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Correspondence

Ms. Rama Kumari Lamichhane
Bharatpur Hospital Nursing
College, Bharatpur Hospital
Bharatpur-10
Chitwan, Nepal
Email:
ramalamichhane77@gmail.com

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Sciences

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Sciences

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Stigma perceived by family members of psychiatric patients attending outpatient department of a teaching hospital

Rama Kumari Lamichhane*

Lecturer, Bharatpur Hospital Nursing College, Bharatpur Hospital, Chitwan, Nepal

**During study period, author was Masters of Nursing student at Lalitpur Nursing Campus, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Patan Academy of Health Sciences, Lalitpur, Nepal.*

Abstract

Introductions: Stigma and unfavorable view of people towards mental illness is prevailing in Nepal due to lack of awareness. Stigma among family members of people with mental illness has a serious impact on the outcome. This study aims to identify the level of perceived stigma by family members and association with selected demographical variables.

Methods: A cross-sectional research design was used to assess the stigma perceived by family members of patients visiting psychiatry outpatient department of Patan Hospital, Patan Academy of Health Sciences during 12 August to Sep 7, 2018. Questionnaire on socio-demographic variables and self-stigma of mental illness scale was used to interview the family members to assess the level of perceived stigma. Chi-square was used to examine the association between demographic variables and stigma, $p < 0.05$ was considered significant.

Results: Out of 180 family interviewed 94 (52.2%) had perceived high level of stigma and 86 (47.8%) low level of stigma. There was significant association between age and perceived stigma (p value=0.030) at 95% of significance.

Conclusions: More than half of the family members of psychiatric patients had perceived high level of stigma and was associated with the age.

Keywords: family members, perceived stigma, psychiatric patient

Introductions

Stigma in mental illness is a serious social problem which is exhibited by society's general fear, lack of respect and refusal to accept a person living with a mental disorder.¹ The stigma of families contains stereotypes of blame, shame, social rejection and a combination of other related attitudes towards the family.² Mentally ill patient rely on family members psychologically, emotionally and/or economically. Family members are important resources in the recovery of mentally ill persons. However, in such situations, families experience burdens of care giving and stigma of having a family member with a mental illness.³

A study from West Bengal, India show the average stigma score (53.3 ± 13.2) was higher than 50% of maximum attainable score.⁴ A study from Nepal shows the family members avoid disclosing their relative's hospitalization and half of the respondents reported concealing the hospitalization at least to some degree.⁵

This study aims to find out the stigma related experiences suffered by family members of psychiatric patients.

Methods

This cross-sectional study was conducted to find out stigma perceived by family members of patient with mental illness (depression, schizophrenia and mania) visiting psychiatric out-patient department (OPD) of Patan Hospital, Patan Academy of Health Sciences (PAHS), from Aug 12 to Sep 7, 2018. Ethical approval was obtained from Institutional Review Committee (IRC) of PAHS. The study was approved from research committee of Lalitpur Nursing Campus, PAHS. Permission for data collection was obtained from nursing director and OPD in-charge of Patan Hospital.

Each day, 75-85 patients with mental illness visit psychiatric OPD, out of which 16-18 patients have depression, schizophrenia and

mania. Among these patients, 8-10 family members were selected based on inclusion criteria. The sample size was calculated by using Cochran⁶ formula: $n_0 = Z\alpha^2 pq/d^2$, where $z=1.96$ for 95% confidence level, $p=51.56\%$, $q=1-p$, ME (margin of error)=5%, n =Sample size. The required sample size was 384. To reduce non-response error, additional 10% was added and final sample size was 422.

Giving average time of 30 minutes for a patient; 9 patients were interviewed per day. However, since time for data collection was 20 days, i.e. 4 weeks (5 days a week, excluding the off days Wednesday and Saturday in hospital), so, purposive sampling was used to select the required sample i.e. 180.

