

ATTITUDE TO MENTAL ILLNESS AMONG MEDICAL INTERNS AND THE ROLE OF PSYCHIATRY POSTING

Medical Science

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Training of doctors about psychiatric illnesses is crucial for betterment of mental health of the community. In our study we have tried to assess the role of compulsory internship posting of medical undergraduates in Psychiatry department in changing their attitude about mental illnesses towards a more positive side.

Method: Sixty-two (62) MBBS interns were included in our study and were assessed by a pre-post study using the Attitude to Mental Illness Questionnaire (AMIQ) before and after their psychiatry posting.

Results: There was an initial negative attitude towards injection heroin user, and poor attitude towards schizophrenia prior to internship posting. However, following psychiatry posting, their attitudes changed towards more positive side, and these changes were statistically significant in cases of injection heroin user, depression & suicide, as well as schizophrenia.

Conclusion: Compulsory internship posting in psychiatry department plays a very crucial role in changing attitude towards mental illnesses among doctors.

KEYWORDS

AMIQ, Attitude, Interns, Mental Illness

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is often stigmatized in our country, and the burden lies greatly on medical professionals about de-stigmatization of the mentally ill, and education of the general population in this regard.^{1,2} All the medical students during their course of internship have a compulsory posting in Psychiatry unit where proper training is undergone. The effect of that training in building a more positive attitude towards psychiatric illness deserves scrutiny.³ Limited studies have been undertaken in this regard in Government Medical Colleges of Eastern India. Our study aims to assess the overall attitude of medical students towards mental illness, and the impact of psychiatry training during internship on modifying those attitudes to a more positive side.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in the Department of Psychiatry of a Government Medical College in Eastern India from January, 2019 to June, 2019 after obtaining approval of the Institutional Ethics Committee. Every consecutive MBBS interns coming to the Psychiatry department for compulsory rotation during that period were included in our study. It was a Pre-Post study design. After explaining the nature of the study and obtaining valid consent from them, a pre-designed, pre-tested semi-structured questionnaire was used to obtain socio-demographic details of the interns. The Attitudes to Mental Illness Questionnaire (AMIQ)⁴ was given to them before and after the Psychiatry rotation. Results obtained were analyzed using statistical software.

The Attitudes to Mental Illness Questionnaire (AMIQ) is a self-reported short instrument with good psychometric properties. It has 7 case vignettes, each of which has 5 questions in a 5-point Likert scale response. Each question scores from -2 (negative attitude) to +2 (positive attitude), with 0 as neutral response. Each vignette scores from -10 to +10.⁴

RESULTS

Among the 62 interns, 37 were males (59.7%), and 25 females (40.3%). The mean age of the interns were 23.39 ± 2.34 years. 39 were Hindus (62.9%), 21 Muslims (33.9%) and 2 were Christians (3.2%). Figure 1 shows the graphical representation of the mean responses in AMIQ case vignettes before and after Psychiatric rotation of the interns. Table 1 shows the comparison of means of the responses in each of the AMIQ case vignettes.

Figure 1: Bar Diagram showing the mean responses in AMIQ case vignettes before and after Psychiatry rotation of the interns

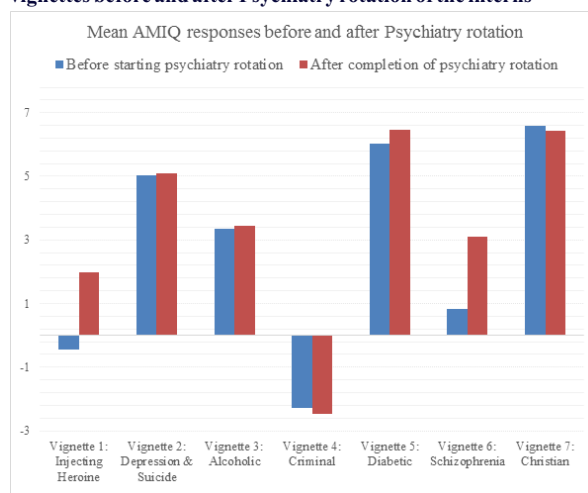


Table 1: Comparison of means of the responses in each AMIQ case vignette using paired t-test (n=62).

