



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Psychiatry

ATTITUDE TOWARDS PSYCHIATRY: ACROSS MEDICAL GRADUATION – A COMPARATIVE STUDY

KEY WORDS: Attitude, Psychiatry, Medical graduation.

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ABSTRACT	Aims: The aim of present study was to compare the Attitude towards psychiatry between first year students of medical graduation and after completion of medical graduation ie during internship.
	Materials and Methods: This cross sectional, questionnaire based comparative study consisted of consenting first year students of medical graduation and interns. socio demographic variables and reply to the Attitude Towards Psychiatry (ATP-30) questionnaire was collected for analysis.
	Results: The sample consisted of 75 participants; 40 first year students and 35 interns. There were 43 males and 32 females. The mean total ATS score for male was 100.88 and for females it was 109.87. Also for first year and interns it was 105.90 and 103.37 respectively.
	Conclusions: comparison showed that females had more positive attitude towards psychiatry than males and there was no significant difference attitude towards psychiatry between first year and interns.

INTRODUCTION

There is increasing prevalence of psychiatric illnesses worldwide. The professionals dealing in mental health however are not adequate to match for it. It was estimated that, in 1990, mental and neurological disorders accounted for about 10% of the total DALYs (disability adjusted life years) lost due to all diseases and injuries, this was 12% in 2000. By 2020, it is projected that the burden of these disorders will have increased to 15% [1]. Psychiatric disorders are now among the top ten causes of economic burden of diseases while depression alone is second in the list [2]. According to census of India (2001) and National sample survey organisation (NSSO 2002) 10% of total disability in India is attributed to mental disorders [3]. The increasing demand of psychiatrists cannot be overlooked because of significant increase in psychiatric morbidity (4).

On the contrary interest in psychiatry among medical undergraduates has remained low despite recent developments in the discipline [5-10]. The percentage of medical students pursuing psychiatry as post-graduates has been gradually declining over the past 50 years and psychiatry remains one of the least favored medical specialties [11]. Most of the literature shows that medical students have negative or at best neutral attitude towards psychiatry [12-17]. However, having a positive attitude towards psychiatry even does not guarantee selection of psychiatry as an area of professional specialization [5,18-20]. As a result there is a global shortage of psychiatrists; this is more so in developing countries like India [5, 11].

Medical students tend to take the view that psychiatric patients suffer from chronic illnesses with a poor prognosis, are difficult to interview, and psychiatrists practice outside mainstream medicine [21-24], earn less money, are less respected and to have less prestige [7, 20]. The other reported causes for not choosing psychiatry as a discipline are stigma, stress, attitude of non-psychiatric faculty and assumed higher rate of psychiatric morbidity in psychiatrists [17, 26-29]. Notwithstanding, psychiatry has been rated higher than any other discipline on intellectual challenge [19].

Understanding the factors influencing students' interest and

respect for psychiatry is essential because of its obvious relevance to recruitment to psychiatry. Of the factors influencing students interest in psychiatry, medical school (institutional) factors may be amenable to corrective measures.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This descriptive cross sectional questionnaire based comparative study was conducted at a tertiary care teaching hospital in north India, that caters patients from several states such as Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Haryana, and Delhi. Two groups were formed Group A: first year professional students and Group B: interns, undergoing compulsory rotatory internship after completion of final year professional exams.

First year professional students and interns were approached through the college administration. The students were informed about the purpose of the study and that their participation was voluntary. They were assured that their identity and responses would remain confidential as no identifying data were required. All the first year professional students and interns who agreed to participate and ready to give consent were enrolled in the study.

A two part instrument consisting of a sociodemographic questionnaire and the Attitude Towards Psychiatry (ATP-30) was distributed. Sociodemographic data included general information and it had questions about their psychiatric posting, whether they have seen or not any psychiatric patient. They were also asked about family history of psychiatric illness. Attitude Towards Psychiatry (ATP-30) is a Likert-type scale designed and validated by Burra et al. [30]. The scale consists of 30 questions positively and negatively phrased. Respondents express their agreement and disagreement to 30 items in terms of five point scale: strongly agree; agree; neither agree or disagree; disagree; strongly disagree. Responses for 15 items meant to measure positive attitude are scored from 1-5, whereas items meant to measure negative responses are scored from 5-1. Total score on the scale indicates positive or negative attitude. The range of scores is 30-150. A total mean score of 90 is regarded as a logical neutral attitude. SPSS Version 16 was used for data entry and statistical analysis.

