



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**Psychiatry**

**A COMPARISON OF CURRENT ATTITUDE TOWARDS PSYCHIATRY AMONG FIRST YEAR AND FINAL YEAR MBBS STUDENTS IN A MEDICAL COLLEGE OF EASTERN PART OF INDIA**

**KEY WORDS:** attitude; undergraduate students; mental illness; MBBS psychiatry curriculum.

**Dr. Harjot Kaur Pabla**

Post Graduate Resident, Department of Psychiatry, IMS and SUM Hospital, Siksha 'O' Anusandhan University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha-751003.

**Dr. Rakesh Mohanty\***

Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry, IMS and SUM Hospital, Siksha 'O' Anusandhan University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha-751003. \*Corresponding Author

**Dr. Surjeet Sahoo**

Professor and Head of the Department, Department of Psychiatry, IMS and SUM Hospital, Siksha 'O' Anusandhan University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, 751003

**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Psychiatry in recent years has seen a lot of progress especially in the areas of neurobiology, neuroimaging and social sciences. To ensure proper care of psychiatric patients, young, passionate and open-minded doctors are definitely the need of the hour. Psychiatry has been included as a subject in final year MBBS students' curriculum.

**Aims:** To compare the attitude of the first and final year undergraduate MBBS students towards psychiatry.

**Methods:** This is a cross-sectional analytical study conducted with the undergraduate students of first year and final year MBBS. The pro forma enlisting the details of the demographic data and Attitude Towards Psychiatry scale (ATP-30) was given out to each participant after taking informed consent. The qualitative data were depicted in terms of percentages and the quantitative data were expressed in terms of Mean + SD. The statistics were done using IBM SPSS 20V.

**Results:** The mean ATP-30 score was found to be higher for final year MBBS students (114.48+10.084) than first year students (83.93+11.083) although it was statistically insignificant (p=.117). Two items from the ATP questionnaire, "Psychiatric patients are often more interesting to work with than other patients" and "It is quite easy for me to accept the efficacy of psychotherapy" had a higher mean score for final year students than the first year students that was significant statistically.

**Conclusion:** Our study suggests the requirement to revise the current curriculum of Psychiatry training imparted to the undergraduate students. Strategies like attitudinal interventions and de-stigmatization must be more focused.

**INTRODUCTION**

Psychiatry in recent years has seen a lot of progress especially in the areas of neurobiology, neuroimaging and social sciences. All of this has enhanced our understanding of various disorders like schizophrenia, mood and anxiety disorders and has further helped to provide treatment that is also cost effective. But in India, as in many other developing countries, the stigma related to psychiatric illnesses has always seen the preference of help from traditional faith healers which is more acceptable by the society as a whole. Such practices are often ineffective and dangerous and bringing the patient to a mental health expert is often the last resort.<sup>1</sup> Mental health is often disregarded as a subject in the medical field and public health at many areas of the world.<sup>2</sup> Psychiatry is becoming progressively important as a medical discipline because of the growing burden of mental disorders worldwide.<sup>3</sup>

To ensure proper care of psychiatric patients, young, passionate and open-minded doctors are definitely the need of the hour. Studies have revealed that even though attitude towards psychiatry among medical students is mostly positive, Psychiatry as a future career choice is insignificant.<sup>4</sup> Other studies have concluded that psychiatrists are regarded to earn less money, are respected less and have a poor prestige in comparison to other specialists in the medical field.<sup>4</sup> The majority portion of attitude building towards subjects happens in the medical training itself.<sup>5</sup> The major reasons behind the negative attitude are the stigma and lack of precise information about mental illness which ultimately have harmful effects on the well being of the patient.<sup>6</sup>

Psychiatry has been added in the final year curriculum. The final year students are posted in Psychiatry for a period of 15 days as a part of the guidelines given by the Medical Council of India. On the other hand, the first year MBBS students do not have any exposure to Psychiatry as no such provision is there

in their curriculum. With all this in mind, we tried to look into the attitude towards psychiatry among the first and final year MBBS students at a tertiary medical college in Eastern India.