A structured interview using standardized tool for Self Stigma of Mental Illness Scale (SSMIS) was used. This tool is already validated in Nepal to assess perceived stigma.⁵

The questionnaire included two parts, Part I: 10 items related to socio-demographic variables of family members such as age, sex, education, type of family, area of residence. Part II: SSMIS of 20 items to measure stigma perceived by family members of psychiatric patient. Each item was rated on a 3-point scale, 1=definitely yes, 2=definitely don't know and 3=definitely no. The range of score was 20–60 and a higher score indicated higher level of perceived stigma.

Pre-testing in 10% of population, 18 respondents in the psychiatric OPD showed the tool was reliable with Cronbach's alpha (0.72). Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistic (Chi-square test) was used to analyze data and $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

Results

There were 180 respondents 97 (53.9%) male, 59 (32.8%) in the age group of 21-30 years, mean age 34.92 ± 12.2 years, Table 1. Depression was seen in 108 (60%) patients of

the respondents and 145 (80.6%) had illness more than one year, Table 2. Half of the respondents, 96 (53.3%) did not hide the fact of mental illness family, Table 3. And, half of the respondents, 94 (52.2%) perceived high level stigma, Table 4.

There was significant association of age with level of perceived stigma ($p=0.03$) and no association with gender, education and area of residence, Table 5.

Table 1. Socio-demographic variables of respondents (N= 180, family members) of patients with mental illness

Variables	N	%
Gender		
Male	83	46.1
Female	97	53.9
Age level (years)		
≤ 20	19	10.6
21-30	59	32.8
31-40	53	29.4
41-50	26	14.4
51-60	16	8.9
> 60	7	3.9
Mean ± S.D: 34.9±12.2		
Residential area		
Urban area	97	53.9
Rural area	83	46.1
Education status		
Illiterate	23	12.8
Literate	157	87.2
If literate (n=157)		
Only read and write	25	15.9
Primary level	44	28
Secondary level	59	37.6
Higher secondary level and above	29	18.5
Type of family		
Nuclear Family	101	56.1
Joint family	79	43.9

Table 2. Clinical profile of mental illness of patients whose family members (N=180) were interviewed for perceived stigma

Variables	N	%
Diagnosis of patient		
Depression	108	60
Schizophrenia	49	27.2
Mania	23	12.8
Duration of patient illness		
Less than six month	11	6.1
Six month to 1 year	24	13.3
More than one year	145	80.6
For treatment, patient first taken to		
Traditional healers	92	51.1
Hospital-Psychiatric department	88	48.9

Table 3. Respondent's (the family members (N=180) of patients with mental illness) response to stigma related questionnaire

Statement	Yes	Don't know/ Can't say	No
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Do you try your best to hide the fact that your family member has mental illness?(C)	84 (46.7)	0 (0)	96 (53.3)
Do you wait until you know a person well before you tell them about your family's mental illness?(C)	171 (95)	1 (0.6)	8 (4.4)
Do you try to hide mental illness of your family members with health professionals?(C)	1 (0.6)	0 (0)	179 (99.4)
Do you feel being humiliated/discriminated in society due to mental illness in the family?(NE)	61 (33.9)	0 (0)	119 (66.1)
Have you been verbally abused by other people due to mental illness of your family members? (NE)	60 (33.3)	0 (0)	120 (66.7)
Do you feel your family being financially burdened by mental illness in the family? (NE)	106 (58.9)	0 (0)	74 (41.1)
Have you found neighbors and other closed relatives being less supportive due to mental illness in the family? (NE)	58 (32.2)	2 (1.1)	120 (66.7)
Do you feel that media is publishing/broadcasting negative reports regarding mental illness? (NE)	11 (6.1)	42 (23.3)	127 (70.6)
Do you think people with mental disorders are dangerous? (NE)	121 (67.2)	1 (0.6)	58 (32.2)
Do you think people with mental disorders are violent? (NE)	114 (63.3)	3 (1.7)	63 (35)
Do you feel that people with mental disorders should be treated as criminals? (NE)	3 (1.7)	10 (5.6)	167 (92.8)
Do you experience that you are receiving adequate true information about mental illness? (NE)	79 (43.9)	62 (34.4)	39 (21.7)
Do you think voluntary organizations are doing adequate work in the field of mental disorders? (NE)	56 (31.1)	77 (42.8)	47 (26.1)
Do you feel health organizations are giving less priority to mental disorders as compared to other disorders?(NE)	56 (31.1)	29 (16.1)	95 (52.8)
Do you think your occupation being interfered due to your family's mental illness?(WR)	103 (57.2)	6 (3.3)	71 (39.4)
Have you faced problems with house tenets due to mental illness of your family members? (WR)	59 (32.8)	8 (4.4)	113 (62.8)
Do you have blamed yourself for mental illness of your family members?(ER)	59 (32.8)	1 (0.6)	120 (66.7)
Do you think that there are adequate laws/rules regarding mental illness? (ER)	22 (12.2)	120 (66.7)	38 (21.1)
Have you experienced any symptoms of mental disorders as a consequence of mental illness of your family members? (ER)	68 (37.8)	3 (1.7)	109 (60.6)
Do you feel your relationship strained with other relatives due to mental illness in your family members? (ER)	51 (28.3)	2 (1.1)	127 (70.6)

