

## Attitudes of Medical Students in Saudi Arabia Towards Mental Illness and Their Beliefs Regarding Its Causes and Treatability

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### Abstract

**Objectives:** The stigmatization of people with mental illness is a worldwide problem. The authors aimed to assess stigmatizing attitudes among medical students at a university in Saudi Arabia towards mental illness and to evaluate the association of psychiatric education and planned medical specialty with stigmatizing attitudes and beliefs concerning the treatability and etiology of mental illness.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional survey of currently enrolled medical students at a Saudi Arabian medical college was conducted through convenience sampling using a 52-item questionnaire. Factor analysis identified four unique factors representing attitudes and beliefs towards mental illness. ANOVA and Chi-square tests were used to evaluate the differences in attitudes among students at different levels and other variables associated with these factors.

**Results:** Altogether 245 students (46.7%) responded to the survey. Completion of a classroom psychiatry course, but not a clinical clerkship, was associated with stronger belief in the effectiveness of treatment of both medical and mental illnesses ( $p= 0.031$ ) as well as greater acceptance of the biopsychosocial model of the etiology of mental illness ( $p= 0.001$ ). Students interested in pursuing a surgical career had weaker beliefs in the effectiveness of treatment of mental illnesses as compared to students interested in other minor specialties ( $p= 0.002$ ).

**Conclusion:** While attitudes towards socializing with people with mental illness did not differ significantly with different levels of psychiatric education, beliefs about treatability and biopsychosocial etiology seem to be strengthened after a

**Keywords:** Stigmatization; Attitudes; Mental illness; Medical students; Mental health

### Biography:

Osama Zitoun has recently completed his MBBS degree from Sulaiman Al Rajhi University. He is interested in medical research and has few publications in the field.

### Speaker Publications:

1. "Bullying victimization among Lebanese adolescents: The Role of Child Abuse, Internet Addiction, Social Phobia, and Depression and Validation of the Illinois Bully Scale", EUR J PHARMACOL/ 2020, Vol 883.

3rd Annual Congress on Psychiatry, Mental Health Nursing and Healthcare; Webinar- October 19-20, 2020.

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classroom psychiatry course but not further reinforced after the clinical clerkship.