



Assessing the Need for a Digital, Anonymous Students' Help Desk (SHD) at the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna

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University students face numerous academic, social, and personal challenges that can negatively impact their academic performance and overall well-being. Although support mechanisms such as counseling and mentoring are available, many students hesitate to use them due to fear of judgment or social pressures. This study assessed the need for a digital, anonymous Students' Help Desk (SHD) at the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka, to provide timely academic, administrative, and mental health support. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 155 undergraduates across three degree programs: BSc in Agricultural Resource Management and Technology, BSc in Agribusiness Management, and BSc in Green Technology. Data on socio-demographics, academic performance, digital access, and preferences for anonymous reporting were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed descriptively. Results indicated that 48% of students preferred anonymity when sharing personal or social concerns, 60% agreed that technology-based anonymous platforms would allow all students to raise concerns fairly, 69% perceived the SHD as improving communication with administration, and 75% believed it could positively impact mental health. High digital readiness (97% owning smartphones or laptops) further supports the feasibility. Chi-square and Spearman correlation analyses revealed no significant differences across gender ($p = 0.204$), age, GPA, or scholarship status, indicating a universally high demand for the platform among both male and female students. Findings indicate that mental health and personal concerns represent the highest priority, followed by administrative and academic support. Overall, the results highlight a strong preference for an anonymous, digital, student-centered help desk to address academic, administrative, and social challenges. Implementation of such a system is expected to enhance accessibility, inclusiveness, early detection of student issues, and overall well-being, while reducing faculty workload and improving institutional responsiveness.

Keywords: Academic support, Anonymity, Digital platform, Mental health, Students' Help Desk, University of Ruhuna