

Mental Health Beliefs: Causes of Mental illnesses According to Attendants of Mentally ill Patients in Pakistan.

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of the current study was to investigate attendant's beliefs about causes of mental illness of their patient.

Study Design: Cross-sectional study.

Place and Duration of Study: This study was conducted at the AIMT Hospital Sialkot during the month of November 2018.

Materials and Methods: Non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to get a sample size of 391. Inclusion criteria were adult attendants giving written informed consent. Attendants with psychiatric illness, medical illness and having delusions were excluded. They were asked, what do you think about the cause of mental illness of your patient? Collected data was analyzed by SPSS v 22.

Results: 203 (51.92%) attendants were male and 188 (48.08%) were female. Mean age of males was 31.34±11.23 years (range 18-62 years). Mean age of females was 29.78±10.24 years (range 18-67 years). Majority were married, illiterate and from rural background. 184 (47.06%) had family history of mental illness. Attendants beliefs about the cause of mental illness were as following, 245 (62.66%) evil spirits, 174 (44.50%) medical illnesses. 167 (42.71%) attention seeking. 86 (21.99%) head injuries, 103 (26.34%) drug abuse, 93 (23.78%) drug side effects, 39 (42.71%) curse of God and 97 (24.81%) disturbed relations.

Conclusion: Of the 391 attendants of mentally ill patients 245 (62.66%) responded that evil spirits were the main cause of mental illness of their patients. 174 (44.50%) thought that these were medical illnesses too. 167 (42.71%) thought that their patients were attention seekers.

Key Words: Mental illness, attitudes, Mental health beliefs, stigma

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INTRODUCTION

Mental illness is defined as variety of mental health conditions and disorders affecting one's thoughts, behavior and mood. Classically, public attitudes study toward mental illness and individuals with mental illness has mainly been carried out by mental health professionals for example Psychologist and Psychiatrist. Different people from different fields of life, literate, illiterate, adolescents and old ones have different thoughts about mental illness.

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Some people have positive attitudes and some have negative attitudes toward mental illness. The people of the concerned population are misguided and got false beliefs about mental illness. A study conducted in Singapore showed that negative attitudes towards mentally ill people were dominant among population.¹ In the past, mentally ill people were mutilated, thrown away from their houses and even penalty to death to relieve their souls. A study conducted on Nigerians journalists and nurses showed that supernatural forces, curse of God, evil spirits and witches caused mental illness and mentally ill people were called as threatening, precarious, untrustworthy, careless and brutal.² These false beliefs had changed the public attitude toward mental illness that they were being discriminated in jobs, housing, in getting medical facilities and even in social relationships reported in a study conducted in America.³ Negative attitudes because of false beliefs may also affect the funding for mental health services.⁴ It was believed that even a very small group of professionals involved in denigration of mentally ill people or who do not have such confidence in improvements, will transform positive social interactions into negative social interactions at a certain time.⁵

On the other side of the story, health care professionals have positive attitudes toward mentally ill people on the basis of well-ordered contact as compared to the general public.^{6,7} American study also reported that positive attitudes were present among Americans research respondents.⁸ Lack of knowledge about mental illness and negative attitudes toward mentally ill people may also be present among Sialkot's Pakistani population. To our information no study has been conducted on this topic in Sialkot. The objective of the current study was to investigate attendant's beliefs about causes of mental illness of their patient.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted at AIMT Hospital Sialkot which is affiliated with KSMC Sialkot. This research was completed in Psychiatry department which has indoor and OPD running whole week. Current study was conducted on attendants who accompanied with their psychiatric patients to this hospital in the month of November 2018. It was conducted in both OPD and inpatients. Only one attendant was allowed to answer the question. It was a cross-sectional study. Non probability convenience sampling technique was applied. Sample size was calculated by G Power calculator. Ethical approval was taken from institutional ethical review committee. Guideline mentioned in the Declaration of Helsinki were followed. Title and purpose of study were explained to each attendant. Total 402 people were approached but 11 refused to give consent. The demographic variables of these people were not very different from rest of the attendants.

Inclusion criteria were adult attendants giving written informed consent. Attendants with psychiatric illness, medical illness, having delusions, in delirium and who refused to give informed consent were excluded from the study. In the end 391 attendants were included after applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria and taking written informed consent. Purpose along with title of the research was explained to all the attendants. A data sheet was prepared. First portion of the sheet contained written informed consent, second portion contained demographic details of the person and in the third portion an open-ended questions was asked. What do you think about the cause of mental illness of your patient? If a person was unable to answer, then he was given a list of options which are shown in the results. Attendants were asked to tick mark their options. For illiterate attendants data collectors read out the whole data sheet and marked the responses according to the will of the attendant. After collection of data it was analyzed by SPSS v 22.

