Attitude towards mental health among postgraduate students and house surgeons in a tertiary teaching hospital at Kancheepuram: a questionnaire based study

Afiz Ashraf Mohammed 1, Cattamichi Vinila 1, Asghar Alam 1, Matilda Arthur 1, Shailaja Bandla 2, Zubeida Sultana 2, Srinivasa Gopalan Gopalaswamy 3, Kondapalakala Kiran Kishore 4, Sivachidambaram Balasubrahmanyan 5

1Postgraduate, 2Assistant professor, 3Associate professor, 5 Professor and Head, department of psychiatry, Meenakshi Medical College and Research Institute, Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu, India
4 Assistant professor, department of pharmacology, Bhaskar Medical College, Moinabad, Andhra Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

Background: The stigma attached to mental illness and the mentally ill is a universal phenomenon and a major barrier to the provision of mental health services. Stigmatising attitude among doctors themselves can result in compromised patient care.

Aims: To study the Perception & Attitude towards Mental Health among Post Graduate students of various specialities and House Surgeons.

Methods: Cross sectional study involving post graduate students of various descriptive specialities and house surgeons at Meenakshi Medical College and Research Institute, Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu, India. A modified version of Attitude towards psychiatry-30 (ATP-30) Questionnaire was used for the study. Statistical Analysis was done using the software, Graph Instapad with which Chi Square test with Yates correction was done.

Results: The attitude of majority among postgraduate students and house surgeons in Meenakshi Medical college and research institute was positive (70.7%). Males (71.2%) had slightly more positive attitude than females (70.2%). House surgeons (80.4%) had more positive attitude than postgraduate students (64.6%). Non clinical post graduate students (81.8%) had more positive attitude than post graduate students of medical (53.7%) and surgical (68.8%) specialities. Participants posted in psychiatry posting prior to this study had slightly more positive attitude (72.5%) than those who did not (69.8%). Unmarried participants had more positive (73.4%) attitude than married participants (63.9%). Participants from urban background had more positive attitudes (81.2%) than with rural background (41.2%).

Conclusion: There is need to create awareness among the non-psychiatry post graduate students about mental health and also introduce mental health education in rural areas.

Key words: House surgeons, Postgraduate students, Attitude, Mental Health

INTRODUCTION

Psychiatry as a branch of medicine has seen numerous advances in the recent years. Better awareness regarding mental illness is not only essential among the general population but also among health professionals. Better understanding and knowledge regarding mental illnesses and available effective treatment modalities may help in shaping up a favourable attitude towards mental health and the mentally ill among the public, medical students and most importantly the medical profession at large. [1, 2]

The stigma towards mental illness is prevalent throughout all regions and cultures. Globally, there is growing evidence of stigmatization of people with mental illnesses. [3-5] Studies show that physical disorders are much less stigmatized than mental illnesses. [6, 7] Most social relationships are disrupted due to the presence of a mental illness. [8] The attached stigma stands as an obstacle in the presentation, detection and treatment of mental illnesses. [9] Moreover, stigma is not found to be different between individual
psychiatric disorders. It is also a major barrier to the provision of mental health services. “It is considered as an amalgamation of three related problems: a lack of knowledge (ignorance), negative attitudes (prejudice), and exclusion or avoidance behaviours (discrimination).”

Stigmatising attitude among doctors themselves can result in compromised patient care. The attitude of medical students towards psychiatry and psychiatric disorders may be modelled by many attributes that may come into play before and while enrolment in a medical school, such as the role of education providers. The attitude of non psychiatry post graduate students towards mental health is particularly important as it influences the large number of psychiatric patients who present mainly to non psychiatry doctors like general practitioners.

**Aims:**
To study the Perception and attitude towards Mental Health among Post Graduate students of various specialities and House Surgeons.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS:**
Cross Sectional Study involving post graduate students of various Descriptive specialities & House Surgeons at Meenakshi Medical College and Research Institute, Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu, India. Prior ethics committee approval was taken for conducting the study. A modified version of Attitude towards psychiatry ATP-30 Questionnaire, was used for the study. The inclusion criteria for this research were post graduate students and house surgeons, while the exclusion criteria were teaching staff.

A total of 130 house surgeons and post graduates participated in the study. Of them, 57 were male and 73 female. Among males 71.2 % had positive attitude and 28.8% had negative attitude towards psychiatry patients. Among females 70.2% had positive attitude and 29.8% had negative attitude towards mental health (p=0.8954). Amongst 51 house surgeons and 79 post graduate students 80.4% and 64.6% had positive attitude respectively whereas 19.6% and 35.4% had negative attitude respectively (p=0.052). Regarding the specialities of post graduate students, amongst the 32 medical, 25 surgical and 22 non-clinical post-graduate students, 53.7% of medical, 68.8% of surgical and 81.8% of non-clinical post graduate students had positive attitude whereas 46.3% of medical, 31.2% of surgical and 18.2% of non-clinical post graduate students had negative attitude towards mental health (p=0.02) (Table 2).

