

A Study of Learned Helplessness among Undergraduates of University of Kelaniya

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Abstract

The research was done to identify the learned helplessness among the undergraduates of the University of Kelaniya. The research consisted of two objectives, one hypothesis and two research problems. The sample which was selected by using the random sampling method included two hundred undergraduates in University of Kelaniya. The questionnaire which was made based on Likert-Scale was administered and the collected quantitative data was analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences. As the findings of the research, it could be found that there is a significant level of learned helplessness among undergraduates of the University of Kelaniya, and there is a significant difference in the level of learned helplessness between male and female undergraduates. The study made suggestions to minimize the learned helplessness among undergraduates.

Key Words: Undergraduates, Learned Helplessness, Gender Difference, University Life, Controllability

Introduction

Learned Helplessness (LH) was introduced by Martin Seligman, an American psychologist who was the president of American Psychological Association at the end of 1960s and early 1970s. Even though the concept was introduced about 50 years ago, it still attracts the research interest of current

psychologists who are occupied in universities, organizations, companies, hospitals, sport, and many other settings in which helpless behaviors can be found.

People make many attempts so that their dreams in life make come true. in achieving goals, targets in the lives, people face many hurdles, obstacles or difficulties. As everyone lives in a stressful world, faces frustration, and encounters depression. Thus, learned helplessness is experienced by all of the people of all walks of lives.

Undergraduates are regarded as young adults as they are living within age between 20-25 in their lives. They are considered to be the cream of the society as they are academically high. They enter the universities after the very competitive examination, General Certificate Examination of Advanced Level and within the university they are living in a very competitive study environment. After the university entrance, it starts the self-living of the students. This may be for some students the first time of living outside the home. As a result, they have to take the responsibility of making decisions on them. And also the responsibility to take care of themselves, provide the security for them and to prepare the meal is on them. This may be the first time that all of the roles are played by them.

There can be found many factors which plays a central role that this separated population and the above mentioned concept, learned helplessness relate together. In the researcher's point, such factors can be divided into two such as internal factors and external factors. The internal factors are factors within the university. Competition based study environment is one of them. Undergraduates are struggling for marks and classes. Due to the high competition, to achieve the high marks they have to work hard with no concern for time and all. But failing the attempts by them, they lose the goals. Teachers' expectations also are prime important in the factors in the

university. They expect the students to attend the classes eighty percent and get high marks for their papers as they are required to show the interests of students to follow the course unit.

As the external factors, parental expectations as well as the societal expectations can lead to difficulties for students. They try to fulfill the aspirations of parents. When failing, they may become frustrated and somewhat depressed. Society may expect them to have good academic qualifications and to be with everything necessary for a life. The same experience may be encountered when they may be unable to reap what society expects.

When taking the above mentioned factors into consideration, it is thought that the student try to meet the requirements for the degree course and face the life in the university alone. Thereby students face difficulties, hurdles and their triumphs may not be succeeded to the extend they expect. When the factors or the environment is not within control of the students, they develop the sense of uncontrollability. In the face uncontrollability, helpless behaviors are resulted in and de-motivation, powerlessness, un-attempts or remaining neutral, withdrawals also appear. The researcher considered such behaviors to be the helplessness in the study. Thus, studying the learned helplessness in undergraduates plays a significant role in the literature of researches and has many implications.

Problems of the research

There are two research problems formulated by the researcher to solve in the research by collecting the relevant data through the questionnaire.

1. What is the level of Learned Helplessness in undergraduate among undergraduate students of University of Kelaniya?

2. What are the gender differences in learned helplessness among undergraduates of University of Kelaniya?

Objectives of the research

This research consists of two main objectives and they are mentioned below.

1. To identify the level of Learned Helplessness among undergraduate students of University of Kelaniya.
2. To identify gender differences in the level of Learned Helplessness among undergraduate students of University of Kelaniya.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis was formulated to test the level of learned helplessness among undergraduates of university of Kelaniya and it is mentioned below.

