

# **Colombo Research Conference for Psychology & Counselling 2026**

Organized by Colombo Psychological Services

Date: 1st of February, 2026

Venue: Colombo Psychological Services (PVT)LTD, No.65, Sangamitta Avenue, Mt Lavinia

## **Book of Abstracts**

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***Keynote Address***

***Lack of published research in psychology and counselling in Sri Lanka***

**Speaker: T. H. Solomons**

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There has been a proliferation of psychology and counselling-related services and educational programs in Sri Lanka in the recent past. There is a considerable number of degree programs in psychology and counselling in Sri Lanka, too. Most of these degree programs require students to carry out research. Yet, there is a lack of published research in the psychology and counselling fields in Sri Lanka. This lack appears to be significant compared to the number of available degree programs and the postgraduate study programs available in the country. There appears to be quite a substantial number of psychology and counselling-related research conducted by medical professionals at the moment. At present, there are not many journals dedicated to publications in psychology and counselling in the country. This is a key factor which has contributed to the lack of published research in this field in the country. Further, there is no unifying professional body that holds annual research sessions for this field. It is unfortunate that these factors lead to the collective output of psychology and counselling research output not being published. As the field of psychology and counselling is relatively new to Sri Lanka, knowing the utility of Western psychological concepts among Sri Lankans has broad therapeutic and social implications. Though such insights might be large in the research conducted by the scholars in the country, due to a lack of publications, benefits of such insights may not be reaped by the current Sri Lankan society. Further, this can seriously hinder the growth of research related to psychology and counselling in Sri Lanka resulting in repetition of certain research areas due to the inability to understand the research gaps in the field. Further, the psychological treatments provided may not be informed by more relevant Sri Lankan research in the field. Therefore, encouraging researchers to publish their research output remains a priority for the growth of the field of Psychology and counselling in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Psychology education in Sri Lanka, Counselling research output, Publication gaps, Professional bodies

## ***Session: Counselling & Contemporary Issues***

### **Panel of Expert Evaluators and Session Chair for Session 1**

#### ***Session 1: Counselling and Contemporary Issues***

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*Trainee clinical psychologist with experience tertiary care mental health setting and supervised clinical practices*

***Ethical, Empathic, Psychological and Social Implications of Artificial Intelligence in Counselling Practice: A Systematic Review and Thematic Synthesis***

***Abstract ID #2000***

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**Abstract:**

The rapid integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in counselling and psychotherapy has outpaced the development of ethical, empathic and regulatory frameworks governing its use. Despite the strong potential of AI-assisted tools in enhancing accessibility and efficiency, concerns involving safeguarding, accountability, psychological influence over vulnerable users' behavior and the erosion of empathic care repeatedly emerge. Such challenges are particularly salient within the Sri Lankan context, where mental health infrastructure, regulatory oversight and AI literacy remain constrained. This study examines qualitative literature addressing the ethical, social, empathic and psychological implications of AI implementation in counselling, with specific emphasis on ethical standardization requirements and the need for continued research. A qualitative systematic literature review was conducted using the READ method and reflexive thematic analysis to identify recurring ethical risks, social tensions and practice-level implications. The analysis revealed themes comprising data privacy and psychological vulnerability; professional competence, accountability, and ethical responsibility; integrity of empathy and the therapeutic alliance; social inequality and marginalization; and systemic gaps in ethical standardization and governance, alongside cross-cutting tensions between accessibility and psychological safety, and efficiency and empathic integrity. The findings indicate heightened ethical risks in emotionally vulnerable populations such as minors, individuals with limited digital literacy or complex mental health needs, and rural residents, as well as increased susceptibility to psychological influence and over-reliance on AI-mediated guidance. Additionally, they emphasize the need for improved quality and competence of AI-based software, and conceptualize AI as a conditional, ethically governed adjunct to traditional therapy as opposed to a therapeutic substitute. The study outlines implications for professional standards, governance frameworks, culturally sensitive implementation, human-in-the-loop safeguards and future directions for ongoing research in the field.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, counselling, ethics, empathy, sri lanka, human-in-the-loop

**DOI : 10.5281/zenodo.18467248**

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***Exploring Coping Strategies Employed by Sri Lankan Adolescents to Cope with Academic Pressure  
Amidst the Economic Crisis***