**RESULTS**
Table 1 show the socio-demographic characteristics of the study population.

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants (n=130)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Attitudes of participants of different categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Positive attitude (%)</th>
<th>Negative attitude (%)</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>0.8954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House surgeon/Postgraduate</td>
<td>House surgeons</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>19.635.4</td>
<td>0.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Postgraduate students</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialties of post</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>graduate students</td>
<td>Surgical</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non Clinical</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatry posting</td>
<td>Posted</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>0.725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not posted</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>0.3943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Background</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 130 house surgeons and post graduates participated in the study. Of them, 57 were male and 73 female. Among males 71.2 % had positive attitude and 28.8% had negative attitude towards psychiatry patients. Among females 70.2% had positive attitude and 29.8% had negative attitude towards mental health (p=0.8954). Amongst 51 house surgeons and 79 post graduate students 80.4% and 64.6% had positive attitude respectively whereas 19.6% and 35.4% had negative attitude respectively (p=0.052). Regarding the specialities of post graduate students, amongst the 32 medical, 25 surgical and 22 non-clinical post-graduate students, 53.7% of medical, 68.8% of surgical and 81.8% of non-clinical post graduate students had positive attitude whereas 46.3% of medical, 31.2% of surgical and 18.2% of non-clinical post graduate students had negative attitude towards mental health (p=0.02) (Table 2).
Part of this study also involved taking into account whether they had completed their psychiatry postings prior to this study. Of the 44 who attended psychiatry posting, 72.5% and 27.3% had positive and negative attitudes respectively and of the 86 who had not attended psychiatry posting 69.8% had positive attitudes and 30.2% had negative attitude (p=0.725). Amongst the 36 married and 96 unmarried participants, 63.9% and 73.4% had positive attitude respectively, 36.1% and 26.6% had negative attitude respectively (p=0.3943). On comparing the attitudes based on the social background of the participants, 96 who came from urban background had 81.2% and 18.8% positive and negative attitudes respectively, and 34 participants who came from a rural background had 41.2% and 58.8% positive and negative attitudes respectively (p<0.0001). Figure 1 depicts the attitude of study participants.

Figure 1: Pie chart showing percentage of total participants with positive or negative attitude

**DISCUSSION**

This study focused on the perceptions and attitudes towards mental health amongst different post graduate students of various specialities and house surgeons. It was observed that majority (70.7%) of the participants had a positive attitude towards mental health (Figure 1). Male and female participants did not show any major difference regarding their positive attitudes (71.2% and 70.2%) towards mental health whereas house surgeons had a more positive attitude (80.4%) than post graduate students (64.6%). The post graduate students of non-clinical specialities had a more positive attitude (81.8%) than their counterparts in medical (53.7%) and surgical (68.8%) specialities, the p value being 0.02 which is significant. There was not much influence amongst the positive attitudes in participants irrespective of their attending psychiatry postings prior to the study or not (72.5% and 69.8% respectively). The unmarried participants had more positive attitude (73.4%) than married participants (63.9%). Lastly, participants with urban background had more positive attitude (81.2%) than participants with rural background (41.2%). The p value being <0.0001, which is highly significant.

Several studies have been conducted at medical schools of United Kingdom, [21] Sri Lanka, [22] and also in India regarding the attitude of doctors and medical students towards psychiatry and psychiatric disorders. [23, 24] These studies have pointed out that a favourable attitude towards psychiatry and psychiatric disorders were present among doctors and medical students, supporting our study. Studies have also shown that significant changes were observed in the attitudes once the study subjects underwent psychiatric posting as observed in India, [26, 26] Malaysia, [27] and Spain. [28]

Through this study, we wanted to study different variables which influenced the attitudes towards mental health. On comparison of attitudes based on different variables most of them had positive attitude towards mental health but have not reached the statistical significance. A significant statistical value was found with post graduate students of various specialities and participants with different social backgrounds (Table 2).

**CONCLUSION:**

Non-Clinical Post graduate students and students belonging to urban background have the most positive attitude towards mental health. This highlights the need for creating awareness among the non-psychiatry post graduate students about mental health and also to introduce mental health education in rural areas.

**Acknowledgements:** Nil

**References:**


---

**Source of Support:** Nil

**Conflict of Interest:** Nil declared