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### Participation in physical activities and associated factors among students of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna

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**Background and objective:** Medical students are particularly prone to physical inactivity due to their demanding academic schedules. This study assessed the level of physical activity, knowledge and attitude towards physical activity, and associated factors among medical students at the University of Jaffna.

**Methods:** An institution-based descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among Jaffna medical students selected through proportionate stratified sampling. Data collection was done by using a self-administered questionnaire (August to November 2024). Physical activity was measured with the International Physical Activity Questionnaire Short Form (IPAQ-SF) and evaluated against WHO standards. Knowledge was assessed by calculating the % responding correctly to each question. Attitudes and barriers were evaluated on a four-point Likert scale (strongly agree-strongly disagree). Data were analyzed with SPSS (v21). Factors associated with participation were determined using the chi-square test (significance level 0.05).

**Results:** In total 389 students participated (response rate 94.2%). The majority were females (67.6%, n=263) and Tamil students (53%, n=203). Just over half (50.3%, n= 189) reported participating in physical activity in the prior week (IPAQ-SF MET values >0). Based on IPAQ-SF activity levels, however, 80.3% (n=302) of students were inactive (0-600MET). By WHO standards, 11.3% met the criteria for adequate moderate activity, 8.2% for adequate vigorous activity. Knowledge gaps were identified in relation to the recommended duration of physical activity and its immediate benefits. Attitudes were generally positive although about a third strongly agreed/agreed that sports did not interest them (35.95%), that they did not have skills to participate in physical activities (35.7%), and felt that competitive sports were not suitable for women (31.4%). Key barriers to physical activity were heavy academic load (87.3%) and lack of time (84.2%). Participation in physical activity was significantly associated with gender, ethnicity, academic phase, exam results and type of residence ( $p \leq 0.05$ ); males, Tamil students, para-clinical students, and those who lived at home, were more likely to be active.

**Conclusion:** Participation in physical activities is inadequate among medical students of the University of Jaffna. Interventions addressing academic and structural barriers, coupled with improved awareness and supportive infrastructure, are needed to promote active lifestyles among medical students.

**Keywords:** physical activity, medical students, participation, IPAQ, University of Jaffna