

Attitudes towards psychiatry among undergraduate medical students

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Summary:

Mental health is the most neglected and stigmatized branch of medical science in Bangladesh. Attitudes towards psychiatry are an important determination for selection of the subject as career by the undergraduate medical students. The objective of this study was to determine the attitudes of undergraduate medical students towards psychiatry and related factors. It was across sectional study conducted from May 2013 to September 2013 among 1st and 5th year medical students of Rajshahi Medical College, Rajshahi and Shaheed Shahrawardi Medical College, Dhaka. Results showed that only 2.6% of 5th year medical students wanted to be specialized in psychiatry and none of 1st year medical students wanted to be specialized in psychiatry. All of them (100% and 98.7%) agreed with the statement that psychiatric research has made good strides in advancing care of major mental disorder and majority students of both groups were (96% and 86.6% respectively) with the statement that psychiatry was a rapidly expanding frontier of medicine. Around two-third of the students (79.3% and 82.7% respectively) perceived psychiatric treatment as being helpful. Fifty nine (76.6%) of 5th year students and forty one (55.7%) of 1st year students did not agree that psychiatrists frequently abuse their legal power to hospitalize patients against their will. Positive opinions on attitudes of undergraduate medical students towards psychiatry became strengthen further following exposure to psychiatry lectures and clerkship in psychiatry ward.

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Introduction

Mental health is an ignored subject in the field of medical science and in the area of public health and less than 1% of health budget is spent on mental health problems in developing countries.¹ This neglect accounts for student's lack of interest in psychiatry and fewer medical students consider psychiatry as career choice as compared to other medical subspecialties.² Globally, it is an ongoing concern that the subject of psychiatry, psychiatrists, mental health professionals and mentally ill patients are affected by negative attitudes, prejudices and the cultural stereotypes of general public.³ There are only 190 psychiatrists in Bangladesh and they practice mainly in urban setting. Besides, about 5000 physician received special training regarding psychiatry.⁴ A study of National institute of Mental

Health & World Health Organization, Bangladesh, 2003-2005 revealed that about 16.01 % of population had mental illness. Out of 16.01% of mental illness, 8.4% of population had anxiety disorder, 4.6% of population had depressive disorder and 1.1% of population suffered from psychosis.⁵ The available 0.07 psychiatrist for one lakh Bangladeshis are absolutely insufficient.⁴ A report of the assessment of the mental health system in Bangladesh using the World Health Organization - Assessment Instrument for Mental Health System (WHO-AIMS) showed that human resources working in mental health facilities per 1,00,000 population is only 0.49. The same report noted that 4% of the training for medical doctor was devoted to mental health, in comparison to 2% for nurses. So, the scope of development of manpower for the management of psychiatric

illness appears once again very deplorable. It was also observed that most of the medical students considered psychiatry as intriguing, time consuming and non-lucrative branch of medicine in today's materialistic world.⁶ Low recruitment to psychiatry is a serious challenge and a cause of a concern worldwide.⁷ The most common concern expressed by the medical students related to the lack of scientific rigor in psychiatry, the non-efficiency of the treatment and the psychiatrist's low social status among physician.⁸ Failure to attract sufficient physicians to be specialized in the field of psychiatry is a growing concern in many countries.⁹ This trend was partly attributed to the negative attitude of medical students towards psychiatry.¹⁰ In this context, the present study aimed to determine the attitudes of undergraduate medical students towards psychiatry and related factors.

Materials and methods

This study was a cross sectional, descriptive study conducted among 1st and 5th year medical students of Rajshahi Medical College (RMC) and Shaheed Shahrawardi Medical College (SShMC) Dhaka during the period from May 2013 to September 2013. A total of 152 1st and 5th year medical students were included in the study. 81 medical students were selected from RMC and 71 medical students were selected from SShMC. An informed written consent was taken from each respondent and socio-demographic data were collected using the questionnaire designed by the researcher. The Bangla version of modified Bangla questionnaire was applied to identify the attitudes of medical students towards psychiatry.

Results

Seventy seven (50.7%) of the respondents were included from the 5th year medical students and seventy five (49.3) of the respondents were included from the 1st year medical students. The youngest respondents were 17 years old and the oldest aged 25 years. The mean age (\pm SD) of the respondents was 21.3 (12.2) years (Table 1.2). Participation of female was predominant (58.6%) and the male were 41.4% (Table 1.2).