***Abstract ID #1600***

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**Abstract:**

Academic pressure is a primary contributing factor that leads to mental health issues among adolescents. This concern becomes more complex when academic demands are experienced amid an ongoing economic crisis. The present study explores the challenges faced and coping strategies employed by adolescents to cope with academic pressure amidst the economic crisis in Sri Lanka. The rationale of the study emerged from the limited availability of in-depth research focusing on adolescents' lived experiences of academic pressure within the context of an economic crisis. The objective of the study was to explore the challenges experienced by adolescents, identify the coping strategies they utilise to manage academic pressure, examine the perceived effectiveness of these strategies, and understand the suggestions provided by adolescents regarding changes that could facilitate more effective coping. Employing a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten adolescents, including five females and five males, who were preparing for GCE O/L, GCE A/L, IGCSE, or IAL examinations within a year. The qualitative data collected were analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Three main themes were identified: Challenges Faced by Adolescents, Coping Strategies Employed, and Suggestions to Handle Academic Pressure. The findings highlighted the significant impact of the economic crisis, parental, societal, and school pressure, and peer competitiveness on adolescents' academic stress. Adolescents employed various coping strategies, including peer-assisted study, engagement in recreational activities, mindful isolation, religious practices, journaling, and disciplined study routines. The findings provide valuable insights into how Sri Lankan adolescents manage academic pressure during an economic crisis and emphasise the need for supportive interventions to promote adolescent well-being.

Keywords: Academic Pressure, Adolescents, Coping Strategies, Economic Crisis

***The Gender Difference in Mental Health Literacy (MHL) of Undergraduate Students in Colombo, Sri Lanka***

***Abstract ID #1222***

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***Background***

Mental Health Literacy (MHL) is defined as recognizing, managing, and preventing mental disorders by acquiring correct information, knowledge, and beliefs. It is an important indicator and contributor to psychological well-being, especially for undergraduate students. Research has shown that interventions including giving psychoeducation about mental illnesses and their treatment, and educating coping strategies for continuous symptoms had a significant positive impact on recovery, self-empowerment, self-efficacy, and hope. Understanding the gender difference in MHL contributes to designing gender-specific interventions to develop the MHL of the targeted population.

***Objectives***

The study aims to investigate the general MHL level, the gender difference in MHL and gender-related and non-gender related trends of MHL, among undergraduate students of Colombo, Sri Lanka.

***Method***

Eighty-two undergraduate students, studying in Colombo, Sri Lanka, within the age range of 18-30 years (M=23.59, SD=1.351), comprising 51 females (62.2%) and 31 males (31.37%) were collected through the volunteer sampling method via an online survey.

***Results***

The mean MHL score of the participants was 109.60 (SD=11.341) and a significant difference was not seen in MHL between males (M=107.68, SD=11.929) and females (M=110.76, SD=10.923) ( $p=.234$ ). Similarly, the distribution of MHL scores based on knowledge of mental health ( $p=.462$ ) and attitudes towards mental health ( $p=.254$ ) was the same across categories of gender. Under the knowledge of mental health, the knowledge on recognizing disorders ( $p=.620$ ), risk factors ( $p=.960$ ), professional help ( $p=.226$ ) and seeking information ( $p=.589$ ), did not show a significant gender difference. But the knowledge of self-treatment was higher in females than in males ( $p=.048$ ).

***Discussion/Conclusion***

The MHL of the students was in the middle level and a notable gender difference in MHL was not found. However, further Sri Lankan studies need to be done to compare the data. It is also recommended to design interventions common to both genders to promote MHL.

Keywords: Mental health literacy (MHL), Undergraduate students, Gender differences, Psychological well-being, Self-treatment knowledge

***Mental Health Stigma and Its Impact on Help-Seeking Behavior in Sri Lanka***

***Abstract ID #2300***

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**Abstract:**

Mental health challenges are increasingly recognized as a pressing public health concern in Sri Lanka. Despite rising awareness, help-seeking behavior among individuals experiencing psychological distress remains strikingly low. Stigma—manifesting in the forms of public stigma, self-stigma, and institutional stigma—emerges as one of the most significant barriers to timely care. This paper investigates the influence of stigma on help-seeking behaviors through a quantitative study of 284 participants, representing diverse demographic and social backgrounds. The research measured four independent variables—fear of social exclusion, cultural beliefs and norms, mental health literacy, and self-stigma—against help-seeking behavior as the dependent variable.

Findings reveal that while stigma-related factors are widely perceived within Sri Lankan society, their measurable statistical impact on reported help-seeking behaviors was weak and not statistically significant. Nonetheless, the broader literature and contextual evidence strongly suggest that stigma interacts with cultural values, family structures, and limited health literacy to discourage individuals from accessing treatment. The study recommends targeted interventions such as community-based awareness programs, integration of mental health literacy into school curricula, training for healthcare providers, and national policy reforms. These measures, if effectively implemented, have the potential to reduce stigma and improve access to care in Sri Lanka.

**Keywords:** Mental Health Stigma, Help seeking behavior, Cultural Norms, Mental Health Literacy, Self-Stigma, Sri Lanka.

