

Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on Physical Activity among Sri Lankan Population: A Cross-Sectional Study

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The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the general population is massive, and one of the effective strategies to reduce the spread is to maintain social distancing. Further, it was facilitated by imposing a nationwide curfew during May 2020. The routine lifestyle of the Sri Lankan population has been affected due to a nationwide curfew. Therefore, the study was conducted to assess the changes in physical activity before and during the COVID-19 pandemic among the Sri Lankan population. A descriptive cross-sectional survey was carried out among the Sri Lankan population during the nationwide curfew in May 2020. Even though the calculated sample size was 384 (Cochrane's formula), 562 data were collected using a pre-tested questionnaire consisting of socio-demographic data (10 questions) and questions addressing the frequency of physical activities carried out before and during the curfew period (16 questions) during the three weeks, that the questionnaire was open to the public. The sample was achieved through snowball sampling technique with ethical approval of KIU (KIU/ERC/20/47). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS version 25. The mean age of the sample was 24.83 ± 5.74 years, and the majority (49.8%) were graduates, while 17.3% of the sample represented the Colombo district. In assessing the physical activity, it was categorized as moderate and vigorous. The majority of the sample (89%) had followed moderate physical activity before the curfew; however, this has been reduced to 1.8% during the curfew. At the same time, 29.7% of the sample followed moderate physical activity between 30-60 minutes per day before the curfew, where only 34.5% of them followed physical activity for more than 60 minutes during the curfew. Under the vigorous-intense physical activities, 49.6% followed no activity before the curfew; however, this has increased to 55% during the curfew ($p=0.001$). In conclusion, even though the majority had followed a moderate level of physical activity during curfew, it shows a significant increase ($p=0.001$) of following vigorous-intense physical activities compared to before the curfew. Since regular physical activities act as a protective factor for many non-communicable diseases and mental health, there is a necessity to raise awareness of the recommended thresholds of physical activity to improve quality of life.

Keywords: Physical activity, Sri Lanka, COVID-19, Survey