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Post of Research Assistant (01 vacancy)

Project: Study on Prevalence and associated factors of psychological issues among school children aged 11–15 years and the perceptions of parents, teachers, principals and education officials regarding these issues, in Kalutara, Batticaloa, and Ratnapura districts – Family Health Bureau

Background of the Project:

The Family Health Bureau will be conducting the above mentioned study based on a recommendation from an expert committee on addressing mental health issues among school children. This survey is designed to identify prevalence of important mental health issues and associated factors among school students and also to find out perceptions of parents, teachers, principals and education officials regarding these issues in 3 selected districts namely Kalutara, Batticaloa, and Ratnapura. Findings from this study will help authorities to identify priorities and develop and establish relevant programmes. These findings will also be used in advocacy initiatives for resources for mental health programmes targeting school children.

Duties and Responsibilities

The research assistant is expected to perform the tasks described below under the supervision of the National Programme Manager of School Health/ Survey Coordinator.

1. To assist in developing literature review of the study
2. To assist in developing questionnaires and other study tools
3. To coordinate survey activities in schools selected for the survey within the 3 districts
4. To assist in planning and conducting training programmes for survey administrators
5. To coordinate with survey administrators, regional education officials and Principals & teachers of selected schools
6. To develop correspondence paperwork to communicate with relevant education and health officials
7. To collate, compile and clean all the survey data received after completion of the study
8. To handle data collation, data entry and data cleaning
9. To assist in data analysis and report writing
10. To conduct any other survey-related activities identified by the survey coordinator

The selected candidate should work mainly under the Director Maternal and Child Health and the Survey Coordinator who is the, National Programme Manager School Health Unit of the Family Health Bureau. It is a full time job with working hours as 8.30am to 4.15pm but the candidate may be requested to work extended hours and weekends if needed without additional remuneration. Transport from the Family Health Bureau to survey areas will be provided. Accommodation will also be arranged if/as necessary.

Desired Qualifications and Experience for the Post

- Pre intern Medical officer with MBBS qualifications

- Previous experience of scientific research, data collection, data entry and analysis
- Good command in English and Sinhala languages. Writing/Speaking skills in Tamil language will be an added advantage
- Ability to work with Microsoft office applications (Word/Excel/PowerPoint/SPSS)
- Proven ability to work as a team member

Nature of Duties

Full time/part time:	Full time
No of days per week:	05-06 days
Working hours per day:	Eight hours (8.30am to 4.15 pm)
Place of work:	Family Health Bureau and field duty in relevant districts
Monthly remuneration:	Rs 86,180.00
Duration:	Three (03) months from 15 th October 2025

A Research assistant is not entitled for any other privileges or claims other than the benefits specified above from the Ministry of Health and/or the funding agency.

Candidates are requested to provide an updated CV with copies of relevant documents and contact details before 3rd October 2025 to School Health Unit, Family Health Bureau, No 231, De Saram Place, Colombo 10. (Tel: 011 2692746 , E mail: sh_fhb@yahoo.com).



Dr Chandima Siritunga
Director Maternal and Child Health

Dr. Chandima Siritunga
MBBS, MSC, MD Community Medicine
Director Maternal and Child Health
Family Health Bureau



Dr Buddhika Sudasinghe
Consultant Community Physician
National Programme Manager – School Health
Survey Coordinator

Terms of reference (TOR)
Recruitment of Research Assistants
For
Detection of Prevalence of Mental Health Issues among School
Children & Assessment of Needs for Service Provision
in 3 Selected Districts
Sri Lanka

Background

Sri Lanka faces a significant mental health burden, with high rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. The country has a high suicide rate and for 2022-2023 it was 15.6 per 100,000 population (*Annual Health Bulletin 2022/2023*). Hospital admissions due to mental disorders have also been increasing over the past years since 2019. Namely mood disorders, schizophrenia, mental and behavioral disorders due to use of alcohol and other psychoactive substances and psychosocial problems have become critical issues in the Sri Lankan context.

Adolescence is a critical transition period in life. Adolescents (ages 10-19) make up almost one fifth (16.6%) of Sri Lanka's population (Department of Census and Statistics, 2024). This period is a transit phase with rapid emotional, physical, and intellectual growth and they have a natural inclination to explore new experiences but a limited ability to fully comprehend their consequences. Therefore, adolescents are extremely vulnerable to unhealthy behaviours such as substance use including tobacco and alcohol, violence and abuse.