***Perceived Professional Identity of Psychological Counselors among Youth in Sri Lanka***

***Abstract ID #2600***

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Sri Lanka is experiencing a growing burden of mental health challenges among young people, yet help-seeking behavior remains low. With approximately one in five individuals facing mental health issues during their lifetime and nearly half not accessing support, understanding how youth perceive psychological counselors is critical. Limited public awareness, social stigma, and the absence of a strong professional regulatory framework have contributed to ambiguities surrounding the professional identity of counselors in Sri Lanka. This study aimed to examine Sri Lankan youths' perceptions of the professional identity of psychological counselors and to identify key factors influencing trust, legitimacy, and help-seeking behavior. A descriptive cross-sectional online mixed-method study was conducted from June to September 2025. Data were collected from 213 youth participants across all nine provinces of Sri Lanka using a structured questionnaire with closed-ended and open-ended items. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, while qualitative responses were thematically analyzed using NVivo. Findings indicate that youth largely perceive counseling as a profession requiring formal academic qualifications, ethical conduct, and strong interpersonal competencies such as empathy and active listening. Despite this positive perception, only one-third of respondents had accessed counseling services, although over 60% expressed willingness to do so. Barriers included social stigma, limited awareness, and concerns related to confidentiality and professional credibility. Registration with a recognized professional body emerged as a key determinant of trust. The study highlights a clear recognition of the value of counseling among youth, contrasted with systemic gaps that weaken counselors' professional identity. The absence of national regulation and limited professional visibility undermine trust and service utilization. Establishing a national licensing framework, a unified code of ethics, and targeted awareness initiatives is essential to strengthen professional identity, enhance credibility, and promote help-seeking among Sri Lankan youth, contributing to a more resilient mental health system.

***A Qualitative Exploration of Mental Health Attitudes among Generation Z in Sri Lanka***

***Abstract ID #1500***

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**Abstract:**

Mental health awareness among young people has increased in recent years, yet stigma and barriers to help seeking remain as significant factors influencing how emotional difficulties are perceived and addressed. Despite growing international research on youth mental health, there is limited qualitative evidence in Sri Lanka related to the attitudes of mental health of younger generations. This research employs qualitative research design to explore attitudes towards mental health, experiences of stigma and help-seeking practices among individuals belonging to Generation Z in the Sri Lankan context. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather the data from selected 10 participants. Using reflexive thematic analysis, data was analyzed. The analysis revealed four interrelated themes. The first theme, “Normalization of Mental Health” reflects participants’ growing openness in discussing mental health and acknowledging psychological well-being as a legitimate aspect of everyday life. The second theme, “Digital Pathways to Awareness and Support” demonstrates how digital media, social networking sites and internet resources influence mental health awareness and facilitate help-seeking. The third theme emerged is “Selective Disclosure and Peer Reliance” and it shows that participants’ tendency to share mental health concerns primarily with peers while avoiding immediate disclosure within family settings due to the fear of misunderstanding or judgement. The fourth theme, “Persistent Social Barriers” refers to the existing obstacles such as stigma, concerns about confidentiality and uncertainty about professional help pathways. Findings suggest that while Generation Z demonstrates increased openness and awareness toward mental health compared to older generations, they still experience social obstacles like stigma. The study underscores the importance of developing youth friendly, culturally sensitive and more accessible mental health services that align with the communication practices and preference of Generation Z.

Keywords: Generation Z, Help-seeking behaviour, Mental health attitudes, Stigma, Thematic analysis

***Cognitive Approach to Conflict Resolution (Psychoanalytic model for the conflicts based on craving with reference to the Theory of Causality)***

***Abstract ID #1100***

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**Abstract:**

Most approaches to conflict resolution (CBT, ACT) focus only on superficial behavioural and communication problems and fail to identify the unconscious, deeper psychological root causes that underlie conflicts. Basic internal motivations, such as cravings and cognitive distortions, are present in individuals. There is a need for a clear theoretical and practical framework for creating and thereby exacerbating conflicts. The research aims to psychoanalytically identify how unconscious cravings cause conflict and to propose practical interventions for cognitive restructuring. Beyond traditional approaches to conflict resolution, the relationship between unconscious cravings and cognitive distortions that affect conflict is investigated through the theory of causalism. To this end, a conceptual and analytical research approach is adopted. A qualitative literature survey in the fields of psychoanalysis, cognition, and causal philosophy compares data and builds a new model. To this end, contemporary academic writings on Freud and Bach's theories (Aaron T. Beck, Albert Ellis), philosophical causalism, and conflict studies are studied. This study presents an integrated approach to conflict resolution that yields more tangible and profoundly transformative results. Additionally, the primary practical significance lies in delivering a new integrated model that offers sustainable and accessible solutions, focusing on the internal cognitive and emotional roots rather than merely modifying external behaviours for conflict resolution. It will open new pathways to the fields of management and education.