Table 1.1: Respondents among two different medical colleges (n=152)

Medical college	Frequency	Percent (%)
RMC	81	53.3
SShMC	71	46.7

Table 1.2: Socio demographic profile of the respondents (n=152)

Socio demographic and other variables	Frequency	Percent
Age (in year)		
17 to 19	46	30.3
20 to 22	41	27.0
23 to 25	65	42.8
Mean (\pm SD)=21.3(\pm 2.2)		
Sex		
Male	63	41.4
Female	89	58.6
Educational level		
1 st year	75	49.3
5 th year	77	50.7
Habitat		
Urban	112	73.7
Semi-urban	24	15.8
Rural	16	10.5
Monthly family income of the respondents (in BDT)		
<5000	4	2.6
5001-10000	17	11.2
10001-15000	17	46.7
15001-20000	32	21.2
>20000	82	53.9
Religion		
Islam	137	90.1
Hinduism	14	9.2
Christianity	1	0.7
Marital status		
Single	140	92.1
Married	12	7.9
Family type of respondents		
Nuclear family	135	88.8
Joint family	17	11.2

It was showed that only two (2.6%) of the 5th year medical students wanted to be specialized in psychiatry whereas none of 1st year medical students wanted to be specialized in psychiatry (Table 2).

It was found that seventy seven (100%) of the 5th year students and seventy four (98.7%) of the 1st year students agreed with the statement that psychiatric research made good strides in advancing care of major mental disorder and seventy four (96.0%) of the 5th year students and sixty five (86.6%) of the 1st year students with the statement that psychiatry was a rapidly expanding frontier of medicine (Table 3).

Table 4 showed that seventy seven (100%) and seventy one (94.7%) of 5th year and 1st year students respectively would recommend psychiatric consultation to family members suffering from very upsetting and non-resolving emotional problem. Major portion of 1st year and 5th year students (88% and 93.5% respectively) agreed that psychiatric consultation would be helpful in medical and surgical patients (Table 4).

Table 5 showed that seventy four (96.0%) of 5th year students and fifty six (74.6%) of 1st year students disagreed with the statement that psychiatry was not a genuine and valid branch of medicine, fifty nine (76.7%) and fifty three (70.6%) respectively were of the opinion that most psychiatrists were clear and logical thinkers (Table 5).

Here, it was found that fifty nine (76.6%) of 5th year students and forty one (55.7%) of 1st year students did not agree that psychiatrists frequently abuse their legal power to hospitalize patients against their will. Fifty seven (74.0%) and thirty (40.0%) of the 5th year and 1st year students respectively agreed that psychiatrists made money as most other doctors (Table 6).

Table 2: Distribution of choice of career among the respondents (n=152)

Subjects	1 st year medical students (n=75)		5 th year medical students (n=77)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Medicine	24	32.0	19	24.7
Surgery	14	18.7	25	32.5
Gynecology & Obstetrics	15	20.0	14	18.2
Neurology	5	6.7	4	5.2
Psychiatry	0	0	2	2.6
Ophthalmology	2	2.7	5	6.5
Cardiology	12	16.0	3	3.9
Others	3	4.0	5	6.5

Table 3: Comparison of overall merits of psychiatry between 1st year and 5th year medical students (n=152)

Questions	1 st year medical students (n=75)		5 th year medical students (n=77)	
	Agree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Disagree n (%)
Psychiatric research has made good strides in advancing care of major mental disorder.	74 (98.7)	1 (1.3)	77 (100)	0 (0)
Psychiatry is a rapidly expanding frontier of medicine.	65 (86.6)	10 (13.4)	74 (96.1)	3 (3.9)
Psychiatry is unscientific and imprecise.	32 (42.6)	43 (57.4)	8 (10.4)	69 (89.6)

Table 4: Comparison of efficacy between 1st year and 5th year medical students (n=152)

Questions	1 st year medical students (n=75)		5 th year medical students (n=77)	
	Agree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Disagree n (%)
If someone in my family was very emotionally upset and the situation did not seem to be improving, I would recommend psychiatric consultation.	71 (94.7)	4 (5.3)	77 (100)	0 (0)
Psychiatric consultation for medical or surgical patient is often helpful.	66 (88.0)	9 (12.0)	72 (93.5)	5 (6.5)
Psychiatric treatment is helpful to most people who receive it.	62 (82.7)	13 (17.3)	61 (79.3)	16 (20.7)

Table 5: Comparison of role definition and functioning of psychiatrists between 1st year and 5th year medical students (n=152)

