PP-21: Online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: the experience of physiotherapy undergraduates in Sri Lanka

P. Cinthuja[1], P. de Zoysa[2]

[1]Department of Allied Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine,
University of Colombo, Sri Lanka
[2]Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Introduction: Online learning was an alternative method during the COVID-19 pandemic. The objectives of the study were to explore perceptions and preferences of online learning among physiotherapy undergraduates during the pandemic.

Methods: An online cross-sectional survey was conducted. Ethics approval and permission were obtained from the relevant authorities. Physiotherapy undergraduates from all three universities which offer physiotherapy degree programmes in Sri Lanka were recruited and a convenient sampling method was used. First year undergraduates were excluded since they did not have experience in clinical or onsite practical classes during the data collection period.

Results: The response rate was 48.8%. Of the 147 respondents, 72% were females. During the pandemic period, 63% of the participants spent between 10-40 hours/week on online learning. 78% mentioned that they have moderate knowledge on Information Technology. Being able to stay at home and to learn at their own pace were commonly mentioned advantages of online learning. However, 36% of participants indicated that internet connectivity issues impacted their learning, whilst 78% of the participants indicated that clinical teaching and practical classes could not be replaced by online teaching. Seventy-seven of the participants preferred a hybrid learning method, even post-pandemic. Results indicated that online learning would be made more effective if the classes were more interactive, stimulating and engaging. Low response which may lead to a response bias was a study limitation.

Conclusions: Physiotherapy students have a positive perception towards traditional learning for clinical and practical classes compared to online learning. However, considering the advantages of online learning for theory components, students prefer a hybrid learning method for the physiotherapy study programme. Problems such as internet connectivity issues should be addressed to provide a satisfactory learning experience to students.

Keywords: physiotherapy, online-learning, traditional learning