**Keywords:** Causality, Cognitive Distortions, Conflict Resolution, Psychoanalytic Framework, Unconscious Craving

## ***Session: Clinical & Therapeutic Approaches & Predictors of Wellbeing***

### **Panel of Expert Evaluators and Session Chair for Session 2**

#### ***Session 2: Clinical & Therapeutic Approaches & Predictors of Wellbeing***

Session Chair :

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*Senior Lecturer*

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*Psychologist- Happy Mind*

*Graduate member of the British Psychological Society*

*Visiting Psychologist, Aitken Spence*

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*Member of the American Psychological Association (APA)*

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*Member of the International Society for the Study of Drug Policy (ISSDP).*

*Practicing psychologist, Mantra Care Global Therapy Platform, representing Sri Lanka.*

*Visiting lecturer at CSBM Campus*

***Association of Self-efficacy and Mental Well-being of Undergraduates***

***Abstract ID #01888***

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**Abstract:**

**Background**

With globalization, undergraduates face strong competition and academic pressure, which can negatively affect mental health. Mental health of a person is important, as it refers to a state of psychological stability, happiness, and the ability to cope with life's challenges. Besides, Self-efficacy allows individuals to control their efforts, select suitable responsibilities, and achieve goals with confidence. In higher education, self-efficacy is crucial for mental well-being and academic success. Studies show that individuals with higher self-efficacy experience greater psychological well-being, better educational performance, and flexibility against stress. Yet, research on Sri Lankan context is limited, making it important to explore how self-efficacy relates to mental health of undergraduates.

**Objectives**

To examine the relationship between age factors and self-efficacy;

To investigate the correlation between self-efficacy and mental well-being of undergraduates.

**Methodology** A quantitative approach was used with a sample of 100 undergraduate students across different streams at Sri Lankan Universities, aged 20–25. Data were collected through a five-point Likert scale questionnaire measuring self-efficacy and mental well-being. SPSS (25) was used for correlation analysis.

**Results** Descriptive statistics showed average self-efficacy scores of  $M = 29.06$  and mental well-being scores of  $M = 48.07$ . Correlation analysis shows a positive relationship between self-efficacy and mental well-being ( $r_s = 0.49$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Age exhibited minimal effect on self-efficacy ( $r = -0.10$ ) and mental well-being ( $r = -0.12$ ).

**Conclusion** The study shows a positive relationship between self-efficacy and mental well-being among undergraduates. Students with higher self-efficacy experience better mental health. Age was negligible, likely due to the narrow age range and demographic diversity. These results affirm the importance of development of self-efficacy over educational interventions to support mental well-being and provide a foundation for future research in Sri Lankan higher education.

Key words: Self-efficacy, Mental well-being, Higher education, Academic pressure, Psychological health

**DOI : 10.5281/zenodo.18467248**

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***The Role of Mental Health Literacy as a Predictor of Subjective Happiness and Psychological Distress among Male and Female Participants in Sri Lanka***

***Abstract ID #2500***

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**Abstract:**

Understanding gender differences in mental health literacy (MHL) and its relation to happiness and psychological distress can provide valuable insights for developing targeted, culturally sensitive interventions. However, a gap in research exploring how MHL relates to happiness and psychological distress within the Sri Lankan context was observed. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate gender differences in MHL and its role in subjective happiness and psychological distress using a cross-sectional design. 95 participants were recruited through snowball sampling via online platforms and data were collected using validated measures, including the Mental Health Literacy Scale (MHLS), the Subjective Happiness Scale, and the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10). Appropriate statistical analyses, including the Mann–Whitney U test, Spearman rank correlation and regression analysis were conducted. A significant gender difference in MHL was observed, with females reporting higher scores than males ( $U = 706, Z = -2.92, p = .003$ ). A significant positive relationship was found between MHL and subjective happiness ( $\beta = .275, p = .007$ ), indicating that individuals with higher MHL also reported higher happiness levels. However, no significant relationship was observed between MHL and psychological distress ( $\beta = .151, p = .144$ ). These findings implies that although higher MHL appears to enhance subjective happiness, it does not influence psychological distress, suggesting that different mechanisms may underlie psychological distress. The findings also highlight the need for gender-sensitive mental health literacy initiatives. While the use of validated measures, ethical data collection procedures, and appropriate statistical analyses are recognized as key strengths of this study, limitations such as reliance on self-report instruments and snowball sampling which may affect the generalizability of the results should also be noted. Therefore, future research containing longitudinal designs which can explore these relationships across larger and more diverse populations are encouraged.

Keywords: Mental health literacy (MHL), Subjective happiness, Psychological distress, Gender differences

## ***The Relationship Between Screen Time and Psychological Well-being Among Sri Lankan Youth***

***Abstract ID #2100***

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### **Background**

The rapid expansion of digital technology has significantly increased screen exposure among young people worldwide. While excessive screen time is often associated with adverse mental health outcomes, existing evidence remains inconsistent, particularly within South Asian contexts. In Sri Lanka, limited empirical research has examined how screen time relates to psychological well-being among youth, highlighting the need for context-specific findings to inform mental health awareness and interventions.

### **Objectives**

This study aimed to examine the relationship between screen time and psychological well-being, specifically symptoms of anxiety and depression, among Sri Lankan youth.

