



Positive Attitudes among Chinese Medical Students toward Psychiatry

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Background

•The Chinese government and Chinese health professionals have become increasingly concerned about the impact mental illness—a substantial proportion of the total burden of illness in China can be accounted for by neuropsychiatric conditions and suicide (20% in 2004 based on estimates from W.H.O. statistics).

•There are few psychiatrists and limited resources for patients and families seeking psychiatric care .

•Stigma of mental illness and relatively lower levels of respect afforded to psychiatrists within the medical profession have presented challenges for psychiatric recruitment, particularly in rural areas where the largest proportion of the Chinese population lives.

•Increasingly positive attitudes have been reported among young people in China towards mental illness, but little is known about Chinese medical students' attitudes towards psychiatry, psychiatric services, and patients.

•We hypothesized that students who had had greater exposure to psychiatric patients would report more positive attitudes toward psychiatry, would have more open attitudes toward psychiatric services and patients, and would make more correct diagnoses.

Methods

•We administered a bi-lingual survey to Wuhan University medical students in the final years of their clinical training which gathered socio-demographic information, data on clinical exposure to psychiatry, and attitudes toward psychiatry, psychiatric services, and patients.

•Primary outcomes were composite scores on a 21-item, attitudes toward psychiatry survey (based on the ATP-30 survey by Burra et al.) and the number of correct responses to diagnostic questions following a series of three clinical case vignettes.

•Primary predictors were demographic characteristics and exposure to psychiatry during medical training.

•We examined predictors and outcomes at the two primary clinical training sites for medical students, Renmin and Zhongnan Hospitals, and explored site-specific correlations.

Excerpts from Attitudes Toward Psychiatry (ATP-30) Survey by Burra et al.

For the questions below, please circle your response (choose only one) on a scale of "1-5" where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral (no opinion), 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

1. Psychiatry is unappealing because it makes little use of medical training.
2. Psychiatric teaching increases our understanding of medical and surgical patients.
3. Psychiatric illness deserves at least as much attention as physical illness.
4. Psychiatry is so unscientific that even psychiatrists can't agree as to what its basic applied sciences are.
5. The practice of psychiatry allows the development of rewarding relationships with people.

Results

•Mean composite score on the attitudes toward psychiatry items was 78/105, (SD=9.6) representing overall positive attitudes among the students.

•Students reported relatively open attitudes towards psychiatric services and respect for patients.

Results (con't)

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics (n = 163)

Age, mean years [SD]	23.7 [1.5]
Sex, n* (%)	
Male	80 (50)
Female	80 (50)
Length of psychiatric rotation (Outpatient and Inpatient), n (%)	
0	56 (37)
1-2 weeks	65 (43)
3 weeks or more	32 (21)
Disorders Observed/Managed, n (%)†	
Schizophrenia	84 (52)
Substance Abuse	13 (8)
Major Depressive Disorder	91 (56)
Anxiety Disorder	75 (46)
Personality Disorder	34 (21)
Neurasthenia	35 (22)
Other	11 (7)
Wish I had learned more about patients with mental disorders in training, n (%)	
Disagree/Strongly disagree	13 (8)
Neutral	25 (16)
Agree/Strongly agree	120 (76)
Attitudes toward Psychiatry-Max score 105, mean [SD]	78 [9.6]
Clinical Vignettes, number correct on diagnostic questions, mean [SD]	1.7 [.64]

*n counts vary somewhat due to partial non-response.
†Percentages do not all sum to 100 due to rounding error.
‡Multiple answers permitted. Percentages computed out of n=163

•Female gender and having learned about more psychiatric disorders were positively associated with a higher mean ATP score (Female 79.5 vs. Male 76.3; p=.034 and learning about ≥12 disorders 80.9 vs. 9-11 disorders 78.7 and ≤8 disorders 75.9; p=.036) and remained so after adjustment for relevant covariates (p=.049 and p=.036 respectively).

•Length of psychiatric rotation and year in medical school were not predictive of either higher mean ATP score or diagnostic score.

A greater total number of disorders observed/managed was associated with a higher mean ATP score but this did not hold true after adjusting for covariates.

Table 2: Attitudes toward Psychiatric Services

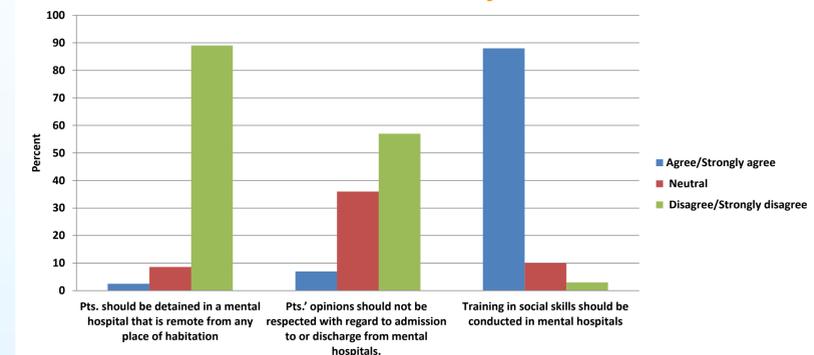


Table 3: ATP Survey Composite Scores Stratified By Student Characteristics and Psychiatric Exposure

	ATP Score		
	mean	Bivariate Unpaired-t p	Multivariate†
Sex, (n)			
Male (79) (80)	76.3	.034‡	p=.049‡
Female (78) (77)	79.5		
Total Number of Disorders Learned About			
≤8 (67) (68)	75.9	.021‡	p=.036‡
9-11 (49) (49)	78.7		
≥12 (44) (43)	80.9		

Table presents characteristics significantly associated (at p<0.05) with one or both criterion variable
*N counts vary slightly by analysis due to partial non-response.
† Multivariate linear regression, after adjustment for location or survey/clinical work, age, sex, and length of psychiatric rotation
‡p<0.05

Conclusion

•Chinese medical students reported positive attitudes towards psychiatry, openness with regard to psychiatric services, and respect for psychiatric patients.

• Learning about a broad spectrum of psychiatric diagnoses and greater clinical contact with patients may improve the attitudes of Chinese medical students toward psychiatry and their ability to make accurate diagnoses.