

# A Questionnaire Survey on Student's Attitudes towards Individuals with Mental Illness

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## Abstract

- Objectives:** To obtain information about basic knowledge towards mental disorders and to evaluate Students attitudes towards people with mental disorders.
- Methods:** Questionnaires which collected basic demographic information, BMI (Beliefs towards Mental Illness) scale is used to assess the attitudes and is delivered to all the students.
- Results:** Completed questionnaires were collected from 50 subjects. In general, the participants' attitude towards people with mental illness was poor. In this study, majority of the participants were aged 20 to 23 years compared with other age-groups and were found to be males. 100% of the respondents says that they get afraid of what others would think if they were diagnosed as having a psychological disorder.
- Conclusions:** Personal contact with people with mental illness may help to improve condition. Younger people in secondary school should be the target and prioritised group for mental health education. Apart from the delivery of mental health knowledge, strategies to increase social contact of the public with people having mental illness could be considered in the design and implementation of anti-stigma programmes.

**Key Words:** Students, Attitudes, Mental Illness, Survey.

## INTRODUCTION :

Stigma appears in the students who lack knowledge, adopting negative attitudes and avoiding certain group of people (usually with mental illness)<sup>[1]</sup>. Discrimination is also seen along with stigma as long as such mental illness exist. Despite of the burdens the mental illness, some societies continue to hold deep-rooted, culture sensitive and negative beliefs about mental illnesses<sup>[2]</sup>. The theory of classical labelling focus on stereotyping and rejection of others which may lead to social exclusion and demoralization<sup>[3]</sup>. These group of people usually show the impairment in cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects. Examples of the cognitive aspects in the patient with mental illness include irresponsible, unpredictable etc they are usually diagnosed as schizophrenia. As schizophrenia patients are aggressive sometimes they may be dangerous so they are separated in student's view due to fear<sup>[4]</sup>. Due to this the patients are significantly less willing to interact with them (student or people alike) and sometimes it creates loneliness to patient or it may leads to violent behaviour towards others who are less willing to interact with them. Due to this stigma and discrimination the people with mental illness face difficulties in social relationships, experience social isolation, social withdrawal, social distance, homelessness, unemployment and institutionalisation<sup>[5][2]</sup>. The patients with mental illness are considered as labeled persons. The concept of stigma has been divided into four components:- labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination. Labeling involves categorizing the people in different groups. Stereotyping involves the association of labels with negative attributes. Separation is itself used to justify the association of negative attributes to labelled persons. Finally these three leads to loss of status and an experience of discrimination by the labelled person. The four components are interconnected with each other<sup>[1][4]</sup>. All the

four components can occur together in a situation in the group of people who empower over other groups<sup>[1]</sup>. To overcome this stigma and discrimination from decades is to support and change the tools of institutionalisation<sup>[2]</sup>. Lack of knowledge and awareness among the students is associated with the negative attitudes towards mental illness in the community. Medical health professionals have to conduct awareness camps at initiative levels like schools, universities. The results of previous studies on attitude towards mental illness after a training programme in students showed a positive result towards the non-medical students when compared to medical students<sup>[4]</sup>. The patients with mental illness have shorter life span and higher incidence of lifetime disorder. Some illness like metabolic syndrome, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and sexual dysfunction also accompany the patients with mental illness. When the question of gender arises for stigma women face stigmatization in the area of reproduction, decreased parenting skills, breast feeding skills and increased feeling of powerlessness. Whereas Fear is the major cause for discrimination and stigma. To overcome this fear, the effective method is increased tolerance and changing negative attitude. The BMI (Beliefs towards Mental Illness scale) scale is used to assess the attitudes of students<sup>[6]</sup>. It consists of totally 21 questions

## AIM AND OBJECTIVE

The current study aims at assessing the attitudes of students towards mental illness.

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

It's a descriptive cross-sectional survey.

### Instruments

1. Semi structured proforma which included the sociodemographic data (age, sex, residence, religion, and socioeconomic status), family history).