### **Methods**

A quantitative cross-sectional correlational design was employed. The sample consisted of 97 participants aged 18 to 30 years, comprising undergraduate students and individuals with higher educational qualifications. Screen time was assessed using an 18-item Screen Time Questionnaire measuring weekday, weeknight, weekend, and background screen use across multiple digital devices. Psychological well-being was measured using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7) and the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9). Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine associations between screen time variables and psychological outcomes.

### **Key Findings**

The findings revealed no statistically significant relationship between total screen time and symptoms of anxiety or depression across all measured screen time categories. These results suggest that the duration of screen exposure alone may not be a strong predictor of psychological distress among Sri Lankan youth.

### **Conclusions**

The findings challenge assumptions that increased screen time directly leads to poorer psychological well-being and underscore the importance of considering contextual factors such as the purpose, content, and patterns of screen use. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs and differentiate between functional and non-functional screen engagement to gain a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between screen time and mental health.

Key words: Screen time, Psychological well-being, Anxiety, Depression, Sri Lankan youth

***The Role of Parenting in Children's Psychological Development***

***Abstract ID #2400***

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**Abstract:**

Children's psychological development is a crucial process that encompasses their cognitive abilities, emotional state, social behavior, and overall mental well-being. Parenting practices play a vital role in enabling children to achieve healthy psychological development. In the contemporary context, social changes, technological advancements, work environments, and transformations in family structures affect parent-child relationships and create various challenges to children's mental well-being. This study, based in the Nallur area of the Jaffna District, primarily aims to examine how parenting practices influence children's psychological development, focusing on the effects of supportive, strict, authoritarian, and neglectful parenting styles, as well as the impact of social and family environmental factors. The hypotheses of the study propose that there is a significant relationship between parenting styles and children's psychological development; supportive parenting styles promote positive psychological development among children; and strict parenting styles lead to negative effects on children's mental well-being. For this study, 25 parents and 25 children from the Nallur area of the Jaffna District were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation methods, and a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The collected data were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The findings reveal that parental love, support, care, and open communication enhance children's emotional stability, self-confidence, and social cooperation. The results show that 68% of the participating children experienced positive psychological well-being due to supportive parenting, 24% experienced stress and fear due to strict parenting, and 8% reported mixed parenting experiences. Based on these findings, key recommendations include conducting parental awareness programs, developing family counseling and psychological support initiatives, and strengthening communication between school teachers and parents.

Keywords: Parenting, Children, Mental Health, Jaffna, Nallur

## ***Psychological First Aid and Trauma Recovery in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding***

***Abstract ID #1400***

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### **Abstract:**

Post-conflict societies are frequently marked by widespread psychological distress, collective trauma, disrupted social relationships, and weakened community trust. While peacebuilding efforts often focus on political and structural reforms, the psychological dimensions of recovery remain critical for achieving sustainable peace. Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an evidence-informed, early intervention approach designed to reduce acute distress, promote adaptive coping, and support psychological well-being in the aftermath of crisis and conflict.

The objective of this study is to examine the role of Psychological First Aid as a peacebuilding tool in post-conflict societies, with particular attention to its relevance within peace psychology and counselling frameworks. The paper seeks to explore how PFA principles contribute not only to individual trauma recovery but also to broader processes of social cohesion and reconciliation.

Using a qualitative and conceptual methodology, this study draws on a narrative review of existing literature on Psychological First Aid, peace psychology, and post-conflict mental health interventions. In addition, selected case examples from conflict-affected settings are analysed to illustrate the application of PFA in community-based and culturally sensitive contexts.

Key findings suggest that Psychological First Aid contributes to peacebuilding by enhancing perceived safety, restoring interpersonal trust, strengthening social connectedness, and fostering hope and self-efficacy among conflict-affected individuals and communities. The findings further indicate that PFA, when delivered by trained counsellors and community workers, can serve as an effective entry point to longer-term psychosocial support and reconciliation initiatives.

In conclusion, Psychological First Aid extends beyond immediate crisis intervention and holds significant potential as a foundational peacebuilding strategy in post-conflict societies. Integrating PFA into post-conflict counselling and peacebuilding programmes can support psychological recovery, strengthen community resilience, and promote sustainable peace.

**Keywords:** Psychological First Aid, Peacebuilding, Post-Conflict Societies, Trauma, Recovery, Counselling

***Effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in Treating Excoriation (Skin-Picking) Disorder in an Adolescent: A Case Study***

