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The level of physical activity among undergraduates of a selected private university in Sri Lanka: A descriptive cross-sectional study

Weerasinghe T¹, Jayamaha AR^{1,2*}, Wimalasekera SW³, Singh SJ^{2,4}, Orme MW^{2,4}

¹Faculty of Health Science, KAATSU International University, Battaramulla, Sri Lanka, ²Department of Respiratory Sciences, University of Leicester, Leicester, United Kingdom, ³Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka, ⁴Centre for Exercise and Rehabilitation Science, NIHR Leicester Biomedical Research Centre-Respiratory, Leicester, United Kingdom

Background: Physical inactivity is a global health challenge across all ages, compromising the health of generations and further exacerbated by the pandemic. Very limited literature is available regarding Physical Activity (PA) among Sri Lankans, including younger adults such as university students.

Objective: The study aimed to describe the self-reported PA levels of undergraduate students at KAATSU International University (KIU), Sri Lanka.

Methods & Materials: A descriptive cross-sectional study (KIU/ERC/21/68) was conducted among conveniently selected 429 KIU undergraduates. A pretested, self-administrated questionnaire which consisted of International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) and basic demographics was shared among the undergraduates via a Google Form. Weekly Metabolic Equivalent of Task (MET) minutes were calculated (PA minutes per week × METs for each PA category) according to the IPAQ guidelines. Descriptive statistics were performed using SPSS version 26 statistical package. P<0.05 was considered significant.

Results: The majority of participants were females (78.8%, n=338) with a mean age of 26 (±6 SD) years. Of the participants, most (37.3%, n=160) were biomedical science undergraduates followed by nursing (24.5%, n=105), psychology (12.8%, n=55), management (10.5%, n=45), and other (14.9%, n=64) undergraduates. Most of the undergraduates (54.3% n=233) were unemployed. The mean PA of the undergraduates was 1358.54±1064.3 MET-minutes per week. Mean weekly MET-minutes for vigorous PA, moderate PA, and walking were 565.67 (±764.08 SD), 322.49 (±392.48 SD), and 470.38 (±302.76 SD), respectively. Of the undergraduates, 52.9% were minimally active (600-3000 MET-minutes), 11.4% were engaged in health enhancing PA (>3000 MET-minutes), and 35.7% were physically inactive (<600 MET-minutes). Also 71.6% participants reported that the COVID-19 lockdown reduced PA level.

Conclusion: Study revealed that most undergraduates were minimally active and COVID-19 pandemic further impacted to reduce the level of PA. Appropriate strategies are needed to improve the level of PA among undergraduates of KIU, Sri Lanka.