Table 4. Level of stigma perceived by respondents (the family members (N=180) of patients with mental illness)

Level of stigma	N	%
Low level of stigma	86	47.8
High level of stigma	94	52.2

Mean perceived stigma±SD=57.59±16.34

Table 5. Association between selected socio-demographic variable and perceived stigma (N=180)

Variables	Level of perceived stigma		χ^2	p
	Low, N (%)	High, N (%)		
Gender				
Male	44 (53%)	39 (47%)	1.69	0.19
Female	42 (43.3%)	55 (56.7%)		
Age				
Less than or equal to 40	56 (42.7%)	75 (57.2%)	4.8	0.030*
More than 40	30 (61.2%)	19 (38.8%)		
Area of residence				
Urban	45 (46.4%)	41 (53.6%)	0.16	0.68
Rural	52 (49.4%)	42 (50.6%)		
Education status				
Literate	75 (47.8%)	82 (52.2%)	0.00	0.99
Illiterate	11 (47.8%)	12 (52.2%)		

*Chi square significant $p < 0.05$ at 95% confidence level

Discussions

The present study shows that more than half, 94 (52.2%), of the respondents (family members of psychiatric patients) perceived high level of stigma, with an average stigma score of 57.6 ± 16.3 . In a similarly cross-sectional study in 200 caregivers of people with mental illness in West Bengal, India found an average stigma score of 53.3 ± 13.2 .⁴ In a specialized out-patient department of the Schizophrenia Research Foundation Chennai, India found 38% caregivers of people with schizophrenia experienced high level of stigma.⁶ A cross-sectional study of stigma towards mental illness among the community people of Shankarapur Municipality, Kathmandu, Nepal, revealed that stigma was found in 51.6%.⁷ All these findings in similar socioeconomic conditions supports our findings of high level of stigma perceived by the caregivers and family members of the mentally ill patients and needs to be properly addressed.

The present study shows significant association between age (less than and equal to 40 years) and perceived stigma, p -value=0.03. Another cross-sectional Nepalese study reports age >40 years had higher negative scores on the domains of stigma than the participants less than 40 years of age.⁸ The present study demonstrated that selected

demographic variables like gender, education and area of residence was not significantly associated with perceived stigma by family members of psychiatric patient. Similarly, cross-sectional study in 200 caregivers of mental illness in the psychiatry outpatient department of a tertiary care hospital in West Bengal, India reports female gender ($p=0.007$) and rural residence ($p=0.01$) had significant association with perceived stigma.⁴ A Germany study reports caregivers from rural areas felt higher stigma than their urban/semi-urban area, unlike finding of the present study, probably because the sampling and study site in a tertiary care urban center.⁹

Limitations of the study include conveniently selected site of psychiatric outpatient department at urban university teaching hospital and the findings may not be generalized to other private and governmental hospitals. Due to limited resources and time constrain during thesis work, purposive sampling was used.

Conclusions

More than half of the respondents, family members of the patients with mental illness, perceived high level of stigma in present study.

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Conflict of Interests

None

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