

## EXPLORING COPING STRATEGIES OF NON-STATE UNDERGRADUATES IN SRI LANKA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### **Abstract**

The widespread COVID-19 virus has changed the lifestyles of people around the world, especially among university undergraduates who had to move from traditional classrooms to online learning. Several studies reveal that, consequently, many issues related to online learning have increased the stress levels of undergraduates. Coping mechanisms played a pivotal role in ensuring that these undergraduates could handle their psychological issues and carry on with their academic work. Therefore, the objective of the study was to identify these mechanisms. A qualitative approach was adopted as primary data were collected through structured interviews. From these interviews, coping mechanisms used by the students were identified based on a thematic analysis performed through NVIVO. The population was non-state undergraduates in Sri Lanka in the academic year 2020, and there were thirty participants. Two main themes were revealed: individual activities and group activities in relation to coping mechanisms adopted by undergraduates to manage the resulting stress. The most common individual activities were listening to music, watching movies and TV series, sleeping, and reading books. Meanwhile, the more common group activities were spending time with close family and playing sports with relations. Therefore, it could be recommended that, based on the findings, undergraduates should engage in activities that will help maintain stable mental health. Similarly, universities and higher education institutes too should facilitate and promote such activities among their student population.

**Keywords:** Coping strategies, COVID-19, Non-state universities, Stress, Undergraduates