Descriptive statistics was used to analyze socio-demographic factors while independent sample t-test was applied for comparison of mean scores obtained by the subject group on each item, and to know the statistical significance of the differences.

Approval was obtained from the teaching hospital ethics committee before conducting the study.

RESULTS

The sample consisted of 75 participants; 40 first year students and 35 interns. There were 43 males and 32 females. All the participants completed the questionnaire.

Comparisons of mean scores were done between males and females & between first year students and interns.

Sex wise comparison showed that females had more positive attitude towards psychiatry than males. The difference between the two was statistically significant (p<0.002). Overall 15 females (8 first year students and 7 interns) and 17 males (11 first year students and 6 interns) disagreed that they want to be a psychiatrist.

Group wise comparison between first year students and interns showed that both groups had positive attitude towards psychiatry. First year students arithmetic mean was slightly higher than interns but the difference was statistically insignificant (p>0.385).

Item wise comparison between first year students and interns showed that difference between mean scores of few responses were statistically significant.

In response to the statement 'I want to be a psychiatrist' nearly half of first year students and more than one third interns disagreed. The interns as a group however had positive attitude (mean 3.14±1.31) while first year students had negative attitude (2.45±1.13) towards psychiatry and the difference was statistically significant (p<0.016).

Almost all of the first year students and interns either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that psychiatric illness deserves as much attention as physical illness. Similarly most of the participants from both groups agreed the statement that 'psychiatric patients are just as human as other people' and 'the practice of psychiatry allows the development of rewarding relationship with people'. Exactly sixty per cent participants from both groups agreed that 'psychiatry patients are more interesting to work with than other patients'. However in all the above statements first year student's mean scores were significantly higher than that of interns'.

Nearly 68 per cent interns and 40 per cent first year students agreed that 'psychiatric treatment causes patients to worry too much about their symptoms' while 17% and 45% respectively were neutral about this statement. As a group interns looked more critical of psychiatric treatment (mean 2.37±0.84) than first year students (mean 2.77±0.86) with statistically significant difference (p<0.045).

DISCUSSION

Lots of studies have been conducted to assess the attitude of medical students towards mental illness and Psychiatry using different scales. Attitude Towards Psychiatry scale (ATP-30) tends to assess attitudes related to Psychiatry looking upon the following four aspects: Psychiatric patients and psychiatric illness, Psychiatrist, psychiatry as a subject, Psychiatric knowledge and teaching and Psychiatric treatment and hospitals [30].

Our study was cross-sectional questionnaire based study, intending only a group-wise comparison between males & females and first year students and interns.

Group wise comparison between first year students and interns showed that both had positive attitude towards psychiatry and the difference was statistically insignificant. It is in keeping with the

findings from some recent studies done at Pakistan, Malaysia and United Kingdom [28,22,18] and in contrast to an earlier study [12]. A WHO study also reported negative attitude towards mental illnesses among the medical students [19].