There is a significance level of learned helplessness among undergraduates in University of Kelaniya.

Methodology

As the researcher measure the level of learned helplessness among undergraduates, quantitative approach was selected for this study. A self- administered questionnaire was used to gather the relevant data from 200 undergraduates from the University of Kelaniya. The sample was randomly selected. The reason for using a questionnaire is the suitability of that method for collecting data on learned helplessness. it is standardized questionnaires that have been used by the researchers in the pool of earlier researches on learned

helplessness. The other reason for selecting a questionnaire to be used was that the study tried to measure or to rate the level of learned helplessness of undergraduates. The sample was separated, based on gender only to test gender differences of the level of learned helplessness. With regard to that objective, the research used the between groups design for the study. The survey method has been used to collect data so that the research problems may be solved. The questionnaire consists of five choices made depending on the Likert's Scale. The choices are as follows.

1. Never
2. No
3. Yes
4. Occasionally
5. Frequently

The data collected was analyzed by using descriptive statistical presentation quantitatively. After that, the researcher has reached the conclusions.

The characteristics of the sample are given in the table below.

Gender			Faculty			Year				Degree	
M	F	S	C	Ss	H	1	2	3	4	SD	GD
100	100	14	18	128	40	61	58	62	19	119	81
200			200			200				200	

Terms for the abbreviations in the above table are given below.

M= Male Undergraduates

F= Female Undergraduates

S= Faculty of Science

C= Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies

Ss= Faculty of Social Sciences

H=Faculty of Humanities

GD= Students following General Degrees

SD=Students following Special Degrees

Results and Discussion

Depending on the descriptive statistical analysis, the overall mean of the sample is 2.5296. The mean (2.5296) suggests that there is a significant level of learned helplessness among undergraduates of University of Kelaniya. The means of the level of learned helplessness between male and female are 2.4052 and 2.6540 in order. In accordance with the means, Female students are more learned helpless than male students. Independent t-test was further used to find whether there is significance difference in learned helplessness between males and females. The statistical table below presents the significant level.

Independent Samples Test

T-test for Equality of Means		
T	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
-3.432	.001	-.24880

Source: Survey Data (2013)

The above table presents that T value is -3.432 and P value is .001. Therefore, at the significance level of $P=0.05$, there is a difference between male and female students as the significance level (0.05) is higher than the P value (.001). Thus, it can be found that there is a significance difference in the level of learned helplessness between males and females which were used as the sample of the research.

The mean of students following general degree is 2.5462 and the mean of students following special degree is 2.5183. According, the students who follow the general degree are more learned helpless than those who follow the special degree. The difference between two means is 0.0279. According to the independent t-test, T value is -.367 and P value is .714. Therefore, at a significance level of $P=0.05$, there is not a significant difference between the groups, special degree and general degree as the significance level (0.05) is lower than P value (.714). Accordingly, there is not a significance difference in the level of learned helplessness between the groups of special degree students and general degree students.

Conclusions

One objective of the research was to identify the level of learned helplessness among the undergraduates of the University of Kelaniya. The research includes a formed hypothesis that there is a significant level of learned helplessness among undergraduates of the University of Kelaniya. Accordingly, It can be concluded that there is a significant level of learned helplessness among the undergraduates of the University of Kelaniya. It can be further concluded that there is significant difference in the level of learned helplessness between male and female undergraduates of the University of Kelaniya. Female undergraduates are more helpless than the male undergraduates.

Recommendations

University life is full of aspirations. In a competitive educational context, undergraduates are doing their very hard to succeed their lives. In doing so, they encounter hardships in controlling the factors in their surroundings. It results in learned helplessness in their lives. Therefore, it could be recommended that universities and the government should reduce the educational competition by revising the education system in Sri Lanka. Coping skills, competencies and knowledge of the students are to be developed by implementing seminars, workshops and training sessions.

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