

CHANGES IN STIGMATIZING ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHIZOPHRENIA BEFORE AND AFTER PSYCHIATRIC TRAINING IN MEDICAL STUDENTS

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BACKGROUND AND AIM: Stigma toward individuals with schizophrenia remains a major barrier to mental health care and social inclusion. This study aimed to examine whether psychiatric education and clinical exposure reduce stigmatizing attitudes toward individuals with schizophrenia among medical students.

METHODS: This cross-sectional study included two independent groups: 170 fourth-year medical students assessed before starting their psychiatry rotation (no prior psychiatric training or patient contact) and 119 sixth-year medical students assessed during their internship after completing psychiatric training. Participants completed a 20-item stigma questionnaire developed by the authors, based on selected items from the ATIDQ (Attitudes Toward Intellectual Disability Questionnaire) short form and the

SSRPP (Social Distance Scale Revised for People with Psychiatric Problems). Responses were recorded as “agree,” “partly agree,” or “disagree.” Group differences between

fourth- and sixth-year students were analyzed using chi-square or Fisher’s exact tests. Benjamini–Hochberg correction was applied for multiple comparisons. The study was approved by the institutional ethics committee (2025, No: 895) and conducted per the Declaration of Helsinki.

RESULTS: After Benjamini–Hochberg correction for multiple comparisons, 9 of 20 items remained statistically significant (adjusted $p < 0.05$). Sixth-year students demonstrated significantly lower stigmatizing attitudes compared to fourth-year students, particularly regarding employment in socially interactive roles ($p < 0.001$), perceived dangerousness and crime risk ($p = 0.001$), inability to live independently ($p = 0.002$), and perceived incurability with reduced life quality ($p = 0.002$). Additional significant differences were observed in attitudes toward institutionalization ($p = 0.004$), social participation ($p = 0.008$), and the need for separate healthcare services ($p = 0.005$), reflecting a consistent pattern of reduced exclusionary beliefs among students who had completed psychiatric training.

CONCLUSIONS: Psychiatric education with clinical exposure is associated with reduced stigmatizing attitudes toward schizophrenia among medical students. These findings support structured psychiatric training and direct patient contact in reducing stigma.

Keywords: Medical student, schizophrenia, stigma