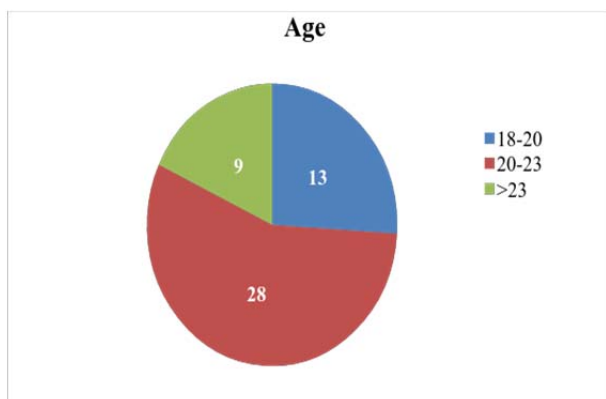
2. The BMI scale is used to assess the attitudes towards mental illness in college students . The BMI (Beliefs towards Mental Illness scale) is a 21-item self-report measure of negative stereotypical views of mental illness. There is a Total Score and three subscales based on factor analysis: dangerousness, poor social and interpersonal skills, and incurability. The poor social skills subscale also taps feelings of shame about mental illness and the perception that the mentally ill are untrustworthy. Items are rated on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 'completely disagree' (0) to 'completely agree' (5), with higher scores reflecting more negative beliefs.

**RESULTS :**

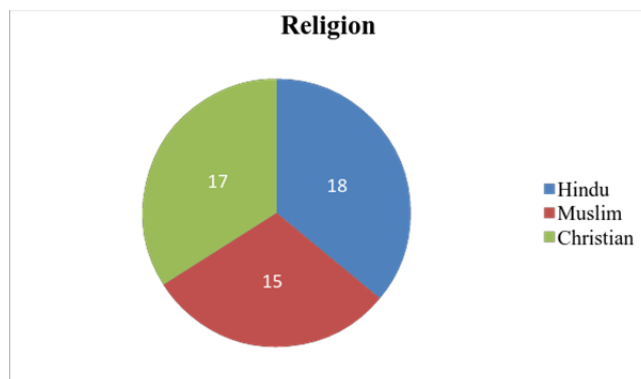
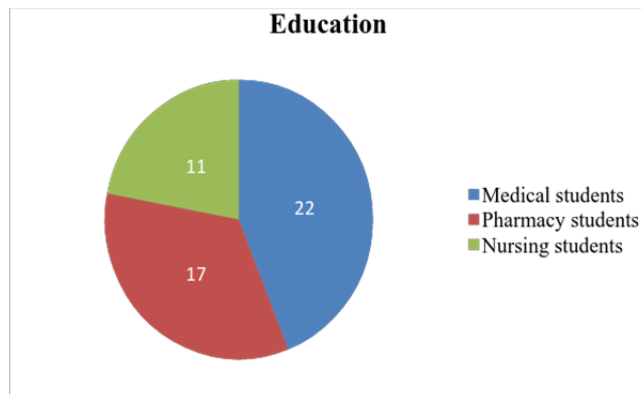
The survey forms were distributed to 50 students. Those consenting to participate were recruited in the study. The response rate was high at 85%. The survey questionnaire was administered in an anonymous form and no identifiable information was collected from the participants. Conditions of anonymity and confidentiality were observed throughout the course of the study.

CHARACTERISTIC	N
<b>Age</b>	
18-20	13
20-23	28
>23	9
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	31
Female	19
<b>Education</b>	
Medical students	22
Pharmacy students	17
Nursing students	11
<b>Religion</b>	
Hindu	18
Muslim	15
Christian	17
Having a patient with mental disorder in their family	8

Majority of the participants belongs to the age group of 20-23 yrs and were found to be males.



Educational background also considered in the study in which medical students were the recognised as major respondents, and most of them belong to the religion of Hindu and 8 among 50 participants have patients with mental illness in their families and found to be having negative attitude towards the people suffering with mental illness.



The results revealed that majority of respondents were afraid of people with mental illness even with people having mental illness living in their neighbourhood. 90% of students believe that a mentally ill person is more likely to harm others. 84% says that mentally ill people are unlikely to be able to live by themselves because they are unable to assume responsibilities. 96% believe that psychological disorders have no cure. 94% answered that they would feel embarrassed if a person in their family became mentally ill. 100% of the respondents says that they get afraid of what others would think if they were diagnosed as having a psychological disorder. 92% People thought that mentally affected people who once received psychological treatment are likely to need further treatment in their future. 86% of the respondents felt that it may be a good idea to stay away from the people who have psychological disorders because of their behaviour which is usually dangerous.

In short , the results signifies that majority of the study participants have the negative attitudes Towards mentally ill persons.

