

University of Huddersfield shares disaster risk expertise at Sri Lanka Medical Association International Congress

Tuesday, 5 September 2023 00:00 📶 - 📶 - 124



The University of Huddersfield's Global Disaster Resilience Centre (GDRC) works with stakeholders across the world to anticipate, plan for and reduce disaster risks.

Its expertise is often called upon and GDRC Co-Directors Professor Dilanthi Amaratunga and Professor Richard Haigh, were recently invited to the Sri Lanka Medical Association's International Medical Congress on its 136th Anniversary.

The Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA) is the oldest organisation and the professional association that represents all grades of medical personnel in Sri Lanka. This year marked the 136th anniversary of this annual congress with the theme of 'Humane Healthcare: Excellence, Equity and Community'. This prestigious event was organised by the SLMA in partnership with the Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka, The World Bank, United Nations Population Fund (UNPF), World Health Organisation (WHO), University of Huddersfield and Sri Lanka Telecom (SLT).

The GDRC was invited to contribute to one of the twelve thematic sessions being held during the congress, to lend their expertise on dealing with a public health crisis. Titled, 'Tackling the Complexities and Cascading Impacts of Multi-hazard Scenarios amidst a Public Health Crisis' the symposium benefitted from their knowledge in this area.

Several research experts from around the world attended the event, some of which were invited as keynote and guest speakers. These included Professor Dilanthi Amaratunga who delivered a speech on Disaster and Public Health nexus: Protecting at risk communities. This insightful speech highlighted the challenges of multi-hazard risks during a public health emergency.

A lively panel discussion also took place, which was organised by the SLMA and GDRC, and addressed how to tackle the complexities and cascading impacts of multi-hazard scenarios amidst a public health crisis.

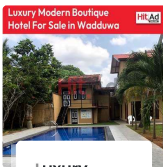
Professor Richard Haigh moderated the discussion and Professor Dilanthi Amaratunga was joined by GDRC Researchers, Thushara Kamalathne and Lahiru Kodituwakku, from the GDRC and Professor Nishara Fernando from the University of Colombo.

The panel discussion focussed on the challenges associated with an emerging and increasingly complex disaster risk landscape and explored some of the experiences and approaches that can be used to strengthen disaster risk governance and public engagement to tackle this complexity. Key discussion topics focussed on pandemic preparedness, better organisation of institutions and society when tackling the complexities of disaster risk and how to engage the public in disaster risk reduction.

This complex disaster risk landscape has challenged our existing disaster and emergency management policies and strategies. GDRC collaboration with SLMA demonstrated the dire need to rethink the inter-sectoral nature of disaster risk management and consider how we can better address multiple and cascading hazard threats.

As a direct result of the congress a research brief on Key insights and recommendations: public health information sharing among

underprivileged groups and vaccine hesitancy during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka has been launched as a joint publication by the GDRC and the SLMA. This research brief includes the key findings of international research conducted by the GDRC, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka, National Dengue Control Board, University of Colombo, University of Moratuwa and University of Peradeniya. This research was conducted as part of the research project Improving COVID-19 and pandemic preparedness and response through the downstream of multi-hazard early warning systems, which was funded by UK Research and Innovation through the UK Government's Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and the Newton Fund and was led by the GDRC. It involved a survey covering 26 divisional secretariats in nine districts in Sri Lanka, and a total of 3,330 households were covered by the study. It is one of the main surveys that has been carried out in Sri Lanka post pandemic and highlights, amongst other points, the main reasons for COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in Sri Lanka



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