

An Exploration of Coping Strategies used During the Examination Period by Final Year Allied Health Undergraduates of General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University; A Qualitative Study

PLAA Sathsarani^{1#}, LGS Kavindya¹, SMPNAB Abhayarathna¹, KLKTD Sandharenu¹,
AWMKK Bandara¹, and NFJ Fernando²

¹Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University,
Ratmalana, Sri Lanka

²Faculty of Medicine, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Ratmalana, Sri Lanka

#mailtoamandi@gmail.com

Abstract

Academic and clinical coursework often leads to high levels of stress among undergraduates specially during exam period, which may induce anxiety, depression and decreased academic outcomes. Recognizing the need for improved stress management, this study explored stress coping strategies used by final year undergraduates of Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University (FAHS, KDU) which could support them to effectively manage stress especially during exam period. A qualitative study using in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted face-face among 35 final-year undergraduates using a purposive sampling method representing all degree programs at FAHS, KDU. Ethical approval was obtained. Interviewer-administered questionnaire was given to assess socio-demographic data and analysed using SPSS Version 23 software. Interview transcripts analysed using Thematic Analysis method. The study participants were aged 22 to 27 years and the majority were females. Our findings revealed the following four themes, maladaptive, adaptive, social support, and active coping strategies. Cigarette smoking, self-blame, venting as a temporary relief and giving up falls under maladaptive coping strategies. Adaptive coping strategies gave rise to four sub themes, such as engaging in religious activities, maintaining a positive and refreshing mindset as positive reframing, avoiding distractions as self-control, accepting real situations as acceptance. Social support includes Psychological, emotional and peer support. Active coping strategies include ignoring reality, Self-distraction, having a study plan and incorporating enjoyable activities into their study routine. The findings revealed that undergraduates faced various stressors and employed coping strategies. Therefore, this study is focused to enhance positive coping skills and to reduce their stress to achieve better academic outcomes.

Keywords: *Final year undergraduates, Coping strategies, Stress, Period of examination*