



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

### KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE OF NURSES REGARDING MENTAL ILLNESS

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#### ABSTRACT

Although recent advances in psychiatry have increased our understanding towards psychiatric disorders, many people are unaware about mental illness and its treatment. The negative attitude is known hindrance of providing quality service to mental ill people. The aim of this study is to assess the knowledge and attitude about mental illness among nurses. The study was carried out in chitwan medical college, Bharatpur, Nepal. One hundred nurses working in different departments were the study population. A structured questionnaire was provided to the nurses for their responses. It was a purposive, descriptive study with 100 respondents of more than 2 years clinical experience. Almost all (99%) respondents mentioned that not all mentally ill are mad. Majority mentioned biochemical disturbances (99%) and genetic (51%) as cause of mental illness respectively. Respondents expressed their faith in psychiatrist (86%) in faith healers. This study revealed that there was overall adequate knowledge and positive attitude towards mentally ill people among the nurses.

**Key Words:** *Attitude, knowledge, mental illness, nurses.*

#### INTRODUCTION

Mental disorders constitute a major public health problem. Today, the global lifelong prevalence for any given psychiatric disorders is reported to be as high as 48%.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that more than 450 million people in the world are suffering from some kind of mental disorders, with 150 million affected by depression and 25 million by schizophrenia.<sup>2</sup> Attitudes influence both professional and personal behavior. Stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness result in the underuse of mental health services.<sup>3</sup> Stigma is a negative evaluation of person tainted or discredited on the basis of attributes such as mental disorder or mental illness race, ethnicity, drug misuse or physical disability.<sup>4</sup> Attitude of society towards mental illness directly affects patients' awareness, their search for medical care, communication with doctors and whole process of therapy and rehabilitation.<sup>5</sup> Incomplete knowledge, misinformation and stigmatization have a direct negative impact on early diagnosis of the disorder and the commencement of therapy at an early stage.<sup>6</sup>

Early psychiatric intervention is known to reduce morbidity and mortality in the patients with physical and mental illness. The nurse's role in this regard is being increasingly recognized.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the knowledge, attitude and beliefs of nursing staff regarding mental illness are keys, as they are directly involved in providing mental health care as well as general care. The aim of this present study is to assess nurse's knowledge and attitudes towards mental illness.

This descriptive study, carried out in Chitwan Medical College

(CMC), Bharatpur, was used to find out the level of knowledge and attitude of nurses towards mental illness. The study sample constitutes of 100 nurses working in different departments of CMC, were selected by simple randomization.

Approval was obtained from Chitwan Medical College Institutional Review Committee. Respondents who participated in this study were informed about the nature and purpose of the study. Privacy was maintained by using the code number.

The structured questionnaire consisted of socio-demographic data, level of knowledge towards mental illness and attitude towards mental illness among nurses, was distributed to all nurses participating in this study. The completed questionnaires were then collected by researcher herself on the next day.

The collected data was checked, reviewed and organized daily for its accuracy and completeness. All the collected data were coded and analyzed in SPSS program version 11.5 and calculated according to the nature of variables by using statistical techniques (frequency, percentage and mean).

#### RESULTS

Out of 100 respondents, majority (67%) were Proficiency Certificate Level by professional education. Similarly, majority of them were Hindus (89%). Majority of them did not give family history of any mental illness (96%). Majority of them (49%) had more than 2 years clinical experience. (Table-1)

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by professional education, religion, family history of mental illness and clinical experience**

Variables	Frequency(n=100)	Percent(n=100)
<b>Professional Education</b>		
PCL	67	67
Bachelor of nursing	22	22
B.Sc. nursing	11	11
<b>Religion</b>		
Hindu	89	89
Muslim	1	1
Christian	2	2
Buddhist	8	8
<b>Family history</b>		
Yes	4	4
No	96	96
<b>Clinical experience</b>		
Less than 6 months	12	12
Less than 1 year	13	13
1-2 years	26	26
More than 2 years	49	49

95% respondents regarded mental illness as noncontagious. Most of them believed that mental illness is treatable (94%) while 89% of participants did not feel that mental patients are necessary to admit in mental hospital. Almost all (99%) believed that all mentally ill patients are not mad. Majority of them regarded that mental patients can present with physical symptoms. 94% respondents did not discriminate mentally ill patient. (Table-2)

**Table 2: General perception regarding mental illness**

Variables	Frequency(n=100)
<b>Mental illness is contagious</b>	
Yes	2
No	95

Do not know	3
<b>Mental illness is treatable</b>	
Yes	94
No	4
Do not know	2
<b>It is always necessary to admit mental patients to a mental hospital</b>	
Yes	11
No	89
<b>All mentally ill patients are mad</b>	
Yes	1
No	99
<b>Mental patients can present with physical symptoms</b>	
Yes	83
No	13
Do not know	4
<b>Discriminate the mentally ill patients</b>	
Yes	5
No	94
Do not Know	1