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

This study was conducted to compare the attitude of the first and final year undergraduate MBBS students towards Psychiatry.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

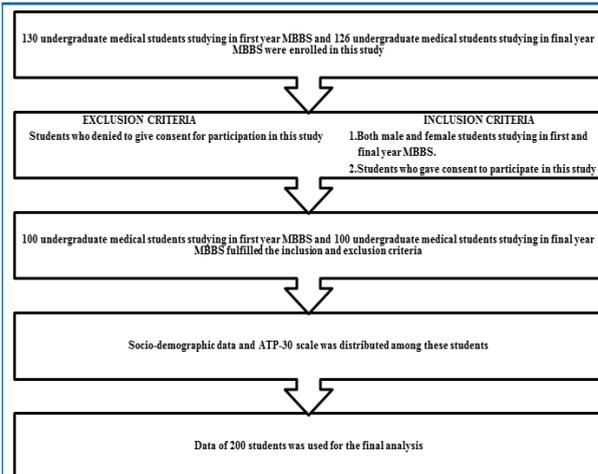
**Study Design And Methods**

This is a cross-sectional analytical study that was conducted with the undergraduate students of first year and final year MBBS in a tertiary care hospital during the academic year of 2019-2020. All the students were explained in detail about the purpose of this study and a written informed consent was taken from all the participants. 130 undergraduate medical students studying in first year MBBS and 126 undergraduate medical students studying in final year MBBS were enrolled in this study. Out of these, 26 students from first year MBBS did not give consent for the study and 4 students submitted incomplete ATP-30 scale.

Among the 126 students of final year MBBS, 18 students refused to give consent while 8 students submitted incomplete ATP-30 scale. Therefore, the total number of students that participated in this study was 200. A flowchart elaborating the methods of this study is shown in figure 1.

The pro forma enlisted the details of the demographic data. Along with that, the ATP-30 scale which is a self assessment questionnaire was given out to be filled by each of the participant in this study.

- Sample size collection was done using the EPI Info Software.



**Figure 1 Showing The Flowchart Of Methods Used In This Study.**

**TOOLS**

**1. SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

This was specially prepared for noting down the social, demographic & clinical variables of the students including age, sex, marital status, place of origin, any doctor in the family, any family history of psychiatric illness, any psychiatric illness in known friend or relative and completion of Psychiatry clinical rotation for 15 days.

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of first year MBBS students (N=100) and final year MBBS students (N=100) and comparison of mean ATP-30 score with the different socio-demographic variables**

S. No.	Variables	First year MBBS students (N=100)	Final year MBBS students (N=100)	χ <sup>2</sup>	p	Total ATP-30 Score Mean±SD (N=100)	t	df	p	
1.	Gender	Male	44 (44%)	50 (50%)	.723	.479	100.51±18.47	.672	198	.672
		Female	56 (56%)	50 (50%)			98.05±18.73			
2.	Domicile	Urban	54 (54%)	58 (58%)	0.325	.669	100.19±19.50	0.325	198	.077
		Rural	46 (46%)	42 (42%)			97.95±17.42			
3.	Marital status	Married	0 (0%)	3(3%)	3.046	.246	119.67±8.96	1.932	198	.068
		Single	100 (100%)	97 (97%)			98.89±18.55			
4.	Family type	Nuclear	37 (37%)	38 (38%)	0.021	1.000	99.05±17.98	0.021	198	.301
		Joint	63 (63%)	62 (62%)			99.30±19.04			
5.	Family history of psychiatric illness	Present	5 (5%)	98 (98%)	1.332	.445	94.86±22.90	.628	198	.529
		Absent	95 (95%)	2 (2%)			99.36±18.48			
6.	History of psychiatric illness in friends or relatives	Present	4 (4%)	3 (3%)	.418	1.000	99.86±17.15	.094	198	.443
		Absent	96 (96%)	97(97%)			99.18±18.69			
7.	Any doctor in the family	Present	32(32%)	37(37%)	.553	.552	99.88±19.60	.374	198	.216
		Absent	68(68%)	63(63%)			98.85±18.12			

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of first and final year MBBS students. Seven variables were assessed namely gender, age, domicile, marital status, family type, family history of psychiatric illness, history of psychiatric illness in friends or relatives and any doctor in the family. All the variables were comparable and did not show any statistical difference between the two study groups. Also, it was observed that the mean ATP-30 score was higher among males (100.51±18.472) in comparison to females (98.05±18.735) although it was not statistically significant (p=.672). It was also seen that mean scores were higher for urban domicile (100.19±19.508); married individuals (119.67±8.963) with absence of family history of psychiatric illness (99.36±18.485) and those who had a doctor in their family (99.88±19.606) but none of these had a statistically significant result.

