

## ABSTRACT

Disasters can occur in day to day life of any human being. While man-made disasters can be minimized, the natural disasters are impossible to prevent. Large-scale disasters around the world demonstrate that no person and no country can escape from them. Improving the disaster preparedness, disaster knowledge and attitudes towards disasters in the community can minimize injury or damage or other health impacts. Higher educational institutions are a type of setting or location where individuals congregate. The graduates from these institutions will hold responsible positions in various institutions upon graduation and eventually be leaders in Sri Lankan society.

The main objective of this study is to assess the institutional disaster preparedness and disaster knowledge, attitudes and preparedness in university students. To achieve this, three faculties in the University of Peradeniya were selected. Using a multi-stage sampling method a survey questionnaire was administered on 380 students to collect information on disaster preparedness, disaster knowledge and attitudes towards disaster management. Study used a few statistical tests and descriptive methods to analysis the collected data to achieve the above objectives.

According to the study results of the research, overall students' level of disaster preparedness on a scale of one to ten, was 5.76. Preparedness was higher for females compared to males. Faculty of Arts averaged below the others. Disaster knowledge was measured on a scale of 1 to 15. Average overall disaster knowledge score was 8.87 out of 15. Agriculture faculty students on average scored the highest. Faculty of Arts students scored significantly lower than both Science and Agriculture students. There was no statistically significant difference among the groups. Majority of the students felt there was a need to have a disaster management plan according to responses on attitudes. However, a high proportion felt that it was highly unlikely for a disaster to happen in their institutions. These results show the need of an attitudinal change in the group. A significant amount of Science faculty students felt it was not necessary to conduct regular disaster drills in an institution. Overall students' average score for attitudes was 30 out of 33, which can be an acceptable level of attitudes towards disasters. The high reliability consistency test score indicates that the survey questionnaire can be used as a tool to measure the disaster management attitudes of educational institutions.

Institutional disaster preparedness survey revealed that all the faculties' needed improvement particularly in fire and laboratory safety systems. Laboratory accreditation should be done and certificates should be issued to all the laboratories. Entire university should develop disaster management committees to all the faculties and each faculty should have disaster management plan and they should perform disaster drills regularly. Disaster management training, fire safety equipment training to all the members of the faculties is critical. The buildings should be disable-friendly. Old building should be renovated to ensure safety. This stresses the importance of implementing disaster preparedness awareness programs and continuous evaluation of these activities for all the universities and other educational institutes in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, incorporation of disaster management into the study curriculum can be the most appropriate step.