

**Factors Affecting Perceived Stress:
A Study of First-Year Undergraduates of Eastern University, Sri Lanka**

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Stress is associated with limitations in higher education and negatively affects academic performance, physical health, and psychological wellbeing of students. This cross-sectional study addressed factors that are associated with perceived stress (PS), their prevalence, and the correlation to PS. From the first-years, 333 were selected representing all 7 faculties of the Eastern University, Sri Lanka using a simple random sampling technique. A Self-administered questionnaire was used to gather data. Frequencies and correlations with PS with regard to academic, physiological, social, psychological, and environmental factors were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficient. Among the participants difficulty to deal with academic problems (13.1%), and studying for long hours (23.5%), too much academic work load (24.1%), poor performance at lectures (5.2%), and boredom felt when attending regular lectures (8.8%) were identified as academic factors significantly correlating with PS. Frequent headaches (12.2%), problems related to gastrointestinal system (5.5%), sleep related issues (14.3%), respiration (2.1%), cardiac (1.5%) and urinary (3.4%) systems related issues, poor appetite (13.4%), and fatigue and tiredness (12.2%) were the physiological factors ($p < 0.05$) that significantly correlated with PS. Lacking good relationship with family (10.4%) and friends (3%), inability to enjoy meeting people (9.1%), conflicts with others (4%) and lecturers (8.5%), desire to be alone (13.7%), insisting others on self-opinion (4.9%), poor conflict resolution skills (2.1%), financial problems (19.5%) were the social factors that significantly correlated with PS ($p < 0.05$). Suicidal thoughts (2.1%), feeling inferior (5.5%), lack of clear vision on future (7.9%), low self-esteem (5.5%), problems with love affairs (5.2%), feeling lonely (4.3%) were the psychological factors that significantly correlated with PS ($p < 0.05$). Lack of extracurricular activities (3.7%), changes in food and food patterns (14%), low quality health services (26.8%), and lack of well-equipped hostels (25.6%), were the environmental factors which significantly correlated with PS ($p < 0.05$). There were many factors prevalent among first-year students which positively correlated with PS and were statistically significant. The university system should address these issues and take appropriate interventions to minimize them.

Keywords: Affecting factors, Perceived stress, Undergraduates