***Abstract ID #2200***

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**Abstract:**

This case study explores the application of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) in treating Excoriation (Skin-Picking) Disorder in a 14-year-old adolescent female. She presented with repeated skin-picking behaviors affecting her face, arms, and hands, which caused visible lesions, scarring, and considerable emotional distress, including feelings of shame, guilt, anxiety, and social withdrawal. The behavior had persisted for several months, significantly impacting her daily functioning and self-esteem. Initial assessment using the Clinical Global Impression Scale (CGI) indicated a severe level of disorder. The intervention involved a structured CBT program, incorporating psychoeducation, Habit Reversal Training (HRT), stimulus control techniques, and cognitive strategies designed to interrupt the cycle of urges, emotional triggers, and maladaptive behaviors. In addition, mindfulness exercises and emotional regulation strategies were employed to enhance her ability to tolerate urges and manage stress effectively. Family involvement was emphasized throughout the process, providing support, reinforcement of adaptive coping strategies, and encouragement of consistent practice outside therapy sessions. Over the course of 12 therapy sessions, the client demonstrated noticeable reductions in skin-picking behaviors and related emotional distress. Post-treatment evaluation revealed improvements in CGI scores, alongside visible healing of previously affected skin areas. This case illustrates how CBT, when combined with behavioral strategies, skills training, and family support, can effectively address excoriation behaviors. It also highlights the importance of individualized treatment planning, continuous monitoring of triggers, and relapse prevention strategies to maintain long-term recovery. These findings reinforce the efficacy of structured psychological interventions as first-line treatments for body-focused repetitive behaviors, including skin-picking disorder, and underscore the importance of patient engagement, a supportive therapeutic environment, and collaborative care in achieving sustained behavioral improvement.

**DOI : 10.5281/zenodo.18467248**

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Keywords: Excoriation Disorder, Skin-Picking, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Habit Reversal Training, Adolescent, Body-Focused Repetitive Behavior

## ***Session : Indigenous, Cultural & Applied Perspectives on Mental Health & Wellbeing***

### ***Panel of Expert Evaluators and Session Chair for Session 3***

#### ***Session 3: Indigenous, Cultural & Applied Perspectives on Mental Health & Wellbeing***

Session Chair :

Ms. T.H. Solomons

*MPhil in Clinical Psychology (Colombo) | PsychSpecial (PDN)*

*Clinical Psychologist*

*Senior Lecturer*

*Department of Psychiatry,*

*Faculty of Medicine,*

*General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University (KDU),*

*Ratmalana*

Panel of Judges:

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*MPhil. in Clinical Psychology (UoC), B.Sc. in Psychology (Missouri University of S & T), HND in Counseling (SLF)*

*Clinical Psychologist at Sri Lanka Army at Army Hospital, Colombo.*

*Lecturer and Research supervisor for BSc in Psychology and MSc in Clinical and Health Psychology degrees of University of West London.*

*Lecturer at University of Sri Jayawardhenapura for a Diploma in Counseling course*

Ms. Piumi Gunarathne

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*Psychotherapist and Lecturer at Colombo Psychological Services*

*Worked as a Counselling Assistant at National Dangerous Drug Control Board*

*Counselling trainee experience at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University (KDU).Ratmalana,*

Ms. Tharani Karunaratne (GMBPsS)

*MSc in Clinical and Health Psychology*

*BSc (Hons) in Psychology (UK)*

*Doctorate candidate studying the prison population of Sri Lanka.*

*Counselling trainee experience at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University (KDU).Ratmalana,*

***A Psychological Study on Creating Mental Well-Being Through Low Country 'Riddi Yāgaya'  
Shānthikarma for Infertile Women***

***Abstract ID #1666***

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**Abstract:**

Riddi Yāgaya is a traditional Sri Lankan dance ritual specifically designed as an exorcism to address infertility among women. It is popular due to its effectiveness in treating infertility and preventing miscarriages, pre-mature births, stillbirths, and childbirth accidents. Mental well-being is the ability to thrive in a variety of spheres of life, including relationships, employment, leisure, and more, in spite of ups and downs. The ritual creates a mental well-being atmosphere through dramatic elements and is effective in treating infertility. The main objective of this research was to modernize Riddi Yāgaya Shānthikarma rites in Sri Lanka as a traditional psychological therapy for women struggling with pregnancy, and sub-objectives are promoting interest, preserving information, educating society, and enhancing mental strength. This is mixed-method research where data has been collected from 50 exorcists in the Polwatta area of the Matara district, where the ritual of Riddi Yāgaya is performed in Sri Lanka. The data collection involved interviews guided by a specifically designed questionnaire in collaboration with the exorcists. Quantitative data analysis was done with SPSS software, while thematic analysis was done for qualitative data. It is evident from the dramatic scenes of Nanumuraya, Kapuyakkariya, and Daru Nalavilla, the woman getting ready for sex, feeding the child, and spending time with the other person that the hormonal activity brought on by desire eliminates infertility, and this is how it is comparable to the counseling services that are offered today. Riddi Yāgaya Shānthikarma uses conversations, poems, drumming, and mantras to illustrate how infertility affects mental health due to changes in brain water composition. The main purpose is to prepare the environment for Athura women's mental well-being by preparing the land of the Shānthikarma using natural materials like Gok Kola (Nucifera) and Kesel Pathuru (banana tree slices). It can be concluded that traditional healing methods such as Riddi Yāgaya can be used as a psychological treatment method for infertile women to overcome the condition. Accordingly, it can be recognized that this method can be used successfully through various scientific research, scans, hormone tests, etc. in connection with modern technology.

