

EFFECT OF PSYCHIATRIC CLINICAL POSTINGS ON ATTITUDES AMONG STUDENT NURSES AT HOSPITAL RAJA PEREMPUAN ZAINAB II KOTA BHARU, KELANTAN

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ABSTRACT

Nurses play a key role in caring for the mentally ill and in rehabilitating them after an episode of illness. The nurses' attitude towards a patient is generally considered to be one of the basic factors contributing to the administration of total therapeutic nursing care. The purpose of this study was to examine whether attitudes towards mental patients improve after psychiatric attachment as well as the relationship between attitudes to psychiatry and intention to pursue psychiatry as a career.

The study was conducted on sixty nursing students of fifth semester at the Kolej Kejururawatan Kubang Kerian, Kelantan who are doing their psychiatric postings in Hospital Raja Perempuan Zainab II, Kota Bharu. The sampling technique for this study was convenient sampling. The instrument used for this study surveyed questionnaire developed by Brenda Happell (Happell, 2008). This quasi-experimental study measured changes in students' attitudes and satisfaction with clinical experience following a placement in mental health nursing. The questionnaire was administered to the nursing students on the first and last day of their psychiatric clinical placement session.

The findings suggested that clinical experience during psychiatric clinical posting can positively influence attitudes, preparedness for practice and the popularity of mental health nursing. Satisfaction with clinical experience was also high. The findings of this study suggest that clinical postings had positive effects on nursing students' attitudes towards psychiatric patients and confidence in this field of practice.

Keywords : *Attitudes, nursing students, mental patients, psychiatric postings*

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the cost of not treating mental illness may be high both in personal and financial terms whereby a significant indirect cost is made on the economy of a nation by mental illness. About 450 million people were estimated to be suffering from a mental health disorder and approximately one in four families currently had one or more of their members suffering from such disorders. Mental and behavioural disorders have a large impact on individuals, families and communities. Individuals suffer the distressing symptoms of disorders. They also suffer because they are unable to participate in work and leisure activities,

often as a result of discrimination. They worry about not being able to shoulder their responsibilities towards family and friends and are fearful of being a burden to others. These families are required not only to provide physical and emotional support but also to bear the negative impact of stigma and discrimination present in all parts of the world. In Malaysia, health care providers in the primary health care and in the community routinely encounter persons with mental illness in their work.

Nurses play a key role in caring for the mentally ill patients and in rehabilitating the mentally ill patients after an episode of illness. The nurse's attitude towards a patient is generally considered to be one of the basic

factors contributing to the administration of total therapeutic nursing care. Furthermore, these attitudes, are to a great extent, the result of exposure to environments and experiences. Due to this reason, it is important to find out the attitudes of nurses towards mentally ill and factors which might influence these attitudes. Since the literature available in Malaysia in this field is very limited owing to the absence of studies conducted, it is highly essential to conduct a study on mentally ill patient.

The purpose of this study was to examine whether attitudes toward mental illness get improved during psychiatric attachment as well as the relationship between attitudes to psychiatry and intention to pursue psychiatry as a career. It also assessed the relationship between students' characteristics with their attitudes toward psychiatry and intention to pursue psychiatry as a career before and after psychiatric attachment.

Prejudice occurs when a person judges another person because of a group they belong to. For many years, psychologists have tried to figure out how to overcome prejudice. One theory is the contact hypothesis. The contact hypothesis says that bringing members from different groups together will reduce prejudice. The idea is that exposure to others of different groups will reduce prejudice for those groups. Contact hypothesis which was mentioned by Allport (1954) was used as a theoretical framework for this study. It is also known as Intergroup Contact Theory. Interpersonal contact with one another is one of the most helpful ways to reduce the amount of prejudice and stereotypical notions that are present among different groups of majorities and minorities. The belief is that the opportunity for individuals to communicate with other people, allows groups to understand the different point of views and cultures.

There are many studies that identified the impact of psychiatric mental health nursing theory and clinical education on attitudes related to mental illness.

