

EXPLORING MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AMONG SRI LANKAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: KEY FACTORS AND TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS

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The rising prevalence of mental health issues among Sri Lankan university students, including high rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts, significantly impacts academic performance. High rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts have led to alarming trends, including course dropouts and severe mental health crises. This study aims to identify key factors associated with mental health among Sri Lankan university students and propose IT-related solutions to address them. A structured survey was conducted with a sample of 1,905 students from Sri Lankan local universities. A self-administered questionnaire is used to collect data on demographics, attitudes, academic performance, mental health coping mechanisms, the impact of technology, and future recommendations. The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) and Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) were included in the questionnaire to assess mental health. Data was analyzed using R software. The majority of respondents were female (68.24%), with significant representation from the University of Peradeniya (38.63%), the University of Moratuwa (24.82%) and the University of Jaffna (14.54%). Analysis revealed that 33.59% of students reported low mental health, 33.96% moderate, 27.82% high, and 4.62% extreme distress. Factors contributing to poor mental health included future uncertainty, family pressure, financial stress, academic challenges, relationship issues, and the influence of technology. Additionally, 90.13% of respondents reported dissatisfaction with their GPA, with 38.83% holding a GPA between 3.00 and 3.39, indicating that even relatively high-performing students are affected. Significant correlations were found between mental health status and department ($p=0.0001$), as well as year of study ($p=0.0312$). Notably, 7.5% of the respondents reported suicidal thoughts, highlighting the severity of the issue. The study emphasizes the need for mental health interventions in universities, including awareness programs, counseling services, stress management, and peer support systems. Proposed solutions include creating a mental health chatbot integrated into university websites to provide accessible support and guidance. Future studies could develop predictive models to identify at-risk students early based on behavioral and academic indicators.

Keywords: Coping mechanisms, IT solutions, mental health, undergraduates