

COGNITIVE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH BELIEFS ABOUT PSYCHIATRY AMONG MEDICAL INTERNS: A TRANSDIAGNOSTIC PERSPECTIVE

Mehmet Eren Yaşaran, İlker Güneysu

Department of Psychiatry, Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University Faculty of Medicine, Tokat, Türkiye

BACKGROUND AND AIM: Future physicians' beliefs about psychiatry influence their clinical approach to mental illness. While medical training shapes these views, pre-existing cognitive traits at the start of clinical practice remain under-examined. This study adopted a transdiagnostic perspective to investigate the associations between anxiety-related cognitive styles, emotional distress, and beliefs about psychiatry among medical interns at the onset of their clinical clerkship.

METHODS: (Ethics Committee Approval must be obtained and the number should be specified). This cross-sectional study assessed 110 sixth-year medical students on their first clinical clerkship day. Participants completed the Beliefs About Mental Illness Scale, the Anxious Thoughts Inventory (meta, social, and health anxiety subscales), and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21). Statistical analyses included Pearson correlations and hierarchical linear regression. Emotional distress was entered in the first step of the regression, followed by anxiety-related cognitive dimensions in the second step to identify independent factors associated with beliefs about psychiatry.

The study was approved by the Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University Faculty of Medicine Non-Interventional Scientific Research Ethics Committee (Approval No: 24-MOBAEK-019; Date: 13.12.2024).

RESULTS: Beliefs about psychiatry were moderately associated with baseline meta-anxiety ($r=-.32$, $p<.05$) and social anxiety ($r=.29$, $p<.05$), whereas associations with depression and general anxiety were weak and not statistically significant. In the hierarchical regression model, baseline psychological characteristics accounted for a meaningful proportion of variance in beliefs about psychiatry ($R^2=.116$, $p=.044$). Higher levels of meta-anxiety were independently associated with less favorable beliefs ($\beta=-.42$, $p=.034$), while higher social anxiety was associated with more favorable beliefs ($\beta=.39$, $p=.017$), after controlling for depression, anxiety, and stress levels.

CONCLUSIONS: At the very beginning of clinical training, beliefs about psychiatry appear to be shaped less by overall emotional distress and more by how individuals cognitively and metacognitively relate to anxiety. These findings suggest that transdiagnostic cognitive factors—particularly meta-anxiety and social anxiety—may play a meaningful role in shaping interns' professional attitudes toward psychiatry even before prolonged clinical exposure begins.

Keywords: Beliefs about psychiatry, medical-interns, meta-anxiety