PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE OF STUDENT NURSES TOWARDS THE CARE OF MENTALLY ILL PATIENTS AT SCHOOL OF PSYCHIATRIC NURSING, USELU, EDO STATE, NIGERIA

KANIKWU PHOEBE NWAMAKA, ORIGBO FAITH OGHENETEGA

ABSTRACT

Perception towards caring for the mentally ill is a vital element affecting both the well-being of mentally ill patients and the moral compass of the society. Positive attitude towards caring for the mentally ill promotes social inclusion whereas negative attitude disempowers the patient and leads to social exclusion. Thus, this study aimed to assess the perception and attitude of student Nurses towards the care of mentally ill patients, as well as factors influencing the student nurses' attitude. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 110 student nurses at School of Psychiatric Nursing, Uselu, Edo state, Nigeria. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researchers. The reliability of the instrument was conducted using Cronbach alpha which yielded a coefficient of 0.94. Data collected were analysed using frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that student nurses had negative perception (mean = 2.99 ± 0.85) but positive attitude (mean = 3.18 ± 0.86) towards the care of mentally ill patients. Also, findings showed the factors influencing the students' attitude towards the care of mentally ill patients to include interest in taking care of patients with mental illness (87.7%), training and specialized skills required to take care of patients with mental illness (80.2%), and lack of social support (90.8%). It was recommended that consistent and frequent education programmes aimed at addressing the gaps in contemporary Nursing care for patients with mental illness should be implemented.

Keywords: Perception: Attitude: Student Nurses: Mental Illness: Patients

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (2022) estimates that there are approximately 970 million individuals worldwide who suffer from mental illness. According to Gul and Malik (2015), a mentally ill person is someone who experiences mild to severe disturbances in their thoughts or behaviors, leading to an inability to cope with the demands and routines of daily life. There are more than two hundred recognized forms of mental illness, including commonly known conditions such as depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and anxiety disorders. These conditions can be attributed to various factors, including environmental stresses, genetic factors, biochemical imbalances, or a combination thereof (Poreddi, Thimmaiah, Pashupu & Badamath, 2014). Symptoms commonly observed in individuals with mental illness include changes in mood, personality, personal habits, and social withdrawal, as identified by Pusey-Murray (2017). Providing appropriate care and treatment for individuals with mental illness is crucial for their ability to cope and recover from these conditions (Jombo, Idung & Iyanam, 2019). Unfortunately, unfavorable attitudes towards individuals with mental illness have been demonstrated among both medical and nursing students, as noted by El-Etreby, Ibrahim & Shahda (2017) and Svensson, Brunt, Bejerholm, Eklund, Gyllensten, Leufstadius, & Hansson (2014). These negative attitudes can contribute to mismanagement of patients with mental illness, lack of attention from healthcare professionals, poor interaction with mental health care providers, and a lack of support and acceptance for patients (Babicki et al., 2021).

According to Pusey-Murray (2017), nurses play a crucial role in the care of individuals with mental illness, both during episodes of illness and during the rehabilitation process. Patients and their families expect healthcare professionals, including nurses, to be aware of their specific needs and to provide care without prejudice or discrimination. The perception and attitude of healthcare professionals toward mental illness have been widely debated as essential factors influencing the quality and outcomes of care for individuals with mental illness (Ghai, Sharma, Sharma, & Kaur, 2013). In contrast to physical disabilities, mental illness often carries negative societal views, myths, and stereotypes (Corrigan, 2014). People commonly hold harsh and negative beliefs about individuals with mental illness, perceiving them as dangerous, unpredictable, and prone to violence (Bekhet, Murrock, Mu & Singh-Gill, 2017). Previous literature has highlighted uninformed, negative, fearful, and stigmatizing attitudes towards the mentally ill (Pescosolido, 2013). These stigmatizing attitudes have led healthcare professionals to avoid and distance themselves from individuals with mental illness, as noted by Parcesepe and Cabassa (2013).

Furthermore, the generalization of negative beliefs and attitudes toward the mentally ill is not different among Nursing students (Corrigan, 2014; Poreddi, et al., 2014). In a similar study which assessed student Nurses perceptions and attitudes toward mental illness and mental health nursing, the findings indicated that most of the students felt uncertain about how to interact with the mentally ill and around one-third of the students mentioned that people with mental illness were difficult to work with (Hunter, Weber, Shattell & Harris, 2014). By implication, nursing students' beliefs and views can become a barrier in the interaction and care of patients with mental illness in psychiatric setting(s) (Hasan, 2020). Some nursing students also exhibit anxiety, discomfort, and fear while working with patients who have been diagnosed with mental illness (Corrigan, 2014). Moreso, the negative belief that nursing students may hold regarding mental illness might lead nursing students to avoid mental health/psychiatric nursing as a career choice for professional practice (Tambag, 2018).

