

## **Undergraduates' Quality of Life and Its Association with Mental Health Symptoms: The Case of the University of Peradeniya**

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Policymakers and university administration are equally concerned about how the current crisis is affecting student wellbeing. Undergraduates find themselves in stressful situations because of their workload and other responsibilities. Mental health symptoms (MHS) are seen as major causes of reduced QOL. This research is conducted to assess the QOL and the presence of MHS, such as depression, anxiety and stress among undergraduates and to determine how MHS are associated with QOL. Social and institutional support systems that are used by undergraduate students was also investigated. To measure QOL across four domains; physical, psychological, social, and environment, the World Health Organization Quality of Life BREF (WHOQOL-BREF) was utilised. The existence of MHS was examined using the 21-item Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21). The QOL, MHS, and support services of 471 University of Peradeniya undergraduate students were evaluated using quantitative research techniques and a deductive approach. Data were collected through both online (271 responses) and physical (200 responses) modes. Preliminary analysis indicated that online and physical survey data were not compatible and could not be merged. Therefore, the analyses were conducted on the two groups separately. Descriptive analyses showed that most undergraduates had favourable levels of QOL and normal level of MHS. However, a concerning 15% claimed to have severe and extremely severe levels of depression, anxiety and stress. MANOVA analysis revealed that QOL and MHS are significantly associated ( $p < 0.05$ ). Descriptive and tabular analysis showed that QOL reduced with the increment of severity of MHS. Support systems that were used by a majority of undergraduates were informal, such as family, batchmates and outside friends. Only a low percentage of undergraduates sought help from university and other formal support systems. Findings can inform ways to improve QOL and mental health of undergraduates.

**Keywords:** DASS-21, Mental health symptoms, Quality of life, Undergraduates, WHOQOL-BREF

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