

Balancing Academic and Professional Responsibilities: An Exploration of Stress Factors Among Full-Time Working Undergraduates At General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka

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This study examined multiple stressors affecting undergraduate students who are balancing full-time employment with academic commitments. Using an exploratory, qualitative methodology, the study examined the academic, personal, socio-cultural and economic stressors experienced by students enrolled in the weekend BSc in Management program at General Sir John Kotelawala Defense University. The study's data collection included nine semi-structured interviews, and purposive sampling was used to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of these students. Theoretical frameworks by Selye and Folkman underlie the study, highlighting stress as a physiological and cognitive response to various demands. The purpose of this study was to identify specific stressors, their impact on participants' academic success rates and the current mental health and coping strategies of the participants. These aspects are useful in formulating institutional policies and service support to eliminate stress and enhance the overall performance of students. The results of the study are useful to educational institutions, managers, industries, and policymakers. In addition, the study contributes to the broader discourse on student mental health, particularly in the context of full-time working professionals studying/ pursuing higher education. Regardless of its contributions, the study acknowledges the inherent limitations of qualitative research, and by addressing these limitations, it aims to provide a solid foundation for future studies and practical applications to improve the academic and professional experiences of working undergraduates.

Keywords: *coping strategies, psychological wellbeing, stress factors*