

CYBERSECURITY AWARENESS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES: CASE STUDY OF ARTS UNDERGRADUATES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF COLOMBO

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Over the past months, the Covid-19 pandemic has increased internet usage. Sri Lankan students are compelled to depend on the internet in schools and universities as the teaching-learning scenario is entirely or partially online. These circumstances make an understanding of cybersecurity mandatory for students and teachers to ensure their security. This quantitative study explores cybersecurity awareness and various vulnerabilities faced by new entrants to the Faculty of Arts, the University of Colombo, in 2021. The questionnaire was forwarded to all new entrants through the Learning Management System. The data were analysed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS. A majority of the sample (58%) lacked cybersecurity awareness, and there was no significant difference by gender ($p = 0.364$). Awareness was dependent on factors such as residence (only western province shows more than 50% of awareness), time spent on the internet per day (*correlation coefficient* = 0.788), experience in using the internet (*correlation coefficient* = 0.976), socio-economic standing (*correlation coefficient* = 0.887). The study shows that students become more vulnerable due to unsecure practices adopted during internet use and ignorance of and lack of attention paid to most updated cyberattacks as significant occurrences that concern activities in cyberspace. Even though the reports of international cybersecurity list Sri Lanka to be one of the most vulnerable countries in South Asia, the number of reported incidents to the Sri Lanka Computer Emergency Readiness Team is very low compared to other countries in the South Asian region (481 in 2020 without social media incidents). The present study points to privacy concerns and a lack of awareness of cyberattacks and reporting procedures (71.4%), resulting in underreporting. The findings emphasise the need to improve cybersecurity awareness among university students in Sri Lanka to ensure security in a rapidly changing virtual teaching-learning scenario.

Keywords: Cyberattacks, Cybercrime, Cybersecurity awareness