The influence of sociodemographic factors on perceived level of stress among first year medical students of Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna

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Background: Medical students are known to experience high levels of stress compared with their non-medical peers. Various socio-demographic factors are known to be associated with experiences of stress. A deeper understanding of those factors may facilitate efforts to improve well being and learning among medical students. The objective of this study was to determine the influence of socio-demographic factors on perceived stress level among first year medical students of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna.

Methods: This was an institutional-based cross sectional study of first year medical students of Jaffna Medical Faculty. A pretested self-administered questionnaire was used for data collection. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) was used to assess perceived level of stress, and relevant socio-demographic data were obtained through the questionnaire. Responses to PSS-10 were marked out of 40 and a total mark (0-13 low stress, 14-26 moderate stress, 27-40 high stress) was obtained for each student. Analysis was done using chi square test.

Results: 106 students participated in the study with a response rate of 78%.. The mean score of PSS was 19.44 (SD±4.658). A large majority of participants (91.4%) were identified to have moderate level of perceived stress. A statistically significant relationship was identified between perceived level of stress and A/L medium of instruction ($p<0.05$) as well as financial support for education ($p<0.05$). No statistically significant differences in stress level were found based on sex, age, first language, monthly family income, present accommodation, monthly expenditure and transport medium to the faculty.

Conclusion: Most medical students at the Jaffna Medical Faculty experience a moderate level of perceived stress. Perceived stress level has a statistically significant relationship with the A/L medium of instruction and financial support for education. Strengthening the English curriculum for first year medical students would be a good approach to addressing students' language issues. The authorities should consider providing student loans, scholarships or grants to needy students.

Key words: Medical students, socio-demogaphic factors, perceived stress level