

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Study on the Attitude of “Tomorrow’s Doctors” towards Psychiatry: A Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Different studies showed different attitudes towards Psychiatry among medical students. This study was initiated to explore the attitude towards Psychiatry among medical students in a Medical College of Manipur.

Methods: A cross-sectional study using self administered questionnaires was conducted among the medical students in Manipur. One self rating scale – Attitude towards Psychiatry, ATP-30 was used to assess the attitude of the students towards Psychiatry. Descriptive statistics and independent sample t-tests were applied using SPSS 22 for analysis.

Results: Exposed students have higher scores as compared to unexposed students. As an overall impression, all the students have positive attitude (mean score of exposed and unexposed as 3.7543 & 3.5313) with no significant difference between two groups (p-value 0.060).

Conclusion: Medical students overall have positive attitude towards Psychiatry and most of them wanted to be Psychiatrist. Exposure to Psychiatry didn’t have any effect.

Key words: Attitudes, Mental illness, Likerts’ scale, Psychiatry and Psychiatrist.

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INTRODUCTION

A person hospitalized for mental illness was assumed to be dangerous, incompetent and untrustworthy.¹ Many studies have demonstrated negative opinions about mental disorders.¹⁻³ Medical students have negative attitudes towards mental illness.⁴ Mentally ill patients are affected by the negative prejudices and cultural stereotypes of the public.⁵ Surprisingly this problem is noted even among medical students who, despite receiving education on psychiatry, still harbor an unhealthy attitude about mentally ill patients and psychiatric practices.^{6,7}

Globally, Unipolar Depressive Disorder singly stood 9th rank among 20 leading causes of DALYs.⁸ According to NCMS, 2005 prevalence rate of mental illness was 5.8% across the country.⁹ According to Mental Health Survey carried by the Directorate General of Health Services, India in 2002, there were only about 2,219 Psychiatrists in the Country, against the required 9,696.¹⁰

Here, in Manipur there is limited local data regarding the attitude of medical students towards Psychiatry. Therefore, the aim of the study is to find out the attitude of medical students of JNIMS towards Psychiatry and to ascertain the association between different variables of interest.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study was conducted at the Department of Community Medicine, JNIMS among undergraduate students of the college from 29th May to 24th June 2014. It was intended for universal coverage except for students involved in the research (20), refusal to give consent, non-availability even after three visits and unable to respond due to sickness.

Study instruments

All participants completed self administered questionnaires on attitude towards Psychiatry using ATP 30.¹¹ The ATP questionnaires consist of 30 items and have been standardized and validated in the UK. It has adequate face validity, construct validity, split half reliability

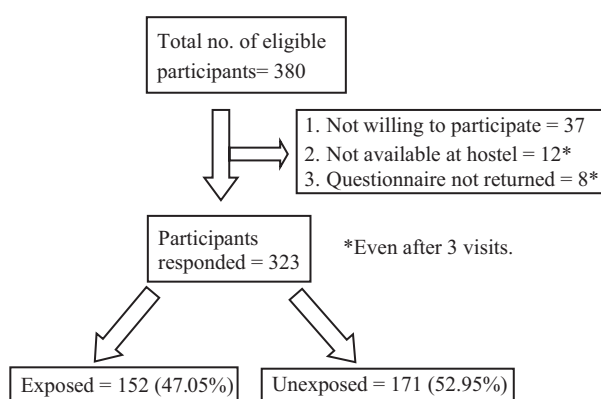
ity and high test- retest reliability, has been widely used in attitudinal studies on medical students. It covers 8 (eight) related attitudinal areas pertaining to psychiatric patients, psychiatric illness, psychiatric knowledge, psychiatrists, psychiatric career choice, psychiatric institutions and psychiatric teaching. Respondents are expected to express their agreement or disagreement to each statement on a 5-point Likerts’ scale ranging from 1 (agree strongly) to 5 (strongly disagree). Half of the items (Statement number 4,5,7,9,10,11,12,14,18,20,23,25,28 & 29) are positively phrased whereas the remaining half is reversely scored. High scores indicate a positive ATP. A logical neutral ATP is indicated by a score of 3 for each statement. Whenever it was needed, Items were rephrased for increased clarity for the present enquiry, without altering their meaning.

