
WHAT STUDENTS FROM HIGH SCHOOL THINK AND KNOW ABOUT MENTAL DISORDERS

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Introduction: Stigma still represents one of the main obstacles to effective treatment of mental disorders and to social integration of those with mental illness. Studies exploring the levels of knowledge and the attitudes of young people toward mental disorder may help to reduce stigma by improving integration of people with mental disorders.

Objectives: to describe opinions and attitudes of high school students toward mental disorders.

Aims: to assess: 1) the level of knowledge on mental disorders; 2) the opinions about people affected by mental disorders in a sample of high school students.

Methods: This study, promoted by the Department of Psychiatry of the University of Naples SUN within the collaboration with the World Health Organization, was carried out in a secondary school located in the catchment area of Naples. The level of knowledge and the opinions on mental disorder were evaluated using the Questionnaire on Opinions, previously validated.

Results: 177 students attending the last two years of secondary school were recruited. Fifty-four percent of the sample were female, with age of 17.5 (± 0.6) years. About 40% of students identified the main clinical characteristics of affective disorders. Half of the sample stated that mental disorders should not be treated by psychiatrists, but by other health professionals (psychologists, 32%; neurologists, 18%; general practitioners, 4%). As regards opinions on civil rights, about 50% of students affirmed that patients should not vote and 41% that they should not get married.

Conclusions: The results show that the level of knowledge about mental disorders in young people is still very poor and the levels of stigma are still very high. Informative seminars dedicated to target population may be helpful to improve knowledge and reduce stigma.