

A KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND PRACTICE SURVEY ABOUT SECTION A
MENTAL ILLNESS AMONG JUNIOR DOCTORS

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Medical undergraduate training in Psychiatry receives little attention. However upto 40% of hospital attenders suffer from recognisable psychological disturbances. These disorders are neither recognised nor treated adequately by doctors.

The author surveyed the junior medical officers in Kandy and Peradeniya. 54 of the 70 doctors responded - a response rate of 77.1%. The questionnaire invited responses on a 3 point scale regarding the knowledge, attitude and practice with regard to 13 common psychiatric disorders. (see Table)

These results are as follows :

1. What is your knowledge/skills about these disorders/procedures?

There were 70 (11%) responses to indicate they had good knowledge. 361 (56.7%) responses indicated an average level of knowledge. 206 (32.3%) responses indicated a poor knowledge.

2. How important is it to have knowledge about, detect and deal with the following disorders?

559 (82.7%) answered Psychiatry was very important while 103 (15.2%) had no opinion and 14 (2.1%) answered it was not important.

3. How often do you deal with the following?

123 (18.9%) answered frequently while 215 (33%) answered average and 313 (48.1%) answered rarely.

The doctors had a mean 2.1 years of experience. The results of the survey show that the majority (82.7%) consider knowledge and skill in Psychiatry as very important to acquire. However the majority of them (67.7%) had either average or poor knowledge and skills in Psychiatry.

The most striking finding was the discrepancy of their belief about the importance of Psychiatry and actual practice. Only 123 (18.9%) responses indicated frequent detection and dealing with these disorders while 313 (48.1%) dealt with them very rarely.

These findings indicate a strong need for changes in medical undergraduate curriculum and the need to strengthen the teaching of Psychiatry. This conclusion was also supported by the numerous free comments written by the responding doctors.

Table 1 :	1. Psychiatry drugs	5. Alcohol related problems	9. Panic attacks
	2. Suicides	6. Sexual problems	10. Childhood problems
	3. Depression presenting with somatic complaints	7. Hysteria	11. Psychology in relation to medicine
	4. Drug abuse	8. Anxiety neurosis	12. Counselling
			13. Psychosis

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