

**OP-07-PHS**

**PREVALENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND ASSOCIATED COPING MECHANISMS OF UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL STUDENTS IN SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN WESTERN PROVINCE**

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**Background:** Psychological distress among medical undergraduates evidently impact on their daily lives and result in health risks like cardiovascular and respiratory conditions. Stress among medical students, stemming from academic and personal pressures, can lead to maladaptive coping strategies. Coping mechanisms, essential in managing stress, vary based on stress levels. This research aims to explore the prevalence of distress and coping strategies among medical students in selected universities Western province, examining the association between coping methods and their psychological distress levels.

**Methods:** This descriptive cross-sectional study involved undergraduates from select universities in the Western Province. A range of coping strategies, particularly problem-focused and emotion-focused approaches, were explored based on Kessler K10 and COPE BRIEF questionnaires. Data were analyzed using SPSS. Frequencies, proportions were used to describe the descriptive statistics and chi-square test was used to detect the associations between the dependent and independent variables. The level of significance was considered as  $p < 0.05$ .

**Results:** The study revealed a significant association ( $p < 0.05$ ) between problem-focused coping strategies and psychological distress levels among the surveyed undergraduates. However, emotional-focused coping methods exhibited no significant correlation with psychological distress ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** The research revealed a positive correlation between the adoption of adaptive, problem-focused coping strategies and a noticeable decrease in psychological distress among surveyed undergraduates from state universities in Sri Lanka's Western Province during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the utilization of maladaptive, emotional-focused coping mechanisms showed limited effectiveness in significantly impacting distress levels, suggesting their potential ineffectiveness in managing distressing situations effectively.

**Keywords:** Psychological distress, Coping strategies, Avoidant coping, Approach coping, Medical students, Western Province, Sri Lanka