Given the prevalence of mental illness in our current society, the need for mental healthcare has increased (Poreddi, Thimmaiah & Math, 2015). In fact, nurses will encounter patients with mental illness in a variety of health care settings. Therefore, educating every nursing student on mental illness, care and mental health nursing it is vital. Meeting the nursing students learning needs should ideally begin with understanding their perceptions regarding mental illness, care and mental health nursing. It is against this background that this study sought to assess the perception and attitude of student Nurses towards the care of mentally ill patients at School of Psychiatric Nursing, Uselu.

Research Questions

i)   What is the perception of student nurses towards the care of mentally ill patient?

ii) What is the attitude of student nurses towards the care of mentally ill patient?

iii) What are the factors influencing the student nurses' attitude towards the care of mentally ill patient?

METHODOLOGY

Design: A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study.

Target Population: The target population for the study consisted of all post basic student nurses in the School of Psychiatric Nursing, Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Uselu, Benin city.

Sampling Technique: Simple random sampling technique was used to select 110 student nurses at School of Psychiatric Nursing, Uselu.

Instrument: Questionnaire on Perception and Attitude of Student Nurses towards the Care of Mentally Ill Patients (QPASNCMIP). The questionnaire had a total of 24 items in four (4) sessions. The reliability of the instrument was

established through test-retest method using Cronbach's Alpha which yielded a coefficient of 0.94.

Data Collection: Data collection was done in the month of June, 2022 through the administration of copies of a Questionnaire. The respondents were first briefed on the aim of the study and were required to give verbal consent to participate in the study.

Data Analysis: Data collected from QPASNCMIP were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation. The research questions were answered using mean. Mean score of 3 and above indicated positive perception and attitude, while a mean score below 3 indicated negative perception and attitude. The data analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. All the results were presented in tables.

Ethical Approval: Ethical approval was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee at Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Uselu (PH/A.864/VOL.XXI/91).

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that majority of the nursing students were between ages 26 and 30 years. Mean age of the respondents was 27.14±3.68 with a range of 21 – 35 years. Most of the respondents 86 (78.5%) were females and 100 (9.50%) practiced Christianity.

Table 1: Socio-Demographics Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Age distribution	21 – 25 years	41	37.3	Mean age
	26 – 30 years	47	42.5	=27.14+3.68years
	31 – 35 years	22	20.2	Range=21-35
Gender	Male	24	21.5	years
	Female	86	78.5	
Religion	Christianity	100	90.5	
	Islam	7	6.4	
	Trad. Afr. Religion	3	3.1	

Table 2 shows that mentally ill patients do not deserve to be cared for because they are the reason for their own problem with mean = 3.59 and that mental illness is as a result of disturbances in biochemical substances in the brain with mean = 3.29. The overall average mean score of 2.99 indicated that nursing students had negative perception towards the care of mentally ill.

Table 2: Perception of Student Nurses Towards the Care of Mentally Ill Patient n=110

Variables	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
Mental illness is contagious	(13.2%)	(10%)	(3.2%)	(23.2%)	(20%)	2.57	0.99
Mental illness cannot be cured	(15%)	(5%)	(21%)	(40%)	(19%)	2.81	0.81
Mental illness is as a result of evil spirits, bewitchments and punishment for wrong doing	(3.6%)	(10%)	(10%)	(26.2%)	(50.2%)	2.91	0.80
Mentally ill patients do not deserve to be cared for because they are the reason for their own problem	(5.2%)	(6.5%)	(10%)	(20%)	(58.3%)	3.59*	1.06
Mental illness is as a result of disturbances in biochemical substances in the brain	(39%)	(30%)	(6%)	(15%)	(10%)	3.29*	0.71
Mentally ill patients are violent and aggressive	(40.5%)	(20.4%)	(10%)	(10%)	(19.1%)	2.93	0.87
The care of mentally ill patients should include drug therapy	(37.6%)	(30%)	(5%)	(15%)	(12.4%)	2.88	0.65
Mentally ill patients should be cared for in a traditional way	(24%)	(10.4%)	(31.2%)	(14.4)	(20%)	2.94	0.91
Average Perception						**2.99**	**0.85**

Mean = Positive at 3.0 & above

Research Question 2: What is the attitude of nursing students towards the care of mentally ill patient?

Table 3 shows that with mean score = 3.25 mentally ill patients should be beaten if they portray unacceptable behaviour; with mean score = 3.38 parole should be given to mentally ill patients; with mean score = 3.20appropriate care should be rendered to patient with mental illness even if they are dangerous; with mean score = 3.51 mentally ill patients should be allowed to engage in recreational therapy and; with mean score = 3.30 mentally ill patients should be allowed to engage in recreational therapy. The overall average mean score of 3.18 indicated that nursing students had positive attitude towards the care of mentally ill patients.

