

Adjustment difficulties, loneliness, and associated factors among freshers at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna

Abewickrama ETM¹, Anoosa Banu MA¹, Karunarathna RMDN¹, Kumara AGOD¹, Vivarjitha K¹, Kumar R², Sivayokan S^{3,4,5}

¹*Faculty of Medicine University of Jaffna*

²*Department of Community and Family Medicine, University of Jaffna*

³*Department of Psychiatry, University of Jaffna*

⁴*Teaching Hospital Jaffna*

⁵*Base Hospital Tellippallai*

Background and Objective: The transition from school to university is challenging. Some students adapt quickly, while others face difficulties, resulting in homesickness and loneliness. This study describes adjustment difficulties, loneliness, and associated socio-demographic factors among students of the junior-most batch at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna.

Methods: This descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out among students of the junior-most batch (43rd) of medical students at the University of Jaffna. Adjustment difficulties and loneliness were assessed with a self-administered questionnaire. The UCLA Loneliness Scale was used to assess loneliness where a higher score indicated a greater level of loneliness. The chi-square test was used to determine the factors associated with adjustment difficulties while the independent t-test and one-way ANOVA were used to assess differences in loneliness. The critical level was considered as 0.05.

Results: In total, 141 (of 187) students participated with a response rate of 75.4 %. Of them, about two-thirds were female (66.6%) and from districts other than Jaffna (66%). In the sample, 61% agreed or strongly agreed that they had adjusted “pretty well” while 10% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement and the rest were neutral. The common adjustment difficulties experienced were academic load (71.6%), feeling the urge to travel home every weekend (74.5%), difficulties communicating in English (66.6%), and adapting to food available in Jaffna (63.9%). Students who studied in Tamil medium before entering university were more likely to have difficulty communicating in English ($p < 0.01$); males were more likely to feel burdened by academic load ($p = 0.035$); those who stayed at the hostel were more likely to have difficulty adjusting to food available in Jaffna ($p = 0.026$). There was no significant difference in mean UCLA loneliness score by gender or ethnicity, but the score was higher among Jaffna district students (19.4, SD 9.1) than others (12.9 SD 9.26; $p = 0.005$), and in students coming from home (18.6 SD 13.9) than students who were boarded or in hostels (13.2 SD 9.67; $p = 0.003$).

Conclusions: Students in the Jaffna Medical Faculty appear to be adjusting reasonably well, although a small proportion struggle. Living in a boarding place or hostel appears to be a protective factor against loneliness. Student support programmes need to target students who are more vulnerable to adjustment difficulties and loneliness.

Keywords: Adaptation, Loneliness, UCLA score, Adjustment difficulties