

# Assessment of the Causal Beliefs of the Workers of Suez Canal University Hospital and Faculty of Medicine in Ismailia about Schizophrenia

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The causes of mental illness are linked to several factors which can be summarized into three main groups: Biological factors which arise from physiology, biochemistry, genetic make-up and physical constitution; Psychological factors including the person's upbringing, emotional experiences and interactions with people; and Social factors that are associated with the person's present life situation and socio-cultural influences. Method: Causal beliefs of workers of Suez Canal University Hospital and Faculty of Medicine-Ismailia about schizophrenia were assessed using a designed structured interview that included personal data and 34 true/false statements about possible causes for schizophrenia. Results and conclusion: Social factors and specifically stress was widely attributed to cause schizophrenia (88.4%) followed by metaphysical factors e.g. fate and religious reasons was attributed in 87% of respondents. Only 71% regarded biological factors capable of producing schizophrenia.*

### Key Words:

Schizophrenia – Beliefs – Stigma – Ismailia – Egypt

## **Introduction:**

Schizophrenia, a disease of the brain, is one of the most disabling and emotionally devastating illnesses known to man. It has a tremendous cost to the society, estimated at \$32 billion per year in USA (Society for Neuroscience, 1997). Other costs such as loss of individual potential, personal anguish, and family hardships are impossible to measure (British Columbia Schizophrenia Society, 2001). Schizophrenia is not a split personality, a rare and very different disorder. Like cancer and diabetes, schizophrenia has a biological basis, it is not caused by bad parenting or personal weakness (Chiko, 1996). Although recent advances in psychiatry have increased our understanding of psychiatric disorders, many people with chronic or severe psychiatric disorders may be unaware that effective treatment is available. It is possible that ignorance and stigma prevent such persons from seeking appropriate help, and that community attitudes and beliefs play a role in determining the help-seeking behaviour and successful treatment of the mentally ill (Hugo et al, 2003). Because it has been misunderstood for a long time, it has received relatively little attention and its victims have been

undeservingly stigmatized. People's causal beliefs of illness directly affect care-seeking behavior and are also related to their level of expressed emotions towards the patients (Harrison et al, 1998; Weisman et al, 1998). In some non western cultures, supernatural phenomena, such as witchcraft and possession by evil spirits are seen as important causes of mental disorders (Razali et al, 1996) although this is uncommon in the west (Angermeyer et al, 1995; Brandli, 1999). Diverse traditional beliefs about the nature and cause of mental illness may lead people with symptoms of schizophrenia and their families to seek care from a broad array of practitioners and the use of indigenous healing practices in conjunction with medical treatment is widespread (Anouchka et al, 2002). For example, Zar is an ancient healing practice based on folk belief in possession by alien spirits as a cause of disease in many of the Eastern developing countries (Okasha, 1999) while cephalic cautery is used in some Saudi regions (Quresh et al, 1998). In Malaysia, belief in supernatural causes was associated with greater use of traditional healers and poorer compliance with medication (Razali et al, 1996).