Table 3: The Attitude of Nursing Students Towards the Care Of Mentally Ill Patient

Variables	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
People with mental illness have unpredictable behaviour; hence, it is difficult to care for them.	(52.5%)	(30.4%)	(2%)	(5.1%)	(10%)	2.99	0.70
Mentally ill patients should be beaten if they portray unacceptable behaviour.	(5.1%)	(2.5%)	(20%)	(20%)	(52.4%)	3.25*	0.83
Restrain people with mental illness because they are violent.	(10%)	(30.9%)	(30%)	(9.1%)	(10%)	2.65	0.74
Parole should be given to mentally ill patients	(41.0%)	(20%)	(10%)	(9%)	(20%)	3.38*	1.08
Render appropriate care to patient with mental illness even if they are dangerous	(50%)	(30%)	(5.2%)	(4.8%)	(10%)	3.20*	0.78
Mentally ill patients should be given occupational therapy	(20%)	(20%)	(47%)	(10%)	(3%)	3.51*	0.92
Mentally ill patients should be allowed to engage in recreational therapy.	(68%)	(20.1%)	(1.9%)	(7%)	(3%)	3.30*	0.97
Average						3.18*	0.86

Mean = Positive at 3.0 & above

Research Question 3: What are the factors influencing the students' attitude towards the care of mentally ill patients at School of Psychiatric Nursing Uselu?

Table 4 presents the findings on the factors influencing the students' attitude towards the care of mentally ill patient. Findings showed the factors to include interest in taking care of patients with mental illness (87.7%), training and specialized skills required to take care of patients with mental illness (80.2%), unfavourable health care policy towards care of patients with mental illness (76.8%), mental status of patients with mental illness affects their care and decision making (77.8%), difficulty to persuade and convince patients with mental illness about their care (69.4%), and lack of social support (90.8%).

Table 4: Factors influencing the students' attitude towards the care of mentally ill patient
n=110

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Interest in taking care of patients with mental illness	96	87.7
Training and specialized skills required to take care of patients with mental illness	88	80.2
Unfavourable health care policy towards care of patients with mental illness	84	76.8
Mental status of patients with mental illness affects their care and decision making	86	77.8
Difficulty to persuade and convince patients with mental illness about their care	76	69.4
Lack of social support	100	90.8

DISCUSSION

This study assesses the perception and attitude of student Nurses towards the care of mentally ill patients. The demographic characteristics shows that majority of the nursing students were between ages 26 and 30 years. Mean age of the respondents was 27.14±3.68 with a range of 21 – 35 years. Most of the respondents 86 (78.5%) were females and 100 (9.50%) practiced Christianity.

Perception of Nursing Students towards the Care of Mentally Ill Patient

Our study revealed that nursing students had negative perception towards the care of mentally ill patients. This finding contrasts with the results of Gul & Malik (2015), who reported that nurses generally held positive perceptions towards mental illness and its treatment, emphasizing love, care, and understanding. Similarly, our study does not align with the findings of Sailahari et al. (2022), who found that a majority of students had favorable perceptions towards psychiatry care in a tertiary hospital.

Attitude of Nursing Students towards the Care of Mentally Ill Patients

The findings of this study indicate that nursing students hold a positive attitude towards the care of mentally ill patients. The authors suggest that this positive attitude may be attributed to the fact that the respondents are undergoing professional/post-basic training in mental health/psychiatric nursing. While no comparable study was available for direct comparison, these findings are consistent with Poreddi, Thimmaiah, and Badamath (2017) who found that nursing students in India exhibited positive attitudes in certain domains related to mental illness care. However, this study differs from the findings of Jombo, Idung, and Iyanam (2019) who reported stigmatizing attitudes towards the care of mentally ill patients in a specific community in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Additionally, this study aligns with the findings of Poreddi,

Thimmaiah, and Badamath (2017) that revealed positive attitudes in a higher percentage of nursing students compared to medical students, albeit with variations in specific attitude domains.

Factors influencing the students' attitude towards the care of mentally ill Patient.

This study identified several factors influencing students' attitude towards the care of mentally ill patients, including interest in mental health care, specialized skills training, healthcare policies, impact of patients' mental status on care, difficulties in persuasion, and lack of social support. Joubert and Bhagwan (2018) found that psychiatric nurses, despite feeling adequately trained, still supported the need for further training. Aoki et al. (2022) revealed that shared decision-making interventions had some positive effects on the clinical condition of individuals with mental health conditions, suggesting the need for further research to assess its overall impact on mental health. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct consistent and comprehensive education programs to address the identified gaps in nursing care for mentally ill patients.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Nursing students demonstrated a negative perception but a positive attitude towards the care of mentally ill patients. To address the gaps in contemporary nursing care for patients with mental illness, it is recommended to implement consistent and frequent education programs.