The need for caring people with mental health problems in general hospitals has increased. Nurses are the major providers of hospital care and have become an important resource in the delivery of mental health care. However, the attitudes and ability of many nurses in providing this care have been shown to be poor (Sharrock & Happell, 2002), and this may have a

negative impact on care. Nurses' attitudes and the issues they believe affect their caring for people with mental health problems in rural hospitals, where demand for care is high, and support and education from mental health specialists are low.

The last twenty years has seen major changes in mental health service policy and delivery in Malaysia in line with Mental Health Policy. The trend is towards care and treatment within the general health system of the community with the increased emphasis on the rights of people with mental illness. Research conducted in urban areas has found that many nurses responsible for care feel unprepared to support mental health needs, and have negative attitudes towards caring for people with mental health problems (Brinn, 2000).

A qualitative descriptive study investigates nurses' attitudes to caring for people with mental illness, the issues that impact on their ability to provide care, and the effect of education, experience, and support. In 2003, 10 nurses from two wards in a rural hospital were interviewed. Participants from one ward had education and support from mental health nurses. Attitudes were found to be inextricably linked to issues that influence nurses' ability to provide care. Dislike was apparent from nurses who suggested that it was not their role. Others identified fear, causing avoidance. Conversely, those receiving support and education described increased comfort, with some nurses expressing enthusiasm for mental health care, seeing it as integral to nursing. The priority of physical care, time constraints, environmental unsuitability, rural, and the lack of skill, knowledge, and mental health services reduced safety and effective care. A limited ability to help was reported, despite support for Mental Health Strategy goals. Positive experience promoted through education and support was required for nurses to improve care and attitudes. Notably, collaboration with mental health nurses was identified to be helping nurses overcome fear and increase competence in caring for people with mental illness (Reed & Fitzgerald, 2005).

A study was conducted on Nursing Student's attitude change toward mental illness and psychiatric care recognition. The attitude towards mental illness were measured among 92 students of the seventh semester in the school of nursing of Athens University before (time 1) and after (time 2) the completion of 40 and 90 hours of lecture on clinical psychiatry and

clerkship, respectively (Madianos *et al.*, 2005). The instrument used to measure attitudinal dimensions was the Cohen and Struening's opinions about mental illness (OMI) scale, which yields five factors and was proven to be reliable and valid in previous studies. Hypothetical case vignettes were used to assess psychiatric case recognition. In factors A, B, and D statistically significant differences in attitudes towards mental illness between time 1 & time 2 were observed. It seems that the completion of training in psychiatric influenced the students' opinion about mental illness as they expressed less authoritarianism and discriminatory beliefs as well as positive views about social integration of mentally ill persons. The group of students who failed to recognize the case vignettes satisfactorily also expressed negative views in four out of five OMI scale factors.

Another study had examined the influence of a clinical attachment in psychiatry on medical students' attitudes towards psychiatry as a specialty and potential career. Medical students at Sydney Medical School were surveyed following an 8-week clinical attachment in psychiatry. Secondary analyses were sought to identify associations with variables such as age, gender and level of clinical experience as a medical student. Following a clinical attachment in psychiatry, 80% of students rated their attitude to psychiatry as more positive. Approximately 32% rated themselves as likely or very likely to choose a career in psychiatry. No differences were seen with respect to gender, age or stage of training. The quality of the teaching, enthusiasm of the clinical teachers, the holistic approach and scientific basis of psychiatry were cited by students as factors influencing attitudes. The clinical rotation in psychiatry is a significant factor influencing medical student attitudes towards psychiatry.

A study on "undergraduate nursing and midwifery students' knowledge of and attitude towards, people with mental illness on a nonprobability sample of 235 under graduate nursing and midwifery students, had adopted modified version of the attitude and beliefs about mental health problems, professional and public view questionnaire was used. Instrument administered cross-sectional and longitudinal cohorts of students. The result showed that the students' knowledge about mental illness is similar to that of the general public. Further, there was a considerable difference in their

attitude towards people with mental illness.