Recent societal changes including economic vulnerability and changes in parenting styles have introduced a multitude of stressors, ranging from disrupted education and social isolation to financial strain within households. Social media & phone addiction has also become another grave issue as a negative consequence of online education. These stressors have significantly impacted the mental well-being of adolescents, exacerbating feelings of anxiety, depression, and uncertainty about the future. The economic downturn has further compounded these challenges, with families facing heightened financial pressures, limited access to resources, and increased inequality. The lingering effects of the pandemic coupled with economic instability might have intensified the existing vulnerabilities faced by adolescents to a greater extent. It has become increasingly imperative to thoroughly evaluate the risk factors and behaviors that are impacting adolescents in our current socio-economic climate.

Recently concluded Global School Health Survey 2024 (GSHS 2024) has revealed alarming findings that warrant urgent action. These findings reported that during the past year 18% of school children felt depressive symptoms, 15.4% had suicidal ideation and 22.4% felt lonely.

In this context, it is important to assess the prevalence of mental health issues affecting adolescents. This includes examining the influence of socioeconomic status, access to healthcare services, educational disruptions, social support networks, and exposure to adverse childhood experiences. A deeper understanding of these factors, would help in identifying the underlying determinants of poor health outcomes and enables the country to develop targeted interventions to mitigate their impact.

It has been planned to conduct this survey - Detection of Prevalence of Mental Health Issues among School Children in 3 Selected Districts, with Ministry of Education and the preliminary work is underway.

This survey requires a large amount of groundwork comprising of;

- Development and editing of questionnaires and tools
- Research and preparation of literature review
- Correspondence with Ministry of Education and UNICEF
- Coordination with regional education & health officials and schools selected
- Training and mobilization of field health staff and teachers of 45 schools in Batticaloa, Kalutara and Ratnapura districts, who would be involved as survey administrators
- Close scrutiny and supervisory activities of all 5 components of the study within the 3 districts

After completion of field level survey activities, following tasks will be carried out;

- Data collation and cleaning
- Data entry
- Data analysis
- Writing of final and other reports on the survey

School Health Unit has no post graduate trainees and only 2 medical officers who are entrusted to handle all routine and ad-hoc correspondence, compilation of routine and special reports and communicate with regard to school health, monitoring/scrutiny over routine school health programmes at RDHS and MOH levels and planning, organization and coordination of routine training programmes on school health.

Therefore it is essential to ensure adequate and appropriate human resources before embarking on an extensive survey which has 5 components and involve faraway districts – especially those with medical and technical background to capably handle the multiple tasks involved. Pre intern medical students receive a thorough exposure to survey methodology, conduction of research and also latest data analysis software. Thus, recruitment of one (01) research assistant is required to realize this purpose.

Scope of Work

The research assistant is expected to perform the tasks described above under the supervision of the National Programme Manager (NPM) of School Health and the Survey Coordinator.

They are summarized below.

1. To assist in developing literature review of the study
2. To assist in developing questionnaires and other study tools
3. To coordinate survey activities in schools selected for the survey within the 3 districts
4. To assist in planning and conducting training programmes for survey administrators
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6. To develop correspondence paperwork to communicate with relevant education and health officials
7. To collate, compile and clean all the survey data received after completion of the study
8. To handle data collation, data entry and data cleaning
9. To assist in data analysis and report writing
10. To conduct any other survey-related activities identified by the survey coordinator

The selected research assistant will be posted to the School Health Unit of the Family Health Bureau (FHB), which is the main focal point of the survey.

Duration

For three (03) months beginning 15th October 2025. Successful recruits will work 05 - 06 days a week from 8.30am – 4.15pm.

Desired qualification and experience required for the post

- Pre intern Medical officer with MBBS qualifications
- Previous experience in scientific research, data collection, data entry and analysis
- Good command of English and Sinhala languages. Writing skills in Tamil language will be an added advantage
- Ability to work with Microsoft office applications (Word/Excel/PowerPoint/SPSS)
- Proven ability to work as a team member

The successful candidate will be paid a monthly remuneration of Rs 86,180.00.

The selected candidate will be given a comprehensive training on preparation and implementation of the survey at the School Health Unit, FHB.

Candidates are requested to provide an updated CV with copies of relevant documents and contact details before 3rd October 2025 to School Health Unit, Family Health Bureau, No 231, De Seram Place, Colombo 10. (Tel: 011 2692746 , E mail: sh_fhb@yahoo.com).