

## **Levels of engagement in physical activity, barriers, and associated socio-demographic factors among Jaffna University undergraduates**

Luxman T<sup>1</sup>, Jinthujan S<sup>1</sup>, Coonghe PAD<sup>2</sup>, Kumanan T<sup>3</sup>, Kumar R<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna

<sup>2</sup> Department of Community and Family Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna

<sup>3</sup> Department of Clinical Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna

**Background:** Prevalence of physical inactivity among young undergraduate students is very high. There are several studies that have been done on the assessment of physical activity among undergraduates in foreign countries. However, studies on physical activity patterns in Sri Lankan university students are lacking. There exists no data about physical activity among undergraduates in Jaffna.

**Methodology:** This is a descriptive cross sectional study. It was conducted in the Jaffna campus of the University of Jaffna. Data was collected from January to March 2017. The study was carried out on 2nd year students in all the faculties in the Jaffna campus of the University of Jaffna. 386 students participated in the study. Data were collecting using a self-administered questionnaire. Data were analysed using SPSS version 23. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna.

**Results:** All participants were in the age group of 20-25 years, 45.6% (n=176) of them were males and 54.4% (n=210) were females with the majority representing the Faculty of Arts 29.5% (n=114). 61.7% of the participants recorded a high physical activity level, 31.3% with a moderate physical activity level and 7% with a low physical activity level. Among the socio-demographic factors studied, sex (p<0.008), ethnic background (p<0.0001) and sector (p<0.009) were significantly associated with physical activity level. A majority of participants reported that fatigue (62%), lack of free time (62.2%), reluctance to exercise in public (52.8%), lack of peer group (50.8%), and lack of exercise facilities (58%), were barriers to physical activity.

**Conclusion:** Majority of the participants had high physical activity level with some socio-demographic economic factors, particularly sex, sector and ethnicity, influencing physical activity levels. However, significant barriers prevented physical activity among participants. Action needs to be taken to address these barriers to improve the physical and mental health of university undergraduates.