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STIGMATIZATION OF “PSYCHIATRIC LABEL” BY MEDICAL AND NON-MEDICAL STUDENTS

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Introduction: Stigmatization of a psychiatric patient is present both in general population and among health-care professionals.

Aim: To determine the attitudes of medical students (MS) towards a person who goes to a psychiatrist, before and after psychiatric rotation, and to compare those attitudes between medical and non-medical students.

Methods: The study included 525 MS (2nd and 6th year of studies) and 154 students of law. The study instrument was a 3-part self-reported questionnaire (socio-demographic data, Rosenberg self-esteem scale and a vignette depicting young, mentally healthy person). The experimental intervention consisted of ascribing a “psychiatric label” to only one set of vignettes. All the vignettes (with or without “psychiatric label”) were followed by 14 statements addressing acceptance of a person described by vignette as judged by social distance.

Results: We found more stigmatizing attitudes of the MS in the final year, after psychiatric rotation. The non-medical students had similar tendency to stigmatize as MS before psychiatric rotation. A higher level of stigmatization was evident in regard to a closer relationship between a student and a hypothetic person who goes to a psychiatrist. Neither sex, nor the size of student's place of origin or average academic mark was associated with the tendency to stigmatize.

Conclusions: Psychiatric education can either reinforce stigma or reduce it. Therefore, detailed analyses of educational domains which reinforce stigma should be conducted at the university level, in parallel with national initiative to fight against stigma and discrimination attached to mental health problems and those living with them.