CHAPTER-05

CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY TO ASSESS THE AWARENESS AND PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS MENTAL HEALTH OF PATIENTS' RELATIVES

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INTRODUCTION

Mental health is characterized as a state of overall well-being wherein individuals can realize their full potential, effectively manage the usual stresses of life, engage in productive and meaningful work, and contribute positively to their community. The current health landscape is witnessing a concerning rise in mental health issues. According to a report from the World Health Organization (WHO), one in four individuals meets the criteria for experiencing some form of mental illness at least once in their lifetime. In the context of India, findings from the National Mental Health Survey 2016-17 indicate that one in every six Indians requires mental health assistance, with the prevalence of mental disorders standing at 10.6 percent [1].

Individuals facing distressing mental health conditions are frequently overlooked by their family members, who may attribute the issues to perceived weakness on the part of the affected individuals. Consequently, seeking the expertise of a mental health specialist is often postponed until the individual's endurance limits have been pushed to the brink. This delay in seeking help leads to late diagnoses, delayed treatment, diminished overall prognosis, and adverse consequences like self-harm, risky behaviors, and, in some cases, preventable suicides that could have been averted with timely intervention [2].

Diverging from physical health, mental health poses unique challenges, especially since individuals grappling with mental health issues often find themselves incapable of autonomous decision-making. Unfortunately, those affected frequently encounter barriers to timely and suitable medical care, as families may conceal their condition out of societal shame. This not only jeopardizes the well-being of the individuals but also exposes them to exploitation, abuse, neglect, and discrimination. Society tends to perceive individuals with mental health challenges as weak, unclean, failures, prone to violence, and potentially dangerous. There is a prevailing belief, supported by studies, that attributes mental illness to malevolent spirits, leading people to advocate for treatment by traditional healers. Some hold the view that mental health problems necessitate prolonged treatment, contributing to delays

in seeking assistance. Consequently, community perceptions often result in neglect and lack of support, pushing some individuals to beg or become homeless due to mental health struggles [3]

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What was the extent of awareness among patients' relatives concerning mental health?

2. How did the relatives of patients perceive mental health?

3. Were there any connections between sociodemographic characteristics and the perceptions of patients' relatives?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To evaluate the awareness and attitudes regarding mental health among relatives of patients.

2. To examine the potential correlation between sociodemographic characteristics and the perceptions of caregivers toward mental health.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a cross-sectional design conducted from February 10 to May 10, 2019, involving the selection of 148 adult relatives (aged >18 years) accompanying mentally ill patients attending visits at the Hospital for Mental Health in Ahmedabad. The sample included adult family members living with and assisting the patient, with inclusion criteria specifying age above 18 and serving as primary caregivers. Exclusion criteria involved family members who declined to participate. Convenient sampling was utilized, with data collection conducted over a 15-day period, interviewing any ten patients' relatives visiting the outpatient department meeting the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The study utilized a self-structured questionnaire to assess awareness and perceptions, covering socio-demographic characteristics and 20 items measuring awareness on mental illness-related aspects. The tool was translated into Gujarati, validated by mental health experts, and data was collected through face-to-face exit interviews, ensuring

anonymity and obtaining verbal consent from participants. Participants were asked to respond to statements using a Likert scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis encompassed a cross-sectional study conducted between February 10 and May 10, 2019, involving 148 adult relatives of mentally ill patients at the Hospital for Mental Health in Ahmedabad. Descriptive analysis was employed to calculate frequencies and percentages for sociodemographic characteristics. The study revealed that 54% of the participants were male, and one-fourth belonged to the age group of 34-41 years. Education-wise, one-fourth had primary education, while 5 respondents were postgraduates. In terms of income, one-third fell into the less than 10,000 categories, and 27% had no source of income. The main caretakers were parents (30%), followed by spouses (19%), and extended family (22%). The analysis of perceptions towards mental illness involved scoring positive and negative statements on a Likert scale. Results indicated that 95% of respondents had a favorable perception based on positive statements, with a mean score of 35.08. However, 52% displayed less awareness and unfavorable perception towards mental illness based on negative statements, with a mean score of 31. Individual item analysis highlighted varying awareness levels, with 88% acknowledging the importance of mental health, while only 40% believed mental illness could not be cured. Further cross-tabulation demonstrated a correlation between education levels and perceptions, with illiterate individuals leaning towards unfavorable perceptions.

CONCLUSION

Individuals grappling with mental illnesses experience a diminished quality of life due to prevailing societal stigma, encountering discrimination across various social spheres and opportunities. The community still stigmatizes mental health, making it challenging for those affected. The pivotal role of family members in the realm of psychiatry underscores their significance. This study delves into the awareness levels and perceptions of patients' relatives regarding mental health, shedding light on crucial aspects that could inform the

development of mental health programs for effective rehabilitation. While there is a fair degree of awareness regarding symptoms and treatment, the study reveals persistent stigma surrounding mental illness. Addressing this issue requires not only sensitizing and educating individuals about mental health indicators but also normalizing the idea of seeking help for oneself and family, thereby diminishing the associated stigma. It is imperative to expand discussions on mental health beyond experts and foster open dialogues with the general public, fostering a more inclusive environment and dispelling stigmas and myths associated with mental health. Research indicates that initiating conversations about suicidal thoughts can reduce suicide risks, and open discussions about mental illness contribute to destigmatization, making it easier for individuals to seek assistance and support.

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