**Keywords-** Infertility, Mental Well-Being, Shānthikarma, Riddi Yāgaya, Psychological Treatment

***The Nuge as a Therapeutic Ground in the Manelembuwa village in Kurunegala District***

***Abstract ID #1200***

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**Abstract:**

In the village of Manelembuwa in Kurunegala district, rural communities use a distinctive e local spiritual framework to cope with life's stresses. Specifically, villagers seek emotional refuge at a sacred site known as Nuge, centered around a sacred banyan tree dedicated to deities such as Brahmin Bandara, Paththini, Kadawara and Ganesh. The research problem is to investigate how the place of Nuge functions as a therapeutic ground for emotional support without formal counselling? The objective of study aims to identify psychological safety and a safe environment provided by Nuge for villagers to express their emotions. Data were collected through qualitative research methodology including 65 interviews with villagers, questionnaires under participant observation under field study. Library study incorporated with research articles and secondary sources. Thematic analysis was adopted to interpret data. The findings reveal that Nuge creates a natural boundary for the village and its dark silence acts as a space that contributes to mental peace for villagers. The place operates a prescribed therapeutic ground with self-worship without a priest, ensuring privacy. Though deities are given distinct roles for different purposes are worshiped with collective intent. Offerings are made for anxiety, illness, educational issues, with kiri ituruma ritual held in gratitude. Annually more than 3000 milk pots are poured for Brahminbandara on one day at same time to invoke protection of villages. Forgotten vows are believed to be reminded by deities through elephant dreams, reflecting subconscious effect. Ultimately, this study concludes, rural deity worship functions as a culturally embedded, highlighting significance of indigenous practices in understanding community-based informal counselling systems.

Key words: Emotional Support System, Manelembuwa, Nuge, Rural Deity, Therapeutic ground

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***Behind Closed Doors: Menstrual Awareness, Cultural Norms, and Stigma among Adolescent Girls in Colombo, Sri Lanka***

***Abstract ID #1300***

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**Abstract**

**Background:** Menstruation is a natural biological process, yet stigma surrounding it can negatively affect adolescents' emotional well-being and school participation. Despite growing attention to menstrual health, limited research has examined how menstrual awareness and cultural beliefs jointly shape stigma and emotional distress among adolescents in Sri Lanka.

**Objectives/Aims:** This study aimed to examine the relationships between menstrual awareness, cultural beliefs, menstrual stigma, and emotional distress among school-going adolescent girls in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

**Methods:** A quantitative cross-sectional design was used with 56 girls aged 13–19 years who had attained menarche. Participants completed a self-administered online questionnaire assessing menstrual preparedness, stigma, cultural restrictions, and emotional distress. Spearman's rank-order correlation, the Mann–Whitney U test, and the Kruskal–Wallis H test examined associations.

**Results:** Menstrual preparedness showed no significant association with stigma ( $\rho = -0.22$ ,  $p = .08$ ) or emotional distress ( $\rho = -0.20$ ,  $p = .12$ ). Cultural restrictions were strongly linked to higher stigma ( $\rho = .82$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Menstrual stigma correlated strongly with emotional distress and absenteeism ( $\rho = .82$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Exploratory analyses indicated that menstrual preparedness was significantly associated with lower stigma in low-restriction households ( $\rho = -.39$ ,  $p = .03$ ), but not in high-restriction households.

**Discussion/Conclusions:** Stigma is shaped more by cultural norms than by knowledge alone. Comprehensive, culturally sensitive menstrual education may mitigate stigma in restrictive contexts, supporting adolescents' emotional well-being, confidence, and school participation.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Emotional Distress, Cultural Beliefs, Menstrual awareness, Menstrual stigma, School Absenteeism, Sri Lanka