Case Vignettes in AMIQ	Before starting psychiatry rotation	After completion of psychiatry rotation	t-value	Significance (p-value)
Vignette 1: Injecting Heroin	-0.45 $\pm$ 2.60	1.97 $\pm$ 2.21	-8.177	0.000*
Vignette 2: Depression & Suicide	5.02 $\pm$ 1.75	5.08 $\pm$ 1.70	-2.051	0.045*
Vignette 3: Alcoholic	3.35 $\pm$ 2.28	3.44 $\pm$ 2.23	-1.691	0.096
Vignette 4: Criminal	-2.29 $\pm$ 4.10	-2.47 $\pm$ 3.98	1.143	0.257
Vignette 5: Diabetic	6.02 $\pm$ 1.90	6.47 $\pm$ 1.85	-1.834	0.072
Vignette 6: Schizophrenia	0.82 $\pm$ 3.03	3.11 $\pm$ 2.50	-7.744	0.000*
Vignette 7: Christian	6.6 $\pm$ 1.94	6.44 $\pm$ 1.87	0.677	0.501

*p-value significant at <0.05

Among the seven case vignettes described in AMIQ, vignettes 1, 2, 3 and 6 were directly related to psychiatric illness; vignette 1 and 3 depicting substance use disorder, vignette 2 depicting depression with suicidal

attempt and vignette 6 depicting schizophrenia. Among these, favorable response (positive attitude) was seen in three out of four scenarios. Vignette 1 described injectable heroine user where, before psychiatry rotation the AMIQ mean score was -0.45 ± 2.60 , which changed significantly to a much more favorable mean score of 1.97 ± 2.21 (p-value significant at 0.000). Likewise, vignette 4 described a schizophrenia patient with history of hospitalization and long term parenteral antipsychotic therapy. Here also the scores changed from 0.82 ± 3.03 to 3.11 ± 2.50 after internship rotation (p-value significant at 0.000). Attitude towards depression with suicide attempt also changed significantly towards a more positive side (p-value significant at 0.045). Changes in mean scores in the remainder of the vignettes were not statistically significant, however, an overall negative attitude was seen in case vignette 4 (convicted criminal), and overall positive attitude was seen in case vignettes 3, 5 and 7 (alcoholic, diabetic and Christian).

DISCUSSION

In this study, initially, before starting psychiatry rotation, low score was seen in case of schizophrenia, and negative scores in case of injectable heroine user. However, statistically significant changes in attitude towards some of the major mental illness were noted, namely in cases of substance use disorder (heroin injection user), depressive disorder (with suicidal attempt) and schizophrenia. In alcohol use disorder, interns showed positive attitude prior to as well as after psychiatry rotation. Similar positive attitude was seen in chronic medical illness like diabetes. These findings correlated with some earlier studies, showing positive attitude towards mental illnesses after psychiatry training in medical undergraduates.⁵⁻⁷ Some studies, however, have found contrasting or mixed results.⁸⁻¹⁰

Despite limitations like small sample size, lack of randomization and limited number of mental illness case vignettes, our study was clearly able to demonstrate the positive change in attitude of interns towards psychiatric illnesses.

CONCLUSION

Negative attitude towards some mental illness were present in medical undergraduates before exposure to Psychiatry. However, compulsory psychiatry posting of interns was beneficial in bringing a positive change of attitude towards psychiatric illnesses.

DECLARATION

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

APPENDIX

Attitudes to Mental Illness Questionnaire (AMIQ)

Subjects are presented with 7 case vignettes describing a hypothetical scenario. In each one of them, they have to answer 5 questions on a scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Each question scores from +2 to -2, making the total score for each vignette from +10 to -10. Questions 1-3 & 6 are related to mental health, whereas questions 4, 5 & 7 are for subject's attitudes towards other situations. Substitute 'X' with subject's name from the vignettes.

Vignettes:

1. John has been injecting heroin daily for 1 year.
2. Tim is depressed and took a paracetamol overdose last month to try and hurt himself.
3. Steve has been drinking heavily for 5 years. He is now going for treatment and has started attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.
4. Robert is a convicted criminal. He has spent time in prison for several convictions for theft and shoplifting and is currently on bail for fraud and burglary.
5. Peter has diabetes. He needs to inject insulin every day and has a special diet.
6. Michael has schizophrenia. He needs an injection of medication every 2 weeks. He was detained in hospital for several weeks 2 years ago because he was hearing voices from the Devil and thought that he had the power to cause earthquakes. He has been detained under the Mental Health Act in the past.
7. Steve is a practising Christian. He attends church every Sunday and attempts to lead a Christian life.

Questions:

- a. Do you think that this would damage X's career?
Strongly agree(-2)/Agree(-1)/Neutral or Don't know(0)/Disagree(+1)/Strongly disagree(+2)

- b. I would be comfortable if X was my colleague at work? Strongly agree(+2)/Agree(+1)/Neutral or Don't know(0)/Disagree(-1)/Strongly disagree(-2)
- c. I would be comfortable about inviting X to a dinner party? Strongly agree(+2)/Agree(+1)/Neutral or Don't know(0)/Disagree(-1)/Strongly disagree(-2)
- d. How likely do you think it would be for X's wife to leave him? Very likely(-2)/Quite likely(-1)/Neutral/Don't know(0)/Unlikely(+1)/Very unlikely(+2)
- e. How likely do you think it would be for X to get in trouble with the law? Very likely(-2)/Quite likely(-1)/Neutral/Don't know(0)/Unlikely(+1)/Very unlikely(+2)

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