REFERENCES

Aoki, Y., Yaju, Y., Utsumi, T., Sanyaolu, L., Storm, M., Takaesu, Y., Watanabe, K., Watanabe, N., Duncan, E. & Edwards, A. (2022). Shared decision making interventions for people with mental health conditions.

Cohrane Database of Systemic Reviews, 2022(11). DOI:10.1002/14651858.CD007297.pub3

Babicki, M., Szewczykowska, I., Mastalerz-Migas, A. (2021). The mental well-being of health care workers during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic- A nationwide study in Poland. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(11): 6101-6112. DOI: 10.3390/ijerph18116101

Bekhet, A., Murrock, C., Mu, Q. & Singh-Gill, H. (2017). Nursing Students' Perception of the Stigma of Mental Illness. SM Journal of Nursing. 2017; 3(2): 1013.

Corrigan, P. (2014). How stigma interferes with mental health care. American psychologist, 59(1), 614-625. DOI: 10.1037/0003-066X.59.7.614

El-Etreby, R., Ibrahim, A. & Shahda, M. (2017). Stigma in nursing students towards patients with mental illness. *IOSR Journal of Nursing and Health Science, 6(2)*: 94-100. DOI: 10.9790/1959-0602079410

Ghai, S., Sharma, N., Sharma, S., & Kaur, H. (2013). Shame and stigma of mental illness. Delhi Psychiatry Journal, 16(2), 293-301. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336459117_shame_stigma_of_mental_illness

Gul, A. & Malik, S. (2015). Perception of Nurses towards mental illness. Pakistan *Postgraduate Medical Journal*, 20(1); 26-29.

Hunter, L., Weber,T., Shattell, M. & Harris, B. (2014). Nursing students' attitudes about psychiatric mental health nursing. Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 36(1): 29-34. DOI: 10.3109/01612840.2014.935901

Jombo, E., Idung, A. & Iyanam, V. (2019). Knowledge, Attitudes and Perceptions about Mental Illness in Ekom Iman Community in Akwa Ibom State, South-South Nigeria. Asian Journal of Medicine and Health, 17(3); 1-9. DOI:10.9734/ajmah/2019/v17i330164

Joubert P & Bhagwan R. (2018). An empirical study of the challenging roles of psychiatric nurses at in-patient psychiatric facilities and its implications for nursing education. International Journal of Africa Nursing Sciences, 9(9), 49-56. DOI:10.1016/j.ijans.2018.08.001

Parcesepe, A. & Cabassa, L. (2013). Public stigma of mental illness in the United States: A systematic literature review. Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 40(5):384-399. DOI: 10.1007/s10488-012-0430-z

Pescosolido, B. (2013). The public stigma of mental illness: What do we think; what do we know; what can we prove? *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 54(1):1-21.* DOI: 10.1177/0022146512471197

Poreddi, V., Thimmaiah, R. & Badamath, S. (2017). Medical and nursing students' attitudes toward mental illness: An Indian Perspective. *Invest Educ Enferm*, 35(1); 86-94. DOI: 10.17533/udea.iee.v35n1a10

Poreddi, V., Thimmaiah, R., & Math, S. (2015). Attitudes toward people with mental illness among medical students. Journal of Neurosciences in Rural Practice, 6(3), 349–354. doi.org/10.4103/0976-3147.154564

Poreddi, V., Thimmaiah, R., Pashupu, D. & Badamath, S. (2014). Undergraduate Nursing students' attitudes towards mental illness: Implications for

specific academic education. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 36(4); 368-372. DOI: 10.4103/0253-7176.140701.

Pusey-Murray, A. (2017). Attitudes of nursing students towards individuals with mental illness before doing the mental health nursing course. *Open Access Library Journal*, 4:e3857. DOI: 10.4236/oalib.1103857

Sailahari, K., Abhinaya, R. & Ramireddy, K. (2022). Study on perception towards psychiatry among nursing students in a tertiary care hospital. *Archives of Mental Health,* 23(1); 35-39. DOI: 10.4103/amh.amh_114_21

Svensson, B., Brunt, D., Bejerholm, U., ... Hansson, L. (2014). Health care students attitudes towards people with schizophrenia- A survey of eight university training programs. Open Journal of Psychiatry, 4(4): 309-316. DOI: 10.4236/ojpsych.2014.44038

Tambag, H. (2018). Effects of a psychiatric nursing course on beliefs and attitudes about mental illness. International Journal of Caring Sciences, 11(1):420-426.

World Health Organisation. (2022). "Mental disorder". 2022. [online] Available at: http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders [assessed on 10 November 2022].

LADOKE AKINTOLA UNIVERSITY OF
TECHNOLOGY OGBOMOSO

EXCELLENCE INTEGRITY SERVICE