Exposed students are those undergraduate medical students who are in the sixth semesters and above. Written consent was taken from the respondents before involvement and confidentiality was maintained by excluding personally identifiable characteristics.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS:

The statistical package SPSS 22nd version was used for analysis. Descriptive statistics are expressed in the form of mean and percentage etc. The difference in means was tested using t-test after checking the distribution to be normal. An alpha level of significance was set at 0.05 for all analysis.

RESULTS



In the college, there were 380 eligible medical students out of which 323 students responded giving rise to 85% response rate. Out of 323 students, 50.2% were unexposed while 49.8% were already exposed.

Table-1 illustrates the religion of the participants where 41.8% of them are Hindu. More than half of them (55%) didn't attend religious services regularly. Many of them (57.6%) have known someone with mental illness,

while only 17% of the participants have volunteered/ worked with individuals who had mental illness.

Table-2 shows that, in all the statements, exposed students have higher scores as compared to unexposed students, however the difference is significant in the Statements 1,2,3,5,6,8,9,12,13,17,18,19,20,21,24,25,26,27 and 30. Regarding statement “I would like to be a Psychiatrist” more number of students have positive attitude (mean scores of exposed and unexposed as 2.84 and 2.71), however many of them refused that Psychiatry is a respected branch of medicine (mean scores of exposed and unexposed as 4.17 and 4.04 with logical neutral score as 3). As an overall impression regarding attitude towards Psychiatry, all the students have positive attitude (mean score of exposed and unexposed as 3.7543 and 3.5313) with no significant difference between the two groups (p-value 0.060).

DISCUSSION

According to study done by O.I.N Buhari et al, it was found that there was fairly positive attitude towards Psychiatry at the beginning and end of the posting (mean ATP score were 91.8 ± 7.6 and 92.5 ± 8.5 with logical neutral score as 90) and the difference was not significant.¹² Similar findings i.e mean scores of exposed and unexposed as 3.7543 and 3.5313 (p-value =0.060) are found in the present study. In the study of OIN Buhari only 16% at the beginning and 20% at the end of posting in Psychiatry opted to become Psychiatrist. Asiri Rodrigo et al found that even after Psychiatry posting only 25.8% agree the Statement while 27.9% of the respondents disagree.¹³ On the contrary, the present study in this positive statement shows that higher number of students' i.e exposed and unexposed mean scores as 2.84 and 2.71 have opinion to become Psychiatrist. The difference in findings could be because of the reason that the study areas are different ie Nigeria, Sri Lanka and India; there are number of internal and external unrests facing in the state (India) thus indirectly sensitizing the students for the needs of the Speciality.

LIMITATION

The inherent property of cross-sectional study is considered as the limitation because cohort study regarding the topic gives reliable findings.

STRENGTH OF THE STUDY

Using internationally accepted tools the findings of the study have validity.

Sl. No	Characteristics	Types	Frequency (%)	Total (%)
1	Religion	Hindu	135 (41.8)	323 (100)
		Christian	96 (29.7)	
		Meitei	63 (14.5)	
		Islam	26 (8)	
		Jewish	2 (0.6)	
		Others	1 (0.3)	
2	Whether attended religious services regularly?	Yes	143 (44.3)	321 (99.4)
		No	178 (55.1)	
3	Do you know someone with mental illness?	Yes	186 (57.6)	321 (99.4)
		No	135 (41.8)	
4	Have you ever volunteered / worked with individual who has a mental illness?	Yes	55 (17)	320 (99)
		No	265 (82)	

Table 1 - Distribution showing certain background characteristics of the participants

