

PP 11

Relationship between perceived stress and body mass index among physiotherapy students of the University of Colombo

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Background: Stress is the body’s response to external or internal demands. University students encounter different types of stressors during their academic life and they use different mechanisms for coping. The prevalence of weight disorders is increasing worldwide. Factors such as stress also play a role in weight disorders, thereby influencing the body mass index (BMI). Similar kinds of relationships have been found among university students also.

Objective: This study was aimed at assessing the relationship between stress and Body Mass Index (BMI) among physiotherapy students at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Methods & Materials: A descriptive cross-sectional study was done among 105 physiotherapy students at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. Convenient sampling was used. Information on stress scores, related stressors, and stress reactions were collected using the student-life stress inventory which is a validated questionnaire. Self-reported weight and weight measurements were taken for this study. The BMI was calculated from the height and weight of the participants. BMI was categorized according to standard World Health Organization guidelines. The relationship between stress score and BMI was analyzed using Pearson correlation test. $P < 0.05$ was considered significant.

Results: The sample consisted of 26% males and 74% females. The mean age of the participants was 23.85 ± 1.25 years. The mean total stress score was 25.35 ± 7.87 . The mean BMI of the sample was $21.882 \pm 4.211 \text{ kgm}^{-2}$. The self-imposed stressors were the most prevalent category of stressors (79.0% above midpoint) and frustrations was the least common category of stressors among participants (64% above midpoint). Cognitive responses were the most prevalent reactions being 73.0 % above midpoint. The correlation coefficient between total stress score and BMI was 0.121 ($p = 0.231$).

Conclusion: The mean BMI value of the population falls under the normal weight category. There was no significant relationship between stress score and BMI among the participants.