

Attitude Toward and Knowledge About Mental Illness in Port-Said City, Egypt

Somaya Abou-Abdou¹, Magdallah Habib², Enas El-Shiekh³ and Sonya El-Sayed⁴

¹Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing Dept, Faculty of Nursing, Suez Canal University, Ismailia, Egypt, ²Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing Dept, Faculty of Nursing, Alexandria University, Alexandria, Egypt, ³Faculty of Nursing, Suez Canal University, Ismailia, Egypt and ⁴Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing Dept, Faculty of Nursing, Suez Canal University, Port-Said, Egypt.

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Background: Mental health problem occurs when something interferes or challenges the mental health. There are little researches to substantiate how mental illness is perceived in the Arab World in the light of recent modernization and accumulation processes.

Objectives: It was then the intent of the present study to assess the knowledge and attitude about mental illness in Port-Said city in an attempt to increase awareness about mental disorder, and to improve negative attitude and allow patient make use of the new modalities of treatment that add new hope for them.

Subjects & Methods: Two hundred-forty persons were selected from six local district office and health centers as a study sample. The data were collected over a period of three months by using two tools: A structured interview questionnaire sheet and attitude scale.

Results: Results prove that the study sample have insufficient knowledge about mental illness. Yet it revealed their positive attitude toward the mentally-ill people.

Conclusion: Mental illness is one of the major afflictions of mankind that has had little support. Although the people in Port-Said city have insufficient knowledge and/or wrong information about mental illness, yet they have positive attitudes and perceptions regarding mental disorders. Health educational programs for public in Port-Said city have the potential to eliminate prejudice, which continues to worsen the plight of the mentally ill. Health team especially nurses can play an important role in dispelling myths and misconception about mental illness.

Keywords: Illness, Stigma, Misconception, Knowledge, Attitude.

Abbreviations:

WHO: World Health Organization
T.V: Television

E.C.T: Electro-Convulsive Therapy

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INTRODUCTION

Mental illness is complex phenomena resulting in difficulties in thinking, feeling, behaving, and relating to others. It is thought that multiple factors, including biological, genetic, and environmental, contribute to their development. Presently, however, there is no consensus on the definition and the phrasing used to describe mental illness depends on the social, cultural, economic and legal context in different societies [World Health Organization] WHO, (2005). As well, there is no agreement about which conditions e.g., mental illness, mental retardation, personality disorder, substance dependence should be included (WHO, 2005).

From a historical perspective, society attitudes toward mental illness have not been positive. In the middle ages, the mentally ill were burned at the stake, and during the age of enlightenment, they were kept in prisons and chains. As well in past years, mental illness was viewed as demoniac possession, the result of neglecting a cultural ritual and spiritual condemnation (Johnson, 1996), even in these days

of organ transplants, interplanetary exploration and laser surgery. The mentally-ill may be stigmatized and treated as if they had earned and deserved their disease, there is sometimes fear and shame attached to having a diagnosis of a mental illness (Bailey and Bailey, 1997).

Discrimination and prejudice against those with mental illness results in marginalization. Consequently, they are less likely to have access to employment, education, good housing, or representation in the justice system. The inability to integrate properly into society because of these limitations can increase the isolation experienced by an individual, which can, in turn, aggravate the mental disorder. Mental illness can lower a person's self-esteem, lessen their happiness, and contribute to disrupted family. The destructive interaction between the person and society deprives the community of resources that could be contributed by the person, and deprives the mentally ill person of the support and sense of belonging needed for healthy