In a study on the influence of education of nursing students on the formation of attitudes toward psychiatric illness, attitudes towards mental illness were examined in 137 undergraduate students in the technological educational institute of Athens before and after completion of 105 hours of course of psychiatric nursing (Evangelou *et al.*, 2005). The instrument used to assess the attitude was the Mental Illness Ideology Scale (CMI) scale about mental illness. In two out of five CMI scale factors, statistically significant differences between two assessment times were observed. It seems that after psychiatric training, student's expresses less authoritarian. Views and their opinion toward social integration of mentally ill person were found to be more positive. Students with relatives with a mental health problem were found to be more negative toward social discrimination and more positive towards the provision of social care. It seems that theoretical training and clinical clerkship improve attitude towards mental illness.

Hayman-White and Happell (2005) had adapted the Psychiatric/Mental Health Clinical Placement Survey for First Day of Placement scale to measure the impact of education and clinical placement on student nurses' preferences in career and in attitudes towards mental health nursing and patients (Hayman-White & Happell, 2005). They studied 784 student nurses, each placed in one of 21 compulsory clinical sites. Most of the students were in their second or third year of study. They addressed the relationship between attitudes, sense of preparedness, and career preferences of undergraduate nursing students prior to their psychiatric clinical experiences and found that few students wanted to pursue careers in mental health. Those who did hope to work in mental health overall had a more positive view of the actual worth of mental health as a profession whereas the other students did not. Students, on an overall view, did not feel well prepared to begin their rotation.

On the other hand, a longitudinal study in Australia over the course of student nurses' entire educational experience, rather than pre/post-mental health content (McCann, Lu & Deegan, 2009) where the researchers studied a non-probability sample of student nurses (90 first year, 46 second year, and 96 third year) measuring

knowledge and attitudes toward mental illness using the attitudes and beliefs about mental health problems: professional and public views questionnaire. Findings indicated that students' initial attitudes were similar to those of the public. These attitudes did not change dramatically during the second year of nursing education. By the end of the third year, students began to believe in the value of therapeutic interventions.

A small number of student nurses choosing to become psychiatric-mental health nurses urged to search the literature to find what influenced career choices for nurses. Various research articles correlated career choice with attitudes toward clients (Hayman-White & Happell, 2005; Melrose, 2002), career counseling as well as interest. Each of these aspects was important in determining career choice. Another study had revealed which of two variables, self-efficacy or interest, was predominant in career choice (Nauta *et al.*, 2002).

The implementation of a psychiatric clinical posting has been an integral component of Malaysian nursing academy curricula. Clinical posting provides students with the opportunity to apply theory to clinical practice in a psychiatric hospital setting. It has been acknowledged in the nursing education literature that the application of theoretical knowledge must be transferred into clinical practice (Munnukka *et al.*, 2002). The theory provides information that assists nursing students in developing an understanding of the nurse's roles and the patients' needs in the clinical setting. Thus theory can inform practice, but theory alone does not provide the opportunity and reinforcement of clinical practice. Clinical posting, on the other hand, provides information that helps nursing students to implement nursing actions in a clinical setting. Consequently, the nursing theory can be applied and further understood with clinical posting.

Recognizing the gravity of the problem, the investigator has chosen the problem of Fifth Semester nursing students for the study of the changes in their knowledge and attitudes before and after the intervention of the psychiatric nursing posting. So the investigator had gone through the details of needs for the study and designing of a conceptual research framework, to work out on the development of the tools.

METHODOLOGY

The research design of the present study is Quasi-Experimental with one group pre-test and post-test model. The design involves three main steps. The first step is the administration of the demographic questionnaires and first-day placement questionnaires (pre-test) before the students go for their posting in the wards. The second step is the posting of the student nurses in the psychiatric wards (intervention), the final and the third step is that of the administration of the last day placement questionnaires (post-test). Difference due to the application of psychiatric posting intervention is then determined by comparing the pre-test and the post-test scores on knowledge and attitudes. The survey designed by Happell (2008) was modified with permission for the purpose of the study (Happell, 2008). The questions were organized from general to more specific. They developed a Likert scale method to survey items. Primarily the instrument required participants to rank the nursing practice areas in which they would most likely to work after graduation in order of preference (1=most preferred to 7=least preferred).

