



Attitudes and Myths of Undergraduate Psychology Students Taking UP Psychology AS A Post Graduate Specialty – An Exploratory Survey

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ABSTRACT

A survey in 409 undergraduate psychology students was carried out to assess the attitudes and myths of undergraduate psychology students on taking up psychology as a post graduate specialty. The data was collected on a specially prepared self reporting voluntary and anonymous questionnaire and was statistically analyzed. All 409 students answered the entire questionnaire. 399 (97.56%) of students strongly agreed that psychological problems do need to be paid attention. 268 (65.53%) of the participants did not consider the psychiatrist equivalent to other doctors and believed that their job was quite challenging. 200 (48.89%) were open to the idea of choosing psychology as a career. 366 (89.49%) considered psychology a very respectable branch as a career. It was also heartening to note that 236 (57.71%) felt that psychology increased their understanding of other human beings and 377 (92.18%) considered their undergraduate training valuable. Further studies in different settings are needed to corroborate and generalize these findings.

KEYWORDS

attitudes, psychology post graduate, myths, career.

INTRODUCTION

Attitudes are supposed to be 'social judgments and are a complex mixture of cognitive, emotional and behavioral components'. Social psychologists have traditionally viewed attitudes being made up of the above three parts [1]. The cognitive component is made up of the beliefs that people hold about the object of an attitude. The affective component of an attitude consists of emotional feelings stimulated by an attitude object and the behavioral component of an attitude consists of predispositions to act in certain ways towards an attitude object. But several researchers have found that attitude behavior relations are not consistent [2].

Since time immemorial human beings have warped their attitude towards psychology and mental illness. These are entrenched in the dungeons of their soul and have never ever been conquered. The perception of a psychologist or counselor as a therapist that just speaks and does nothing more is still prevalent and so is the notion of mental illness as being incurable or mental being equated to insane which often shapes the attitudes of interested college students [3]. The community perceptions of psychology as a non lucrative branch of arts affect the specialist interests of these students [4] and this is coupled with the stigma prevalent regarding psychological illness and psychiatric patients [5].

In order to understand the prevailing attitudes of the undergraduate psychology students to psychology as a post graduate specialty and career, we decided to undertake this study in three different colleges in Mumbai.

MATERIAL & METHODS

The study was conducted during Jan – Feb 2016 in three undergraduate colleges where psychology as an undergraduate major was being taught and students had the option of choosing psychology as a major in the third year of graduation. All the colleges were in the city of Mumbai. The sample consisted of 409 undergraduate psychology students (3rd year B.A.) who had completed two years of studying psychology. They had all undergone a training in various psychiatric disorders and were well versed with testing concepts and psychopathology. All of them had attended the lecture series in

psychology and psychopathology in their third year B.A. course. Based on the prevailing beliefs amongst undergraduate college students, a semi-structured proforma was prepared in the form of a self reporting questionnaire with the questions pertaining to attitudes, myths, and the desire to pursue psychology as a post graduate specialty and career. The questionnaire was validated by three senior faculty of the colleges. The questionnaire was a likert type questionnaire consisted of 23 questions, of which there were choices on which the student had to grade the answers and some questions were yes and no type. The students were instructed to tick one or more options whichever was applicable.

Each proforma had a brief introduction by the authors regarding the need for the study and anonymity was guaranteed. The questionnaire was then administered to 409 undergraduate psychology students in a classroom setting and all completed the entire questionnaire and hence all were included in the study. The results were then tabulated and analyzed by the means of frequency distribution and percentage using basic descriptive statistics.

RESULTS

399 (97.56%) of medical graduates strongly agreed that psychological illnesses do need attention to be paid to as opposed to 2.44% who disagreed. 244 (59.66%) of graduate students agreed to the fact that it is interesting to unravel the causes of psychological problems as opposed to 40 (9.77%) who disagreed. 152 (37.17%) of graduates disagreed that psychologists talk a lot but do very little. 268 (65.33%) of medical graduates disagreed that it is hard to think of psychiatrists equal to other doctors as their work is more challenging.

