

## **Nexus between Academic Workload, Compulsory Internship, Isolation from Peers and Stress during COVID-19: Study of Final Year Undergraduates of State Universities in Sri Lanka**

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The rapid spread of COVID-19 infections, Sri Lankan universities and higher educational institutes had to terminate all on-campus activities and switch to online learning. This resulted in a rapid shift in undergraduates' lifestyles, and they were confronted with a slew of new academic obstacles, putting them under a lot of mental strain. If an undergraduate does not complete the minimal internship requirement, they will be unable to complete their university degree program, causing significant stress among students. Therefore, this study was to examine the impact of academic workload, compulsory internship requirements and isolation from peers leading to the stress of final year undergraduates of the state universities in Sri Lanka. This study looks into compulsory internships, academic workload and peer isolation acts as an independent variable and stress as dependent variable. The findings of this qualitative research have shown that lockdown and social and peers isolation implemented as a preventive precautionary measure for COVID-19, the lives of all students, educators, and families have been completely mentally and physically disrupted. Stress comes as a result of a desire to meet the future expectations and to achieve better grades by completing their dissertations that will help one obtain a dream career. The environment of the internship organization also doesn't support them to fulfill the period. Further the findings highlighted that the discovery of the pandemic issue exposes a greater complexity in the impact of searching a suitable internship organization, workload generated with the distance learning, and isolation from university colleagues and lecturers which will lead to increased stress among final-year undergraduates. Because of the high level of stress caused by unprecedented academic pressure, most students report low self-esteem and poor attention, both of which have an impact on their academic performance. As a result, final-year students must deal with the stress that they have caused. Generally, this situation added to students' burdens, greatly raising their stress levels.

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