Most of the respondents believe that mental illness could be caused by biochemical disturbances in brain, genetic heritability and financial constraints. Respondents did not believe that own sin, evil spirits/ghost/witchcrafts/blackmagic could cause mental illness.(Table 3)

**Table 3: Knowledge about etiology of mental illness**

Variables	Frequency(n=100)
<b>Mental illness is due to</b>	
Own sin/Disregard of religion	7
Evilspirits/Ghost/Witch craft/Blackmagic	4
Financial constraints	7
Genetic heritability	51
Biochemical disturbances in brain	91

Majority of the respondents opined that mentally ill people should be treated by a psychiatrist and mostly believed that mentally ill person are also in need of treatment. A large majority of respondents expressed yoga and meditation could be effective for treatment.

**Table 4: Knowledge about treatment of mental illness (Multiple Response)**

Variables	Frequency (n=100)	Percent (n=100)
<b>Following can be effective for treatment</b>		
Yoga and meditation	86	86.0
Visiting local faith healers	1	1.0
Getting treated by general practioner	7	7.0
Getting treated by psychiatrist	86	86.0
Mentally ill patients are also in need of treatment as patient with physical illness	50	50.0

Above table no. 5 shows that majority of the respondents did not visit neither psychiatrist nor healer if they had emotional problem. Majority of them did not afraid of someone with mental illness who is staying next door. Most of the respondents did not believe that marriage can treat mental illness. A large majority of respondents were willing to maintain friendship with someone with mental illness. Most of the respondents were not ashamed to mention someone in family who has mental illness regarding their attitude.

**Table 5: Attitude of respondents toward mental illness**

Variables	Frequency (n=100)	Percent (n=100)
<b>Visit psychiatrist if had emotional problem</b>		
Yes	42	42.0
No	58	58.0
<b>Visit a healer if had emotional problem</b>		
Yes	11	11.0
No	89	89.0
<b>Afraid of someone with mental illness who is staying next door</b>		
Yes	23	23.0
No	77	77.0
<b>Marriage can treat mental illness</b>		

Yes	11	11.0
No	89	89.0
<b>Willing to maintain friendship with someone with mental illness</b>		
Yes	69	69.0
No	31	31.0
<b>Ashamed to mention someone in family who has mental illness</b>		
Yes	7	7.0
No	93	93.0

## DISCUSSION

Mental health problems are of serious concern worldwide. A major barrier to the realization of good mental health and well being is stigma and discrimination. Nurses working in general hospitals have an important role to play in dealing with patients having psychiatric problem. They help in referring patients to psychiatrist as they closely associated with patients and easily notice behavioral changes.

The participants in this study were professional nurses working in different department of the hospital. Regarding etiology of mental illness, majority held fairly good knowledge. Most of the respondents felt that God's curse, witch craft or evil spirit does not cause mental illness which again may be contrary to the general public's prevailing views but are comparable to the views of nurses in a study from India.<sup>7</sup> In developing countries, supernatural phenomena like witch craft and possession by evil spirits are seen as important cause of mental illness.<sup>9</sup> Subjects' belief in genetic heritability and biochemical disturbances in the brain indicated their better knowledge of the etiology of mental illness.

Majority (70%) of the respondents correctly underscored the importance of psychosocial causes including financial constraint as cause of mental illness which is parallel with the opinion held by western population.<sup>10</sup> The views expressed in this study are almost similar to the study done by Shyangwa et al.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding the treatment of mental illness, 86% respondents opined that psychiatrists are most effective followed by yoga and meditation. In one western study, psychiatrist and psychologist are rated less than general practioners for minor psychiatric problems but are more likely seen helpful for schizophrenia.<sup>11</sup> The study done by Shyangwa et al<sup>8</sup> revealed that about 98.2% viewed that mentally ill patients are also in need of treatment as patients with physical illness which is similar to this findings.

Formal education and experiences are important vehicles to change the attitudes towards individuals with mental illness.<sup>12</sup> Previous researchers have shown that when participants are given accurate and enough information about mental illness, they have less negative attitude and less fear towards those

individuals.<sup>13</sup> Changing the negative attitude of students towards mental illness will affect the quality of the patient care.

## CONCLUSION

The majority of the respondents had fairly good knowledge about the cause of mental illness and possible effective modalities of treatment. Positive attitude of nurses about the mental illness will influence the quality of care they deliver to the mental ill patients. Because of the mental health course provided for the nurses during their academic education, their attitude towards mentally ill people was found to be positive. Attitudes are important in determining behaviors, so it is important for the policy makers to focus on nurse's attitudes; as they are the care providers of mentally ill patient.

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