week), and Health Enhancing Physical Activity (HEPA) (>3000 MET- minutes per week). Data were analysed with descriptive statistics using IBM SPSS version 25.0.

Results: Of the participants, 86.1% (n=106) were female, Grade III nursing officers (59.3%, n=73) with the mean (SD) age of 33 ($\pm$7) years. Only 12.1% (n=15) nurses engaged in regular exercises. Of the nurses, 34.1% (n=42) were inactive, 54.5% (n=67) were minimally active and only 11.4% (n=14) engaged in health enhancing level of physical activity. Most prevalent perceived barriers for engaging physical activity were tiredness due to job (51.2%, n=63), not having enough time (28.4%, n=35) and not interested to do regular exercises (8.1%, n=10).

Conclusions: Most of the nurses who work at COVID-19 wards were not engaged in an adequate level of physical activity and appropriate measures to overcome perceived barriers to engage physical activity among nurses are entailed.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Nurses, Perceived barriers, Physical activity*