The sample size consisted of all sixty Fifth Semester nursing students who were doing their psychiatric nursing posting in Psychiatric Wards of Hospital, Raja Perempuan Zainab II, Kota Bharu, Kelantan. The questionnaire was pilot tested for internal consistency. The Cronbach's Alpha values for this instrument are 0.884 and 0.871 respectively.

RESULT

A series of one-sample *t*-tests were used to compare pre and post-placement responses to the clinical posting survey. The Psychiatric Clinical Placement Survey for First Day of Placement examined the following three areas of student nurses' perceptions and experiences:

- Preparedness for clinical experiences (statements 1, 4, 7, 10, 14–17, and 22).
- Attitudes towards people experiencing a mental illness (statements 3, 5, 8, 9, 13, 18, 19, 21, 23, and 24).
- Attitudes towards mental health nursing (statements 2, 6, 11, 12, and 20).

In the post-placement survey, in addition to the above questions, 15 additional statements addressing student nurses' positive clinical experiences (statements 25–39) were included.

Most of the average post-placement scores were significantly different from the corresponding mean pre-placement scores. A significant and positive change is evident in students' attitudes towards people experiencing a mental illness as demonstrated by their greater tendency to acknowledge that the development of mental illness is not the fault of the individual, that people with a mental illness are not violent and unpredictable, and that the feelings of people experiencing mental illness are likely to be influenced by the attitudes of others. Students also indicated a decreased anxiety about and greater confidence in providing care for people experiencing mental illness and generally felt safe within and more certain on how to act within the mental health environment.

More positive the view of the value of mental health skills for nursing practice, a greater understanding of the role of the mental health nurses and an appreciation that mental health services can make a difference for people experiencing mental illness were also apparent following the completion of the clinical experience. Students felt more prepared for mental health nursing practice and suggested they were more likely to apply for a graduate nurse programme in this field and to pursue mental health nursing as a career.

Table 1. Differences between Pre- and Post- Placement Survey

Statements	Pre Post	t-value	P (two-tailed)
1. I feel well prepared for my psychiatric/mental health clinical placement.	3.67	2.009	0.049*
	3.23		
2. Psychiatric/mental health nursing makes a positive contribution to people experiencing a mental health problem.	4.63	-7.329	0.000*
	5.90		
3. I am anxious about working with people experiencing a mental health problem.	5.35	11.882	0.000*
	2.50		
4. I have a good understanding of the role of a psychiatric nurse.	2.87	-16.968	0.000*
	5.77		
5. I am uncertain how to act towards someone with a mental illness.	5.90	16.952	0.000*
	2.50		
6. I will apply for a Post Basic Program in psychiatric/mental health nursing.	2.78	-12.521	0.000*
	5.48		
7. I feel confident in my ability to care for people experiencing a mental health problem.	2.48	-16.632	0.000*
	5.65		
8. People with mental illness are unpredictable.	5.78	14.266	0.000*
	2.92		
9. Mental illness is not a sign of weakness in a person.	3.15	-16.212	0.000*
	6.07		
10. My theoretical component of psychiatric/mental health nursing has prepared me well for my clinical placement.	3.95	-7.294	0.000*
	5.35		

