

OP-11: Student perceptions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their educational and personal life: a cross-sectional study in the Colombo Medical Faculty

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Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted university education worldwide. This study aimed to examine undergraduates' perceptions on how their learning and lifestyle were affected and the institutional support they received during the pandemic.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted between January 2021 to March 2022 using an online questionnaire at the Colombo Medical Faculty among all students from the first to fifth year (n=1120). The participants used a Likert scale to rate their degree of agreement on how they were affected by the pandemic. The data were dichotomized (i.e., as 'agree'/'disagree') to examine its association with the students' demographic characteristics using Chi-squared test. A p value of <0.05 was considered significant.

Results: The response rate was low (249; 22.23%). The mean age of participants was 22.3 years (SD=2.0) with a predominance of females (62.2%). A majority disagreed that they had higher monthly expenditure due to online learning, or that they faced technical problems, and that they had been negatively affected by delayed examinations. A majority also indicated that they had been negatively affected by examinations being clumped together and that they were anxious about the future, and this was seen more among junior (1st and 2nd years) as compared to senior students (3rd, 4th and final years). Only half of the sample indicated that the personal tutor scheme was helpful, while 60.0% of those residing in the hostel did not indicate satisfaction with hostel facilities. Watching movies or television series (85.1%) was the highest reported leisure activity. Cooking (56.2%) and gardening (25.3%) were reported as new skills acquired.

Conclusions: The majority of students did not face accessibility issues during online learning. The changes in the programme due to the pandemic may have led to difficulties in exam performance and feelings of uncertainty and this was more among the junior students. The faculty support services need to be further improved to meet the students' needs.

Keywords: COVID-19, medical students, online learning