Sl. No.	Questions	Exposed		Unexposed		p-value
		N	Mean	N	Mean	
1.	Psychiatry is unappealing because it makes little use of medical training.	152	4.22	170	3.94	0.005
2.	Psychiatrist talks a lot but do very little.	152	4.07	171	3.92	0.042
3.	Psychiatric hospitals are little more than prison.	151	3.84	169	3.57	0.019
4.	I would like to be a Psychiatrist.	152	2.84	171	2.71	
5.	It is quite easy for me to accept the efficacy of Psychotherapy.	152	3.25	171	3.02	0.029
6.	On the whole, people taking up psychiatric training are running away from participation in real medicine.	152	3.97	170	3.44	0.000
7.	I would consider a career in Psychiatry after completing my medical undergraduate studies.	152	2.83	171	2.70	0.191
8.	The practice of Psychotherapy basically is fraudulent since there is no strong evidence that is effective.	151	3.94	171	3.62	0.001
9.	Psychiatric teaching increases our understanding of medical and surgical patients.	152	3.86	171	3.67	0.029
10.	The majority of students report that their Psychiatric posting has been valuable.	152	3.59	170	3.49	0.259
11.	Psychiatry is a respected branch of medicine	151	4.17	170	4.04	0.072
12.	Psychiatric illness deserves at least as much attention as physical illness.	152	4.43	169	4.18	0.016
13.	Psychiatry has very little scientific information to go on.	152	3.76	171	3.49	0.015
14.	With forms of therapy now at hand, most Psychiatric patients improve.	151	4.00	171	3.78	0.009
15.	Psychiatrists tend to be at least as stable as the average Doctors.	152	2.46	171	2.56	0.298
16.	Psychiatric treatment causes patients to worry too much about their symptoms.	152	3.23	171	3.26	0.822
17.	Psychiatrists get little satisfaction from their work than other specialists.	152	3.74	171	3.27	0.000
18.	It is interesting to try and unravel the cause of Psychiatric illness.	152	4.11	170	4.05	0.007
19.	There is very little that Psychiatrists can do for their patients.	152	4.11	171	3.85	0.008

Sl. No.	Questions	Exposed		Unexposed		p-value
		N	Mean	N	Mean	
20.	Psychiatric hospitals have a specific contribution to make to (can help specifically) in the treatment of the mentally ill patients.	152	4.18	171	3.95	0.011
21.	If I were asked what I considered to be the most exciting medical specialists, Psychiatry would be excluded.	152	3.46	171	3.19	0.011
22.	At times it is hard to think of psychiatrists as equal to other Doctors.	152	3.62	170	3.53	0.454
23.	These days Psychiatry is one of the most important parts of the curriculum in Medical School.	152	4.01	171	3.87	0.135
24.	Psychiatry is so unscientific that even Psychiatrists can’t agree as to what its basic applied sciences are.	152	3.78	171	3.45	0.001
25.	In recent years Psychiatric treatment has become quite effective.	152	4.12	171	3.80	0.000
26.	Most of them so called facts in psychiatry are really just vague speculations.	152	3.55	171	3.15	0.000
27.	If we listen to them, Psychiatric patients are just as human as other people.	152	4.06	171	3.77	0.002
28.	The practice of Psychiatry allows the development of really rewarding relationship with people.	152	4.21	171	4.08	0.095
29.	Psychiatric patients are often more interesting to work with than other patients.	152	3.33	171	3.26	0.487
30.	Psychiatry is so unstructured that it can’t really be taught effectively.	152	3.75	171	3.33	0.000
31.	Overall Impression.	30	3.7543	30	3.5313	0.060

Table 2 - Distribution showing attitude towards psychiatry among exposed and unexposed groups of students.

CONCLUSION

The Medical Students as overall have positive attitude towards Psychiatry and most of them wanted to be Psychiatrist. Exposure to Psychiatry didn’t have any effect.

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