11. This clinical placement in psychiatric/mental health nursing will provide valuable experience for my nursing practice.	4.35	-9.106	0.000*
	6.03		
12. I intend to pursue a career in psychiatric/mental health nursing.	2.32	-15.551	0.000*
	5.43		
13. If I developed a mental illness I wouldn't tell people unless I had to.	5.93	17.252	0.000*
	2.47		
14. My course has prepared me to work as a staff nurse in a medical-surgical ward.	2.75	-13.446	0.000*
	5.87		
15. My course has prepared me to work as a staff nurse in a pediatric ward.	2.78	-2.903	0.000*
	3.28		
16. My course has prepared me to work as a staff nurse in a psychiatric/mental health ward.	2.60	-26.229	0.000*
	6.47		
17. My course has prepared me to work as a staff nurse in a geriatric ward.	3.37	0.971	0.336
	3.20		
18. Someone I know has experienced a mental health problem.	3.22	-3.628	0.000*
	3.87		
19. When a person develops a mental illness it is not their fault.	3.72	-11.424	0.000*
	6.08		
20. Mental health services provide valuable assistance to people experiencing a mental health problem.	3.62	-13.156	0.000*
	6.18		
21. People with mental illness can't handle too much responsibility.	5.58	4.875	0.000*
	4.65		
22. I feel safe about this psychiatric/mental health placement.	3.07	-13.080	0.000*
	5.75		
23. The way people with mental illness feel can be affected by other people's attitudes towards them.	3.44	-13.617	0.000*
	5.86		
24. People with mental illness are more likely to commit offences or crimes.	6.03	18.510	0.000*
	2.38		

*Significantly different at $p < 0.05$

When items 1-24 in Pre- test were computed as Pre-test and items 1-24 in Post- test were computed as Post-test and compared using *the t-test*, a significant difference was obtained as shown in Table 2

Table 2. Comparison between Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Scores	N	Mean	t value	p value
Pre-test	59	93.30	-20.95	0.000*
Post-test	59	112.92		

*Significantly different at $p < 0.05$

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study suggested that a number of significant changes in attitudes towards people experiencing a mental illness and sense of preparedness for work in the mental health field have occurred following the completion of psychiatric clinical posting. Comparing scores on the 24 statements before and after clinical experience

demonstrates significant changes to most questions, with more positive attitudes to people with a mental illness and to the mental health nursing profession.

This finding supports the literature in suggesting that clinical experience in mental health nursing produces more positive attitudes (Mullen & Murray, 2002; Wynaden *et al.*, 2000). During the clinical posting, nursing students came in close contact with the psychiatric patients for two weeks. Based on Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, "close and pleasant interpersonal contact with people from different groups is probably the best way to achieve social harmony" (Hogg & Abrams, 2007). Since Allport had first formulated the contact hypothesis to improve intergroup relations between different races, it has been extended to mental illness stigma. Thus, researchers have focused on the role of contact in reducing stigma toward mental illness and have found that contact leads to improved attitudes and behaviour toward mental illness (Schulze *et al.*, 2003; Thornicroft *et al.*, 2008). It is now a generally accepted practice: "under appropriate conditions, interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members" (Schiappa *et al.*, 2005). Studies consistently reveal that people who are more familiar with mentally ill persons hold more positive attitudes toward them (Corrigan & Watson, 2002).

An improvement in perceived preparedness for

practice in the mental health field was also evident. Students demonstrated more confidence in and less anxiety about caring for people within a mental health setting following the completion of the clinical experience. Regarding an increased sense of preparedness, participants professed that the theoretical component had prepared them for the experience. This supports the finding of a study that undergraduate nursing students feel less prepared for the mental health field than they do for general nursing (Wynaden *et al.*, 2000).

A very high level of satisfaction with clinical experience was also observed through this study. This finding further supports the view that the perceived quality of clinical experience is likely to influence nursing students' attitudes towards mental health nursing as a career (Henderson *et al.*, 2007; Mullen & Murray, 2002; Wynaden *et al.*, 2000).

CONCLUSION

While this study has produced valuable information, it is not possible to generalize to all nursing students. However, the current study provides a stronger basis for concluding that positive clinical posting and experience in psychiatry produces more positive attitudes towards mental illness and psychiatric nursing and contribute to a greater sense of preparedness for practice in the psychiatric ward.

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