



Effect of Psychiatry Course on Medical Students' Attitude towards Mental Illness and Psychiatry, at University of Khartoum, 2017.

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Abstract

Statement of the Problem: Studies found that there is stigma of mental illness among doctors and medical students. This will affect the care and treatment provided by doctors for their patients. The rate of undergraduates pursuing psychiatry as post-graduates has been declining in the course of recent years leading to a decrease in the number of therapists. This creates a treatment gap, especially in developing countries. The purpose of this study is to assess medical students' attitude towards mental illness before and after the psychiatry course, and to determine the percentage of students who would like to become psychiatrists before and after the course.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: An analytical cross-sectional, institutional-based study was conducted. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to fourth year medical students at the University of Khartoum before and after the psychiatry course. MICA-2 scale was used to assess attitude towards mental illness. Statistical analysis was done using Google Form and SPSS including Independent t-test, Chi-square and analysis of variance test.

Findings: 298 students participated (83%) before and 217 students participated both before and after (60.61%). The results showed that there was a significant change in MICA-2 score mean with P value 0.002. The percentage of students interested in psychiatry as a career did not change significantly. Less than 30% considered psychiatry seriously as their future career both before and after the course.

Conclusion and Significance: Stigma of mental illness can be reduced and attitude can be improved through medical education. Attitude towards mental illness improved after the psychiatry course but the interest in psychiatry as a future career did not change. Recommendations are to do further research to be a guide for psychiatrists in order to improve the gain from the psychiatry courses in changing students attitude, and to increase recruitment to psychiatry.

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Introduction

Mental illness as defined in Oxford medical dictionary is "a condition which causes serious disorder in a person's behaviour or thinking". Psychiatry is a medical specialty and it is defined in Oxford dictionary as "the study and treatment of mental illness, emotional disturbance, and abnormal behavior" .

Stigma is a combination of ignorance, prejudice, and avoidance behavior. Stigma affects treatment seeking and social support.

There is stigma both to mental health diseases and professionals. Studies found that there is stigma of mental illness among doctors and medical students. This will affect the care and treatment provided by doctors for their patients.

The rate of undergraduates pursuing psychiatry as post-graduates has been declining in the course of recent years leading to a decrease in the number of therapists. This creates a treatment gap, especially in developing countries.

The purpose of this study is to assess medical students' attitude towards mental illness before and after the psychiatry course, and to determine the percentage of students who would like to become psychiatrists before and after the course.

Methods and Materials

An analytical cross-sectional, institutional-based study was conducted. The students were recruited during their academic activity including lectures and rounds. An online questionnaire was also used to help cover students whose attendance rate is low.

The students were assessed by using a self-administered questionnaire that consisted of three sections before and after the psychiatry course. The first section to determine if they had self-experience of being mentally ill or if they had previous contact with mental illness .The second section to assess their attitude towards mental illness. The 3rd section to determine their willingness to be psychiatrists in the future. .

MICA-2 scale was used to assess attitude towards mental illness. As mentioned by the creators of the scale it is "A 16-item scale developed to assess the attitudes of medical students towards people with mental illness as well and the field of mental healthcare. There are 6 anchor points ranging from "strongly agree to strongly disagree". High score indicates more negative stigmatizing attitudes towards mental illness and psychiatry".

Qualitative variables were described as numbers and percentages. Pie charts were used to present some of the answers. All the analysis mentioned was done using Google form.

Methods and Materials

The collected data was coded, tabulated, and statistically analyzed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS, version 20.0).

Quantitative variables were described as mean and standard deviation (SD).

The independent sample t-test was used to compare between means of the group before and after the psychiatry course.

ANOVA was used to compare answers of the attitude of five groups divided according to their interest in psychiatry as future career.

Chi square was used to find if there was a relation between the availability of a role model and interest of psychiatry as a future career.

P value was used to indicate the level of significance

(P < 0.05 was considered significant, P < 0.01 was considered highly significant).

Results

On exploring medical students' attitude before and after psychiatry course, results showed that there was a highly significant change in MICA-2 score mean with P value 0.002. We showed the results as mean+ or -SD. The minimum was 29 and the maximum was 75. After the course, the minimum was 25 and the maximum was 71.

The intention of students to become psychiatrists before and after the psychiatry course completed is shown in pie chart figure 1 and 2. There was no significant change.

The availability of role models had an impact on considering psychiatry as a future career. The difference was significant before psychiatry course (p value .007) and highly significant after it was done (p value .000).

We compared attitude towards mental illness by comparing MICA -2 scale scores between five groups divided according to interest in psychiatry. The difference was highly significant before the course (p value .000) and significant after the course (p value .007).

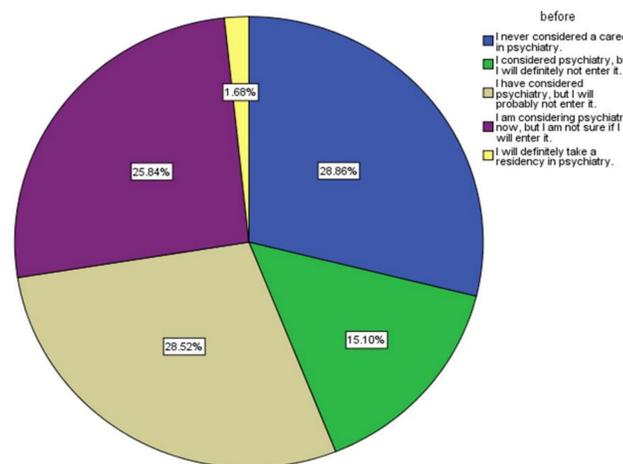


Figure (1): Consideration of psychiatry as future career before the course.

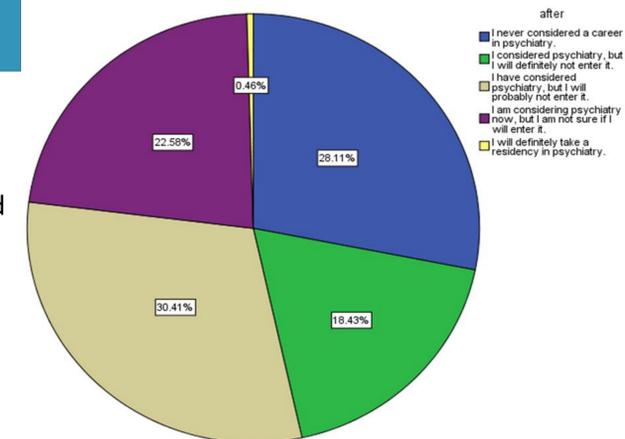


Figure (2): Consideration of psychiatry as future career after the course.

Discussion

As the results showed, there was significant improvement in attitude towards mental illness MICA -2 mean scores in contrast to what had been found in the study in Ain Shams University in which no change in attitude happened, although the duration of placement is nearly the same and Egyptian culture is nearly similar to Sudanese culture. This may be due to difference in socio-demographic data of students. Also this emphasizes that the difference in the course is an important factor and the psychiatrist who teaches the curriculum also plays an important role. The interest in psychiatry as a future career did not increase after psychiatry studying and rounds. This may be because of the short period of clinical placement which does not give them a complete picture of the psychiatry career. This was in contrast to a study in Sri Lanka which showed a near three-fold increase in the likelihood of pursuing a career in psychiatry from 9.4% to 25.8% (33). This may be due to longer duration of psychiatry clerkship (eight weeks).

References

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