

IMPACT OF SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INCLUDING NATURE ENGAGEMENT ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF VETERINARY UNDERGRADUATES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA

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The psychological well-being of undergraduate students is crucial for their personal development. Recent studies indicate that proximity to nature can improve psychological well-being, leading to increased interest in nature-based interventions for mental health. This preliminary study explored various factors influencing the psychological well-being of veterinary undergraduates, including environmental, social, economic, and individual aspects. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained (Arts/Ethics/2024/01/20.1), and a representative sample of 112 students was selected through stratified random sampling to ensure the inclusion of all academic years, genders, and ethnicities. A self-administered questionnaire was developed and used to assess the students' satisfaction related to their personal and academic life, residential environments, financial and non-financial support available to them and relationships. Findings indicated that students' happiness in their achievement of educational and other goals, internal and external environments of hostels or boarding places, and decision-making freedom had moderate correlations with their overall happiness, with Kendall's Rank Correlation Tau values of 0.31 ($p < 0.05$), 0.284 ($p < 0.05$) and 0.277 ($p < 0.05$), respectively. However, their GPA, level of happiness in the non-financial help received, and the amount of money in their possession for personal expenses had weak correlations of 0.169 ($p < 0.05$), 0.167 ($p < 0.05$) and 0.132 ($p < 0.05$), respectively, with overall happiness. The student groups with the highest and the least engagement levels with nature reported average overall happiness scores of 7 ($n = 5$, $SD = \pm 0.71$) and 5.86 ($n = 21$, $SD = \pm 1.61$), respectively on the 1-9 Likert scale. These results suggest that engagement with nature positively correlates with overall happiness, underscoring the potential of nature-based solutions in fostering psychological well-being among the undergraduates of the University of Peradeniya.

Financial assistance from the University of Peradeniya under the Multidisciplinary Research (Grant No. 370) is acknowledged

Keywords: Happiness, Mental health and well-being, Nature-based solutions