**2. ATP-30 SCALE**

This 30 item questionnaire was introduced by Burra and colleagues for the sole purpose of evaluating the attitude towards varying aspects of Psychiatry using a 5 point Likert scale. This scale is multidimensional and involves various measures like attitude towards the psychiatric patients, psychotherapy, mental illness, psychiatric hospitals as well as towards psychiatrists. It consists a total of 30 items out of which 15 have a direction of positive attitude towards psychiatry while the other 15 have a negative attitude towards psychiatry. The maximum score is 150 and the minimum is 30, the higher range meaning a favorable attitude towards psychiatry. The scale has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.831, making it a reliable and popular scale that has been widely used in various Indian as well as worldwide studies. Positive domain items were reversed by subtracting their respective scores from 6. The total score was then calculated by adding all the 30 item scores.

**Data Analysis**

The qualitative data were depicted in terms of percentages and the quantitative data were expressed in terms of Mean ± SD. The statistics were done using IBM SPSS 20V. The participants' proportion was compared using χ<sup>2</sup> while ATP-30scale scores were compared using the Independent samples T test. To be statistically significant, a p value of <0.05 was considered.

**RESULTS**

**Table 2: Comparison Of Mean ATP-30 Score In First And Final MBBS Year Students**

S.No.	Group of MBBS Students	ATP-30 score Mean±SD (N=100)	df	t	p
1.	First year	83.93±11.083	198	20.38	.117
2.	Final year	114.48±10.084			

Table 2 shows that the mean ATP-30 score was found to be higher for final year MBBS students(114.48±10.084) than first year students (83.93±11.083) although the result was not found to be statistically significant (p=.117).

Table 3 compared 5 items from the ATP-30 scale and it was found that the item questionnaire "Psychiatric patients are often more interesting to work with than other patients" had a

higher mean score (4.23±.750) for final year students than the first year students (3.67±1.155) that was clearly significant statistically (p=.000). Also, another item from the scale, "It is quite easy for me to accept the efficacy of psychotherapy" had a mean score (3.87±.971) higher for final year students than the first year batch (2.23±.886) with a significant p value of 0.014.

**Table 3: Comparison Of 5 Items Of ATP-30 Scale In The First And Final Year MBBS Students**

S. No.	Variable	Group of MBBS Students	Mean±SD (N=100)	t	df	p
1.	"Psychiatric patients are often more interesting to work with than other patients"	First Year	3.67±1.15	4.06	198	.000**
		Final Year	4.23±.75			
2.	"Psychiatrists tend to be at least as stable as the average doctors"	First Year	2.69±.72	10.97	198	.111
		Final Year	3.90±.83			
3.	"The practice of Psychiatry allows the development of really rewarding relationships with people"	First Year	3.80±.87	6.52	198	1.459
		Final Year	4.55±.74			
4.	"It is quite easy for me to accept the efficacy of psychotherapy"	First Year	2.23±.88	12.47	198	.014*
		Final Year	3.87±.97			
5.	"Psychiatric hospitals are little more than prisons"	First Year	2.56±1.14	7.78	198	.572
		Final Year	3.82±1.14			