RESULTS

Of the 391 study participants, 203 (51.92%) were male and 188 (48.08%) were female. Mean age of males was

31.34±11.23 years (range 18-62 years). Mean age of females was 29.78±10.24 years (range 18-67 years). According to age participants were divided into three groups, as 18-29 years old, 30-45 years old and above 45 years old. In the first age group there were 129 (32.99%) participants, 176 (45.01%) were in second age group and 86 (22.00%) were in third age group. 213 (54.47 %) contributor were from rural while 178 (45.53%) belonged to urban background. 269 (68.80%) were married and 122 (31.20%) were single. According to educational status, there were three groups. The groups were Illiterate, up to 10 years and more than 10 years of education with number and percentage of 167 (42.71%), 131 (33.50%) and 93 (23.79%) respectively. Positive family history was present among 184 (47.06%) attendants while 207 (52.94%) didn't have family history of mental illness. Table 1

Table No.1: Demographics of attendants N=391

Variable	Number	%age	
Gender	Male	203	51.92 %
	Female	188	48.08%
Age in years	8-29	129	32.99%
	30-45	176	45.01%
	Above 45	86	22.00%
Background	Rural	213	54.47%
	Urban	178	45.53%
Marital status	Married	269	68.80%
	Never Married	122	31.20%
Years of study	Illiterate	167	42.71%
	Up to 10 years	131	33.50%
	More than 10 years	93	23.79%
Others family members having mental illness	Yes	184	47.06%
	NO	207	52.94%

Table No.2: Perceived causes of mental illness N =391

Sr. No.	Mental illness cause	Number (n)	Percentage %
1	Medical illness	174	44.50%
2	Head injury	86	21.99%
3	Drug abuse	103	26.34%
4	Drug side affects	93	23.78%
5	Curse of God	39	9.97%
6	Attention seeker	167	42.71%
7	Evil spirits	245	62.66%
8	Disturbed relationships	97	24.81%

Of the 391 attendants of mentally ill patients 245 (62.66%) responded that evil spirits are the main cause of mental illness. 174 (44.50%) thought that these were medical illnesses. 167 (42.71%) thought that their patients were attention seekers and thus changed their behavior by their own will to get attention. 86 (21.99%) thought that their patients' head injuries caused their mental illness. 103 (26.34%) participants said that drug abuse caused their mental ailment. 93 (23.78%) said that drug side effects played an important role in causing mental diseases. 39 (42.71%) believed that curse of God affected the mental capacities of their patient. 97 (24.81%) participants thought that disturbed relations caused mental illness. Table 2.

DISCUSSION

Our study results show that three main triggering factor for mental illness are, evil spirits 245 (62.65%), medical illness 174 (44.50%) and attention seekers 167 (42.71%). In our study there is dominancy of male gender 203 (51.92%), rural population 213 (54.47%), married people 269 (60.80%) and illiterate participants 167 (42.71%). The supremacy of evil spirits may be because that our study participants mostly belonged to rural dwelling 213 (54.47%). A study conducted on Nigerians journalists and nurses showed that supernatural forces, curse of God, evil spirits and witches caused mental illness contrary to our research which mentioned evil spirits 245 (62.65%), medical illness 174 (44.50%) and attention seeker 167 (42.71%) the leading causes of mental illness.² Disturbed relationship was also an important cause of mental illness among Americans and Pakistanis.³

A study conducted in Singapore showed that, male gender, old age, socioeconomic status and lower education were related with more negative behavior towards the mentally ill, which favors our results because majority of our study respondents were male gender, rural residents and illiterate.⁹ Drugs and substance abuse is the cause of mental illness according to 103 (26.34%) participants in our study as it is the same as in the study conducted in Nigeria in which it is stated that causes such as drugs, drinking alcohol and abuse of different substances that are injurious to health, stress related jobs, and trauma were also considered as main causes of mental health illness. In addition, this is a general belief among Nigerians who are used to attribute mental illness causes to psychological or social impacts.¹⁰ In our study the attendants who had history of mental illness in their families when they was asked about the cause of mental illness in their patient their attitude toward mental illness was very positive. They replied that mainly it's because of medical illness 174 (44.50%) or may be drugs side effects 93 (23.78%) but not the evil spirits as

it is the same as in the study conducted in Singapore which explains that the professionals who have a positive family history or close personal friends diagnosed with mental illness predicted remarkably less societal distance regarding who had a mental illness.¹¹

The strengths of our study are its easy method to conduct and using simple survey form to collect data. The limitations being cross-sectional nature and being hospital based. Some of the data collectors might be more enthusiastic and encouraged more responses from attendants. Bias and social pressure may have also been concurred upon attendants. In future prospective studies done in community with rigorous methodology may shed more light on this issue.

CONCLUSION

Of the 391 attendants of mentally ill patients 245 (62.66%) responded that evil spirits were the main cause of mental illness of their patients. 174 (44.50%) thought that these were medical illnesses too. 167 (42.71%) thought that their patients were attention seekers and thus changed their behavior by their own will to get attention.

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Conflict of Interest: The study has no conflict of interest to declare by any author.

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