Questions	1 st year medical students (n=75)		5 th year medical students (n=77)	
	Agree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Disagree n (%)
Psychiatry is not a genuine and valid branch of medicine.	19 (25.4)	56 (74.6)	3 (4.0)	74 (96.0)
Most psychiatrists are clear, logical thinkers.	53 (70.6)	22 (29.4)	59 (76.7)	18 (23.4)
Among mental health professionals, psychiatrists have the most authority and influence.	57 (76.0)	18 (24.0)	49 (63.7)	28 (36.3)

Table 6: Comparison of possible abuse and social criticism between 1st year and 5th year medical students (n=152)

Questions	1 st year medical students (n=75)		5 th year medical students (n=77)	
	Agree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Disagree n (%)
Psychiatrists frequently abuse their legal power to hospitalize patients against their will.	34 (45.3)	41 (55.7)	18 (33.4)	59 (76.6)
On average, psychiatrists make as money as most other doctors.	30 (40.0)	45 (60.0)	57 (74.0)	20 (26.0)

Discussion

Only 2(2.6%) of the 5th year medical students wanted to be specialized in psychiatry whereas none of the 1st year medical students wanted to be specialized in psychiatry. The number of students choosing psychiatry as a future career rose to 2.6% (0 to 2.6%) in this study. This finding of this study indicated that medical student's choice of psychiatry as a field of future medical specialization probably depended on factors that might be favorably influenced by the exposure to psychiatry. This result was consistent with some other studies¹⁰⁻¹² but a Bangladeshi study conducted in 2005 in a medical college, reported that there was no significant change on choosing psychiatry as a future career between pre-clinical and post-clinical medical students.⁶ This might be due to the some modification of undergraduate medical education curriculum in psychiatry. According to the recommendation of BMDC, 8 hours of lecture class, 2 weeks clerkship in the 4th year and 2 days block posting in 5th year were also added in the new MBBS curriculum.

Positive opinions regarding the overall merits of psychiatry got further strengthened following the exposure to psychiatric lecture class and ward rotation in psychiatry ward. They more strongly supported the views that psychiatry is a rapidly expanding frontier of medicine and psychiatric research has made good strides in advancing care of major mental disorder. These findings were supported in other studies indicating opinions on psychiatry have been improved.¹³

The student's opinion concerning efficacy also changed after exposure to psychiatry. They adequately supported the opinions that psychiatric consultation for medical and surgical patients is often helpful and they

would recommend psychiatric consultation for their family members who was very emotionally upset and the situation did not seem to be improved. Psychiatric consultations is helpful for all branches of medical science: this view was only significantly changed among post clinical students of a public medical college, Bangladesh.⁶

A significant proportion of students had changed their views that psychiatry was not a genuine and valid branch of medicine; they had changed their opinion and regarded psychiatrists as clear and logical thinkers. This result was consistent with a Malaysian study¹² and inconsistent with a Nigerian¹⁰ and a Spanish study.¹⁰

With the exposure to psychiatry, students were more inclined to believe that psychiatrists make as money as most doctors. A greater change concerning income prospect was observed before and after exposure to psychiatry. This finding was inconsistent with the other study.¹² The student's opinion concerning the power abused by psychiatrists to hospitalize patients. They were less likely to agree that "psychiatrist abuse their legal power to hospitalize patients against their will" which reflected a more favorable attitude following exposure to psychiatry. This result was consistent with a study conducted in the faculty of medicine of the University at Autonoma de Barcelona, Spain during the academic year 1999/2000.¹⁰

There was a positive change about the social prestige of the discipline after the exposure to psychiatry. Students were inclined to view that psychiatry enjoyed a respectable image among the general public. There was also change in the way the students perceived the family's reaction for considering psychiatry for

further specialization. The level of discouragement expressed by the family was perceived to be greater following the exposure to psychiatry. The reason was not very clear although it could be presumed that it was due to the stigma attached to psychiatry as a profession. With the exposure to psychiatry, the students reported a more favorable attitude concerning teaching quality of psychiatry in medical colleges, the effective role model to alter the image of psychiatry among other medical professionals and them during their psychiatry rotation. There was a negative shift in these opinions that most non psychiatry and house staff at my medical college are respectful of psychiatry. Actually it was felt inappropriate to administer among 1st year medical students because the responses of all of six questions regarding specific medical school factors were closely related to the clerkship in the psychiatry ward.

Conclusion

The students of today will be the psychiatrists of tomorrow and they will be in a position to influence the attitudes of their own students. In this context education program in psychiatry needs to undergo revision. Findings of this study can give guidance for further research and help the development of the field of psychiatry.

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