

Abstract 22:

Usage of WhatsApp among undergraduates of Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna, and its perceived impact on psychosocial, behavioural, educational and extracurricular activities

Roxshana R¹, Nanduni Dhananjani HG¹, Kunadiluxshan K¹, Keethanjalie P¹, Yasodha Gimhan KAD¹, Thuvaraga S², Sivayokan S^{3,4}

¹Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna

²Office of Medical officer of Health, Uduvil

³Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna

⁴Professorial Psychiatry Unit, Teaching Hospital Jaffna

Background and objectives: WhatsApp is commonly used by undergraduates in Sri Lanka. However, little is understood from an empirical viewpoint about the intensity of usage of WhatsApp and its various impacts. Thus, this study aimed to assess the perceived impact of WhatsApp on psychosocial, behavioural, educational and extracurricular activities among the undergraduates of Faculty of Medicine, Jaffna.

Methods: This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 427 undergraduates of Jaffna Medical Faculty using proportionate stratified random sampling. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee, Faculty of Medicine, Jaffna. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire and analysed using SPSS. Chi-square and independent tests were used to determine statistical significance

Results: Among the 427 students who participated, 60% were female, and 339 (79.4%) lived away from their families. Personal chats were the primary WhatsApp feature used (93.9%), while 374 (87.6%) used it for audio calls, and only 67 (15.7%) used it for community chats. Academic activities were recognized as the major purpose by 185 (43.3%). The mean daily WhatsApp usage time was 143.7 minutes (SD 105.7). Though 93.7% were aware of screen time monitoring, over half (56%) did not use it. Significant associations were identified between distance from family and perceived behavioural impact ($\chi^2 = 4.17$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.042$), gender and perceived psychosocial impact ($\chi^2 = 5.57$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.018$), and batch affiliation with status update usage ($\chi^2 = 34.76$, $df = 20$, $p = 0.021$). Status updates also correlated with perceived educational impact ($\chi^2 = 17.020$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.002$), while group chats were linked to sharing extracurricular information ($\chi^2 = 8.716$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.003$).

Conclusions and recommendations: This study showed that there is a gap between awareness and actual usage in managing screen time, highlighting the need for better strategies to encourage effective screen time management. Promoting the use of screen time monitoring apps can help students manage their WhatsApp usage more effectively, leading to a better balance between online and offline activities.

Keywords: WhatsApp, Psychosocial, Behavioural, Educational, Extracurricular