206 (50.37%) felt that psychologists get higher job satisfaction than other professionals due to the changes they bring about in fellow human beings. 233 (56.97%) disagreed with the fact that psychology was unappealing and felt that it was a very reputable branch of humanities. 99 (24.21%) of the participants however did also express that psychology was at times vague and speculative and had less scientific theory. It

was heartening to see that 253 (61.86%) felt that psychology was an interesting subject and was taught effectively in their college.

It was great to note that 200 (48.89%) wanted to take up psychology as a career. 366 (89.49%) considered psychology a respectable branch and a useful career option. 236 (57.71%) felt that their psychology knowledge gave them a better understanding of fellow human beings. 377 (92.18%) felt that psychologists played a valuable role in the management of psychological problems and considered their undergraduate psychology education as valuable.

DISCUSSION

The fact that psychology was viewed positively was a refreshing change and a positive attitude would help not only in learning but also considering it as a career choice. Many of the graduates expressed that the knowledge of psychology was very useful in daily life and in their interactions with other human beings. Psychology was a scientific, yet intriguing and not a stigmatizing branch for a career choice. A moderately positive attitude towards psychiatry was also studied previously by other authors [6].

It was also heartening to see a positive attitude towards psychology as a career, while mental health professionals have many a times been considered to be odd and eccentric and have more often than not invited skepticism from society and teaching fraternity at large. Several researchers have found that exposure to psychology as a subject changed and improved attitudes towards psychology [7-8]. However the influence of media and peers that is an important source of attitude formation was not seen in our study.

Education has been founded on the basis of classroom teaching. In our study the graduates did feel that psychology teaching was valuable and helped them to understand the subject better. This would also mean that as educators we would have to address the improvement in skills and knowledge in the psychosocial care. There are several studies that therefore evaluate the relevancy of the behavioral science curriculum and lay down the objectives of teaching [9].

Studies have reported that interaction with patients, seeing them respond, a better psychologist-patient relationship influenced attitudes of students to psychology and gave them an idea of their clinical competency [10]. A clinical observership is the best period to get an idea of what may entail taking up psychology as a career. Psychology as a prospective career option was considered by nearly half the study group. A choice of psychology has also been studied and certain factors have been found influential on the choice of psychology as a career [12-13].

In India, the future of psychology holds good as changes seem to have occurred in the last decade in the attitudes towards the subject. Certain caveats to the study however remain. It is a subjective evaluation with no rating measure in place. It is a retrospective evaluation and memory biases may play a role in data gathering. It was just from three centers and cannot be generalized to colleges all over Mumbai or India. This study is a small step in the direction of further psychology education based studies that need to be taken up in this regard.

Table – Questions answered in the proforma

<p>QUESTIONS ASKED TO THE UNDERGRADUATES (Lickert type)</p> <p>Agree, Strongly agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree</p>

<p>Do you think psychological problems and illnesses need attention.</p> <p>Is it interesting to unravel the causes of psychological problems.</p> <p>Do you think that psychologists talk a lot and do very little.</p> <p>Are psychiatrists equal to other medical doctors.</p> <p>Do you feel that psychologists get adequate job satisfaction.</p> <p>Do you feel psychology is one of the top three exciting branches of careers</p> <p>Is psychology unappealing as it uses little scientific skills</p> <p>Do you feel psychology is nothing but vague speculations.</p> <p>Do you feel psychology is based on firm scientific foundations.</p> <p>Do you feel psychology undergraduate training is valuable to you.</p> <p>Do you feel psychologists derive more work satisfaction than others.</p> <p>Do you feel psychology is the most important aspect of college education</p> <p>Does psychology increase your understanding of fellow human beings</p> <p>Do you feel psychotherapy is a valid treatment.</p> <p>Do you feel people benefit from psychotherapy and counseling.</p> <p>Is psychological treatment really effective.</p> <p>Would you like to take up psychology as a career.</p> <p>Do you feel psychology is a respectable branch of career choice.</p> <p>Do you feel psychology makes you run away from it</p>

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