

F-11: Attitudes towards social issues in medicine (ATSIM): comparison of first-year medical students in Sri Lanka and the West

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The objective was to assess the attitudes of first-year medical students at University of Ruhuna, towards social issues in medicine, and to compare their ATSIM scores with those of first-year medical students in the West.

The modified ATSIM questionnaire evoked responses on a Likert-type scale in 7 areas: (I) Social factors in health, (II) Paramedical co-operation, (III) Preventive medicine, (IV) Doctor-patient relationship, (V) Role of Government in health, (VI) General liberalism, and (VII) Social desirability. This questionnaire was given to 2 batches of first-year medical students (1981/88 and 1988/89) at University of Ruhuna.

There was no statistically significant difference between the 2 batches tested nor between male and female respondents in both, in the 7 different areas. The scores (SD) for the 2 batches were: (maximum possible score 45)

I - 31 ± 4 , 32 ± 3 ; II - 27 ± 3 , 27 ± 4 , III - 31 ± 4 , 34 ± 3 ,
IV - 30 ± 5 , 33 ± 5 ; V - 26 ± 4 , 28 ± 4 , VI - 26 ± 4 , 28 ± 3 ,
VII - 29 ± 4 , 32 ± 4 : Total (maximum 315) - 200 ± 20 , 212 ± 15 .

The scores between males and females took a similar pattern. A correlation matrix showed that there was no correlation between any scores obtained in each of the 7 areas.

Comparison was made with the ATSIM scores of medical students of sample Universities in Australia, Canada and U.S.A. The scores in the separate areas were found to be statistically not significant though the American students appeared to be more conservative in areas II, V and VI. The scores (Ruhuna, Australia, Canada, and USA respectively) were: I - 31 ± 4 , 30, 31, 31; II - 27 ± 4 , 28, 27, 23, III - 32 ± 4 , 31, 33, 32 IV - 32 ± 5 , 30, 32, 32; V - 27 ± 4 , 27, 28, 23; VI - 27 ± 4 , 29, 28, 26; VII - 31 ± 4 , 32, 32, 30, Total - 207 ± 18 , 176, 179, 168.

The first year students of Ruhuna Medical Faculty showed homogeneity between the batches and the sexes and similar and comparable attitudes in the 7 areas with those in the 3 developed countries. They showed a higher total score indicating a better overall attitude towards social issues in medicine.