***Determinants of Sri Lankan Mothers' Decision-Making on HPV Vaccination for Their Daughters***

***Abstract ID #1900***

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**Abstract:**

Cervical cancer remains a major public health concern in Sri Lanka, where HPV vaccination coverage is low and declining in some regions. Although prior studies have examined knowledge and intention, few have applied theoretical frameworks integrating psychological and socio-cultural determinants. Guided by the extended Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), this study explored Sri Lankan mothers' HPV vaccination intentions. This study therefore examines psychological factors - attitudes, subjective norms (SN), and perceived behavioural control (PBC) - and socio-cultural factors - religious beliefs, media exposure, knowledge, and past vaccination history - shaping Sri Lankan mothers' decisions to vaccinate their daughters, and how these factors influence vaccination intentions and actual behaviour. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted among 152 mothers of daughters under 26 years. Correlation, Mann-Whitney, and Kruskal-Wallis tests examined associations, while regression analyses were used to identify predictors. Associations were significant for attitude ( $r_s = -.29, p < .01$ ), PBC ( $U = 1946.50, p < .001$ ), knowledge ( $r_s = .35, p < .01$ ), and positive media exposure ( $rs = .35, p < .01$ ). Regression analyses confirmed H1 (attitude:  $\beta = -.35, p < .001, R^2 = .12$ ), H3 (PBC:  $\beta = -.29, p < .001, R^2 = .08$ ), H4 (knowledge:  $\beta = .41, p < .001, R^2 = .17$ ), and H5 (positive media:  $\beta = .41, p < .001, R^2 = .16$ ). H2 was weakly supported ( $\beta = -.19, p = .017, R^2 = .04$ ), while H7 showed modest effects for education ( $\beta = .20, p = .013$ ) and income ( $\beta = .19, p = .018$ ). H6 (religious beliefs) and H8 (vaccination history as mediator) were not supported. Hierarchical regression indicated knowledge and positive media remained the strongest predictors, jointly explaining 21% of variance in intention. Findings emphasize strengthening maternal knowledge, accurate media support, and reducing structural barriers through school and community initiatives to improve HPV vaccine uptake and reduce Sri Lanka's cervical cancer burden.

Keywords: HPV vaccination, Sri Lankan mothers, Theory of Planned Behaviour, cross-sectional study, maternal decision-making

***Psychological Predictors of Online Deception Vulnerability Among Adolescent Girls: A Sri Lankan Case Study***

***Abstract ID #1555***

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**Abstract:**

Girls are becoming increasingly active in the digital space. They are dominated by peer comparison, edited identities, and emotional validation, which shape how they react to ambiguous or deceptive online interactions. Despite international studies finding a connection between self-esteem and online vulnerability in social comparison, limited evidence has been obtained in Sri Lanka. This study employs an exploratory case-study design to examine how global self-esteem, general comparison tendencies, and social media-specific upward comparison predict susceptibility to online deception among Sri Lankan adolescent girls. The sample consisted of 20 girls aged 13-17 attending a government school in Colombo, recruited using purposive sampling based on frequent internet and social media usage. The measure of self-esteem was based on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), general social comparison based on the Iowa Netherlands Comparison Orientation measurement (INCOM), and upward comparison based on the social media Upward Comparison Scale (SMUCS). The measurement of online vulnerability was conducted using a scenario-based tool, which entailed a series of short, fictitious, and age-relevant online scenarios, including unpleasant profiles, ambiguous messages, and overly friendly. The respondents were asked to rate their chances of trusting or responding to each situation, which resulted in a composite measure of vulnerability. This method design allowed a specific study of psychological indicators of vulnerability. Low self-esteem, greater comparison orientation, and breakdown stronger upward comparison on social media are expected to be correlated with higher vulnerability. Emotional responsiveness to comparison can also result in less caution in ambiguous online interactions, whereas excessive dependence on online validation can lead adolescents to be less sensitive to subtle inconsistencies of social signals. The paper presents the necessity of school counselling and digital literacy programs that enhance self-esteem, decrease harmful comparison, and enable more competent skills to interpret information on the Internet without causing harm to themselves.

Keywords: Self-esteem, Social comparison, Upward comparison, Online vulnerability, Adolescent girls

## ***The Effect of Pets on Human Mental Health and Wellbeing***

***Abstract ID #1333***

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### **Abstract:**

#### **Background**

The link between pets and humans has always been an extraordinary bond and it's always been mutually beneficial to be engaged with each other during the life course of both the parties. The present discussion about this paper signifies the health effects a human can experience because of their animal companion which can greatly affect in coping with stress or handling difficult situations. This shows the importance of having a pet animal in a human's life and how it can affect a person's mental wellbeing which can impact their life positively. The data that is collected through the participants supports in finding the main objective which is to understand how owning a pet can change an individual's life, their emotions, behavior and to what extent. Recognizing the different aspects of having a strong bond with an animal can impact the health industry and the overall mental wellbeing of humankind and this purpose is addressed through the research by understanding the experiences of pet ownership.

This study explores how pet ownership and companionship influence individuals' mental wellbeing, including experiences of depression, anxiety, and stress.

**Objectives** To examine the effect of pets on mental health and wellbeing, to understand how pets function as emotional support and to explore the therapeutic value of pets across age groups.

**Methods** A qualitative research design was employed, using semi structured interviews with five pet owners aged 16–50. Data was collected through one on one discussions and telephone interviews and was analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework.

**Key Findings** Four profound themes in this research are the emotional support and comfort, bond and connection, coping and stress reduction, and therapeutic impact which humans get through pets. Participants described pets as sources of companionship, unconditional affection, and emotional stability, helping them manage stress, depression, and anxiety.

**Conclusion** Pets significantly enhance emotional wellbeing and reduce stress. Findings support integrating pet assisted therapy into Sri Lankan mental health programs.

**Keywords:** Pet ownership, Mental health, Emotional wellbeing, Stress reduction, Companionship