Psycho-Social and Health Related Problems Faced by Pre-Clinical Students during Online Learning at Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya

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Due to the covid-19 pandemic situation pre-clinical students had to adapt to learning online rather quickly. This sudden transition from onsite to online may have had an impact on the health and social aspects of students. The study was carried out to determine the psycho-social and health impact of this transition. A cross-sectional descriptive survey was conducted. A pre-tested questionnaire was designed and distributed via Google forms to 185 students who had undergone 2 semesters of online learning. A total of 115 Google-forms were received. The mean age of the sample was 21.9±1.09 years and 50.9% of the sample were females. Of the participants 86%, 68.4% and 41.2% used smartphones, tablets, and laptop computers to access online content respectively. Of the participants, 49.1% complained about health issues and discomfort due to prolonged screen time. Prior to the pandemic, only 10.5% engaged in more than 4 hours per day of learning via online resources. During the pandemic it increased up to 70.2%. The reported common health problems were visual symptoms (83.9%) headache (78.6%), eye-fatigue (82.1%), focusing problems (35.7%) and burning sensation of the eyes (21.4%). Thirty-six-point two percent reported sleeping difficulties and 41.1% reported musculoskeletal pain: neck 70%, shoulders 40%, upper and lower back 37.5% and knees 12.5%. Social problems identified were expenses on internet (28.9%), missing university environment (85.1%), missing friends and teamwork (78.9%), and missing face to face communication with teachers (38.2%). The psychological problems identified were, stress (34.2%) and lack of self-motivation to learn (52.6%). In conclusion, online learning continues to play a vital role in continued education during the ongoing pandemic situation and this study highlights the health and psycho-social issues faced by students. Administrators and teachers should have these in mind when designing online teaching, learning sessions and remedial actions must be taken to minimize them.

Keywords: COVID-19, Online learning, Psycho-social impact, Health, Pre-clinical