Sex wise comparison showed that females had significantly more positive attitude towards psychiatry than males but more females (47%) disagreed that they want to be a psychiatrist in comparison to males (40%). The most common statements agreed on by both sexes in descending order of frequency were 'psychiatry is not based on much scientific evidence' (males 70% females 50%), 'people taking up psychiatric training are running away from participation in real medicine' (males 44% females 26%), 'psychiatrists get less satisfaction from their work than other specialities' (males 40% females 25%), 'psychiatry is so amorphous that it cannot be taught effectively' (males 30% females 16%). It seems that females, despite less agreeing on with negatively framed questions are not ready to take up psychiatry as a career. Many factors may be postulated to be behind this, for example parental and societal dislike, marital concerns. These things in other way denote that we are far from destigmatising psychiatry. However it is worrying that such a high percentage of students didn't see psychiatry as a career option despite having positive attitude towards psychiatry. More so both groups very much agreed to the statements like psychiatric illness deserves same attention as physical illness that psychiatry patients are just as human as other people and are interesting to work with. So despite having such empathic attitude towards psychiatric patients they are somehow unsure about psychiatry as a career. Most probably the unscientific and vague nature of the subject (as believed by the participants) as well as social stigma associated with psychiatry is mainly responsible for the dislike of psychiatry as a career. In some previous studies possible reasons highlighted were disorganized undergraduate curricula, lack of scientific validity of the profession, financially less rewarding career and less respect in the eyes of the public [25]. Students also opined that psychiatric patients are difficult to interview and understand [26]. Our study was not without any limitations. Sample size was small and that too from only one institute, so generalization of the results is difficult. Cross-sectional nature of the study might not have served our purpose of ascertaining the importance of undergraduate education in Psychiatry. Similarly, as we used the same English version of the scale without translation or adaptation to our study population, some statistical biases cannot be ruled out. Further studies are needed with large population of medical students using scales well adapted to our own population. Results from a study comparing the attitude towards Psychiatry before and after a formal training in Psychiatry would have visualized the importance of Psychiatry among the undergraduate medical students.

Table 1: Comparison of Total Score between males and females

Sex (N)	Total Score Mean (SD)	Positive Score Mean (SD)	Negative Score Mean (SD)
Male (43)	100.88 (12.63)	56.25 (5.9)	44.62 (8.76)
Female (32)	109.87 (10.36)	58.06 (4.99)	51.81 (7.04)
P value	0.002	0.166	0.000

Table 2: Comparison of Total Score between first year students and interns

Group (N)	Total Score Mean (SD)	Positive Score Mean (SD)	Negative Score Mean (SD)
First Year (40)	105.90 (12.85)	57.50 (5.66)	48.40 (8.48)
Interns (35)	103.37 (12.06)	56.48 (5.49)	46.88 (9.17)
P value	0.385	0.435	0.460

Table 3: Comparison of the mean scores on items measuring attitude towards psychiatry (ATP) among first year students and interns

ATP items	First Year N=40	Interns N=35	P value
1.	3.60 (1.03)	3.48 (1.33)	0.678
2.	3.22 (0.97)	3.11 (1.20)	0.662

3.	3.07 (1.22)	3.22 (1.05)	0.567
4.	2.45 (1.13)	3.14 (1.31)	0.016
5.	3.37 (0.66)	3.54 (1.03)	0.402
6.	3.17 (1.00)	3.17 (1.12)	0.988
7.	3.65 (0.76)	3.60 (0.94)	0.804
8.	3.52 (1.08)	3.85 (0.81)	0.142
9.	3.72 (0.87)	3.85 (0.77)	0.494
10.	3.50 (0.81)	3.31 (0.86)	0.343
11.	4.07 (0.76)	4.20 (0.75)	0.481
12.	4.57 (0.67)	4.17 (0.85)	0.026
13.	2.92 (1.02)	2.77 (1.03)	0.520
14.	3.85 (0.76)	3.77 (0.73)	0.653
15.	3.57 (0.87)	3.74 (0.91)	0.420
16.	2.77 (0.86)	2.37 (0.84)	0.045
17.	3.12 (0.88)	2.85 (0.91)	0.201
18.	4.17 (0.78)	3.97 (0.92)	0.304
19.	3.50 (1.08)	3.37 (1.03)	0.602
20.	4.02 (0.69)	3.97 (0.70)	0.742
21.	3.42 (1.03)	2.94 (1.28)	0.076
22.	2.85 (1.12)	3.25 (1.14)	0.125
23.	3.42 (0.95)	3.74 (0.81)	0.129
24.	3.22 (0.99)	3.14 (1.00)	0.724
25.	4.15 (0.66)	3.82 (0.74)	0.052
26.	3.20 (0.75)	2.88 (0.86)	0.098
27.	4.47 (0.64)	3.74 (0.88)	0.000
28.	4.30 (0.60)	4.00 (0.64)	0.042
29.	3.95 (1.06)	3.42 (1.00)	0.033
30.	3.17 (0.90)	2.88 (1.05)	0.209

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