

Friendships among University Students: A Case Study of the University of Peradeniya

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There are different types of relationships among groups of students studying together. Among many facets of their relationships, one vital relationship is the category of friends. Undergraduate university students who are young adults are expected to initiate these types of relationships during their stay in the university. The study aims to describe the non-sexual relationships between students in the university in terms of numbers of friends in each sex and to describe themes of conversations they engaged in.

The study design is a descriptive cross sectional study. Study population was undergraduate students of the University of Peradeniya. The proposal was perused by the Board of Study in Psychiatry in Postgraduate Institute of Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. A self-administered questionnaire which was developed in English was translated to Sinhala.

The median frequency of female friends among female university students is two, whereas the median for a male student having a male friend in the university is between two and three. Males seem to have more friends than the females. Approximately 7% of the sample claims that they do not solicit a friend of the same sex. Very few students have more than four friends on campus of the same sex. The most significant finding of the study is the extremely poor inter-sex interaction. Of the study population, 70% of males claim that they do not have a female friend, while 50% of the females claim that they do not have a male friend. Only 15% of the students revealed they have friends of the opposite sex.

In analysing student conversations, there are three categories of themes. Themes which are common to all categories which transcend the barrier of sex are making jokes and politics. The second category which is exclusively spoken within the same sex friends is about private matters. Themes completely spoken within male friends are to do with substances of abuse. There are no identified exclusive themes within females. The third category is the theme exclusively spoken within the opposite sexes. They are to do with common activities such as organizing trips or religious activities. Taking the above research evidence into consideration, it transpires that there is poor interaction within the undergraduate student body in mostly a resident campus. It is appalling that about 7% of the students claim not to have any friend. This indicates that for academic and social issues the students function in relative isolation. More than 50% of the female students not having friends in the opposite sex should not be disregarded as vanity. The social learning and the maturity one expects from a university graduate which is nurtured at the university is lost if this condition prevails