### SCORE OF THE STUDY GROUP ON BELIEF TOWARDS MENTAL ILLNESS SCALE

STATEMENT	Proportion Of Subjects That Completely Agree With The Statement	
	N	%
A mentally ill person is more likely to harm others than a normal person	45	90%
Mental disorders would require a much longer period of time to be cured than would other general diseases	47	94%
It may be a good idea to stay away from people who have psychological disorder because their behaviour is dangerous	43	86%
The term 'psychological disorder' makes me feel embarrassed	41	82%
A person with psychological disorder should have a job with only minor responsibilities	38	76%
Mentally ill people are more likely to be criminals	27	54%
Psychological disorder is recurrent	45	90%
I am afraid of what my boss, friends and others would think if I were diagnosed as having a psychological disorder	50	100%
Individuals diagnosed as mentally ill suffer from its symptoms throughout their life	48	96%
People who have once received psychological treatment are likely to need further treatment in the future	46	92%
It might be difficult for mentally ill people to follow social rules such as being punctual or keeping promises	47	94%
I would be embarrassed if people knew that I dated a person who once received psychological treatment	23	46%
I am afraid of people who are suffering from psychological disorder because they may harm me	42	84%
A person with psychological disorder is less likely to function well as a parent	38	76%
I would be embarrassed if a person in my family became mentally ill	47	94%
I believe that psychological disorder can never be completely cured	48	96%
Mentally ill people are unlikely to be able to live by themselves because they are unable to assume responsibilities	42	84%
Most people would not knowingly be friends with a mentally ill person	48	96%
The behaviour of people who have psychological disorders is unpredictable	45	90%
Psychological disorder is unlikely to be cured regardless of treatment	47	94%
I would not trust the work of a mentally ill person assigned to my work team	45	90%

#### DISCUSSION :

The current study made use of a survey based methodology to study the attitude of students from different professions towards mental illness. The results of the current study was compared with that of the other.

In our study, Majority of the participants belongs to the age group of 20-23 yrs and were found to be males .90% of students believe that a mentally ill person is more likely to harm others and 100% of the respondents says that they get afraid of what others would think if they were diagnosed as having a psychological disorder. These results were compared with a study by Helia Ghanean et al [5], in which it was found that majority of the participants were males and belongs to the age group of 26 - 45 years and it was found that 52 % in Tehran and 96.5% in Nigeria think that people with mental illness are dangerous because of violent behaviour .24% in Tehran and 82.9% in Nigeria feel that they get ashamed if people knew someone in their family been diagnosed with mental illness.

In another study by Jennifer Hill [1] it was shown that the Students who label people experiencing the mental disorders as being mentally ill are not significantly less willing to interact with them. And Students are also significantly more likely to believe that the people experiencing symptoms of schizophrenia would do something violent toward the others.

High levels of ignorance, prejudice and discrimination towards the mentally ill patients was observed in studies among health professionals in, Canada, Croatia, England, Australia, Brazil Malaysia, Spain and Turkey.

Studies among medical students have also reported unfavorable attitudes towards mentally ill. The knowledge of the attitude and awareness of the undergraduate students towards the psychiatry and diseases, mental health and mental disorders is of utmost importance as these people are going to be involved in the patients care either directly or indirectly during their careers. An overwhelming majority of patients with neurosis, depression, alcohol-related problems, sexual problems and psychosomatic disorders have been found to seek treatment from general physicians in India.

Further education on the causes and management of mental disorders for the public is necessary. Personal contact with people suffering with the mental illness may help to improve their condition. Younger students should be the target prioritised for mental health education. Apart from the delivery of mental health knowledge, strategies should aim to increase social contact with persons having mental illness. Such measures could be considered in an attempt to overcome stigmas and discrimination in the community. Tracking the attitudes toward mental illness can serve as an indicator of the public's mental health literacy.

#### CONCLUSION :

Creating awareness in students regarding the mental illness and the care to be taken for the patients with mental illness is very important because most of the population is found to be suffering with any one of the mental disorders like schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder, OCD.

This is a student centered survey and is chosen to assess their attitude. This shows that improvement in the role of teachers in educating their students regarding the mental health is important. Continuous educational programmes in the way of oral presentations, verbal reminders, providing

newsletters through emails and direct distribution , advertisement, and encouraging the students to attend the psychiatry wards and involving actively in education and training of students especially for improvement of knowledge and increased awareness in psychiatric disease is essential meetings and other journal club activities or any workshops to make students more familiar is also necessary.

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