

OP 06: Prevalence of distress and associated factors among G.C.E. A/L students in Gampaha District: A descriptive cross-sectional study

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Introduction: GCE A/L examination is a highly competitive examination, owing to the limited opportunities for university entrance in Sri Lanka. Thus, A/L students are likely to experience high levels of distress.

Objectives: To assess the prevalence of distress and associated factors among G.C.E A/L students in Gampaha District.

Methods: In this cross-sectional study, 464 A/L students (66.8% female) from five randomly selected schools from Gampaha District were evaluated using General Health Questionnaire (GHQ)-30 and a demographic questionnaire. Students were stratified according to stream.

Results: Almost half of the students (n=220, 47.41%) exhibited significant distress. The percentage of distress among male and female students were 45.5% and 48.4%, respectively. Among streams, technology stream had the highest prevalence of distress (61%, n=61), followed by mathematics (58.4% n=45). The chosen stream was unhappily studied by 54.1% (n=251), out of whom, 53% (n=133) were under distress. Among those who spent more than 70 hours with their families per week, only 42.6% (n=112) were under distress. Out of students who were studying for more than 50 hours per week (n=308), only 46.1% (n=142) were under distress.

Conclusions: A high prevalence of distress was observed among A/L students in the selected district in Sri Lanka. Being unhappy with the selected stream and less time spent with families appear to be associated with greater distress. Uncertainty about future academic and career opportunities may have contributed to the higher prevalence of distress in the Technology stream students.

Keywords: Psychological distress, students, university entrance