\*p value=<0.05, \*\*p value =< 0.01

**DISCUSSION**

In our study, while analyzing the socio demographic data we found that both the groups were comparable in accordance with gender, domicile, marital status, family type, family history of psychiatric illness, history of any psychiatric illness in friends or relatives and any doctor in the family. On searching, studies conducted by Hasanthi, T. et al.<sup>7</sup> and Hemanthkumar et al.<sup>11</sup> stated that attitude towards psychiatry was found to be better in groups who had attended 2 weeks clinical rotation in Psychiatry. Similar results were found in our workup but the findings were not statistically significant. Another study done by Khan et al.<sup>5</sup> concluded that the attitude of female students towards Psychiatry was more positive in comparison to the male students. Studies of Reddy et al.<sup>1</sup> and Samari et al.<sup>9</sup> revealed similar findings. But in our study, there was no statistical difference of attitude towards psychiatry in either of the two genders although male students had a slightly higher score than their female counterparts. Moreover, there was no statistical difference in different socio-demographic variables like domicile, marital status, family type, family history of psychiatric illness, history of psychiatric illness in friends or relatives and any doctor in the family.

Various studies did see a loophole in some of the questions similar to our study. Study of Chawla et al.<sup>6</sup> showed that the undergraduate medical students had multiple gaps in their knowledge toward psychiatric disorders, psychiatric patients and psychiatric management. Hasanthi et al.<sup>7</sup> also confirmed that statistical improvement did fall behind in various questions dealing with psychiatrists and the institution. Numerous studies similar to works of Ndeti et al.<sup>4</sup> relate to

poor attitude towards psychiatry as a potential career choice since there is no insurance coverage for psychiatric patients and therefore, corporate hospitals do not entertain them unlike other medical illnesses. This further uplifts the belief of lesser income in this branch. This study received an overall improved attitude towards psychiatry in final year medical students in comparison to the first year students. From our result it would appear that overall, a 15 days rotation in Psychiatry in our hospital had less impact on final year students' attitudes towards psychiatry. This is similar to the study findings of Rajagopalan et al.<sup>9</sup> which also found that the attitudes of young physicians toward psychiatry following a postgraduate Psychiatry course were only minimally affected. This finding differs from the study done by Burra P et al.<sup>10</sup> where significant improvement in attitudes among medical students were found to be linked with specific patient orientated training followed in Psychiatry. The lesser improvement in attitude towards psychiatry could be because of a lot of reasons. Firstly, it could be that 15 days is too short a time to upshot any attitudinal changes. Secondly, it may be possible that after graduation when serious career choices have been made, attitudes are more strongly established rather than during the medical training. It could be concluded that attitudes appear to be more stable and difficult to influence than knowledge. Also, the apparent lack of interaction between these two factors on the analyses done by ATP-30 scale suggests that these are two independent aspects that should be independently assessed during the final year MBBS rotation in Psychiatry.

In summary, the 15 days compulsory rotation in Psychiatry for the final year MBBS students was successful in enhancing their attitude towards the subject, but a lot more could be done in the current education and training curriculum to enhance empathetic attitudes towards psychiatric patients, as it will affect the way these future doctors deliver care towards their patients. Although the study was according to the previous curriculum, the present curriculum gives more emphasis on integration of both vertical and horizontal arms of different subjects, but considering the prevalence of mental illnesses, Psychiatry should be a separate subject with proper examination system which might help in improving the attitude towards psychiatry.

**CONCLUSION**

Our study concluded that although not statistically significant, but male students had a relatively better attitude towards psychiatry than the female students and final year students showed better outcome for these two questionnaires, "Psychiatric patients are often more interesting to work with than other patients" and "It is quite easy for me to accept the efficacy of psychotherapy". Also, our findings suggest the requirement for revise the current curriculum of Psychiatry training imparted to the undergraduate students. Strategies like attitudinal interventions and de-stigmatization must be focused specifically towards all medical students such as helping to prepare them for the realities of clinical placements to enrich the experience. Hence such de-stigmatization strategies might also be integrated into other curricula besides Psychiatry, to capture the attention of students who might have negative attitudes towards people with mental illnesses.

**LIMITATIONS**

The sample size consisting of 200 students was small and this was limited to only one medical college setting, so the findings cannot be generalized. Although the study found improvement in attitude towards psychiatry in final year students, but it cannot be concluded that the views of students shall remain the same in the coming future. To tackle this, a long term follow-up can be done to track the attitude of students from time to time for a better analysis of the effectiveness of clinical posting of Psychiatry as a part of the

medical curriculum.

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**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:**

There are no conflicts of interest.

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