

Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviour Towards Mental Illnesses Across Secondary School Students at Benha City

By : E. Fahmy, V. Mikhael, H. El-Sheikh, M. El-Hamady and R.Radwan

Abstract

The complexity of mental illness and its often bizarre presentation are distressing to the layperson. One way an individual or society often deals with something that is frightening and distressing is to segregate it, alienate it, and set it outside the framework of one's personal society. This process results in stigma against patients and providers, and has manifold meaning and ways of expression.

***Methods:** In a trial to investigate the knowledge, the attitude and behaviour of young youths towards "Mental Illnesses". A questionnaire was designed including a number of questions. Five secondary schools were nominated at Benha city. Several visits to the school were arranged during the period from Oct. 2001 to March 2002. Students were informed about the aim of this study. They were asked to respond to the questionnaire once before awareness session about mental illnesses and another time immediately after the awareness by our team took place and an open discussion was allowed. After one week a post test was applied and the same students were requested to respond to the same questionnaire. **Results:** The data of the 190 students who were included in the study proved some ignorance or at least poverty in the knowledge of the students about mental illnesses. It proved also some negative attitude towards the mentally ill persons. These results showed marked and significant improvement immediately after the awareness sessions and the open discussion. It had the same impact even after one week of the awareness sessions.*

***Conclusion:** Providing information about the nature of mental illnesses, about its development as well as its treatment and outcome should be available not only to secondary school students but also to the whole population in order to reduce the stigma against mental disorders Human rights of mentally ill persons should be emphasized and discussed with school students aiming to improve their attitudes towards mental illnesses and mentally ill persons.*

Introduction:

In historical examination of "stigma", it is important to consider the history of the term. It is a Greek noun coming from root that means to make a "Point" or a "Mark". It was probably most widely used to designate tattooing, whether decorative, religious or to indicate ownership such as on a slave. The ancient Greek world was puzzled by the origins and treatment of severe mental illness, as we are today. (Okasha, 1993). Media representation of people with mental illness have certainly shown little change since World War II. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, US media were still projecting a sensational image of those with mental illness (Steadman and Coccozza, 1978). Much of the time TV dramas represented the mentally ill as violent or homicidal (Gerbner et al., 1981). US media survey in 1983 found the same misconception of mental illness (Shain and Phillips 1991). Wright et al. (2000), stated that social rejection is a persistent source of social

stress for discharged mental patients, this experience increases the feeling of self depreciation that, in turn, weakens their sense of mastery. In a comparison of attitudes towards the mentally ill at sites in four European countries, people in Athens, Greece and Naples, Italy were more rejecting than those in Britain and Sweden (Brockington et al., 1993). Johnson et al. (1997), found that rural leaders believed that other community members held attitudes toward mentally ill persons that were more discriminatory than their own. In addition, rural leaders expressed that mental health was a more important concern to them than it was to the community as a whole. It is possible that the perception of stigma is related to the social class. Kamel et al. (1991) and El-Dod et al. (1998) found that parents with high social standards were more concerned with stigma. Psycho-educational programs should be intensified to reduce the social stigma and societal intolerance