

Development of a Screening Tool to Identify Psychological Morbidity of New Entrants of University of Peradeniya

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Mental well-being is very important to become an effective and efficient member of the society. The mental health and behavior of a person is influenced by individual and environmental factors experienced during childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. Although many studies have been conducted with the general public, there are only a very few studies conducted to identify risk factors for development of psychological morbidities among university students. Thus, the aim of this study was to develop a screening tool to identify those at risk of developing psychological morbidity among new entrants to the University of Peradeniya. This study adopted a mixed methods approach. In phase I, the preparation of a preliminary questionnaire was accomplished with developing a Semi-Structured Interview Guide (SSIG) through literature review. To identify risk factors for development of psychological morbidity among new entrants, in-depth interviews were conducted using the SSIG among key informants and a list of risk factors was identified through thematic analysis. In the phase II, refining the preliminary questionnaire and the reduction of items were carried out through discussion with an expert group and after conducting two Delphi rounds among experts consisting of administrative staff and service staff of the university and teaching hospitals in Peradeniya and Kandy. The data was collected in the above two phases from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Registrar, Wardens, Sub-Wardens, Health Center staff, Staff of the Career Guidance Unit, Senior Student Counsellors, Consultant Psychiatrists, and Psychologists. The pilot test of the prepared tool was conducted with 50 first year students. The final tool was constructed with 28 items and the reliability of the factors was greater than .6 in the Cronbach alpha scale. The prepared tool is ready to use with the new entrants of University of Peradeniya to screen and extend support to vulnerable students to help them overcome their psychological issues.

Keywords: Psychological morbidity, University new entrants, Risk factors, Screening tool, SSIG