The Perception of University Students on Mental Illness Patients

A.H. Najwa¹, Z.M. Lukman², M.Y. Kamal³, R. Normala⁴, C.Azlin⁵
¹,²,³,⁴,⁵Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Kuala Nerus, Terengganu, Malaysia

Abstract—Lack of understanding about mental disorder among society has caused the mentally ill patients to suffer from social exclusion. Mental illness patient is often misunderstood as having a severe disease however society failed to understand that it is also associated with many other common mental illnesses such as dementia, anxiety disorder and depression. This study was conducted to determine the perception of society towards mental disorder patients. A total of 353 respondents which consisted of Sultan Zainal Abidin University (UniSZA) students were involved in this research. This study adopted a descriptive analysis approach by reporting the results of the study in terms of frequency and percentage. The instrument used for this study is a questionnaire. The researcher examines the students’ perceptions towards mental disorder patients through two aspects 1) students’ perceptions towards the behavior of the mentally ill patient and 2) students’ perceptions towards the life of mentally ill patients. Thus, the results of the study on behavioral aspects showed that the majority of students agreed that mental patients behaved unknowingly (90.1%), while some students disagreed with the notion that mental illness patients have lower IQ (62.0%). In terms of perception towards the life of mental patients, the majority of 97.2% students agreed that mental patients need immaculate and thorough care, while 84.7% students disagreed with the outlook that patients do not have a good future. The results showed that UniSZA students have a negative perception of the behavior of mental disorder patients, however, reacting positively towards the perception of mental patients' life.

Keywords— Mental Illness, Perception, Mental Patients, University Students, Behavior

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of mental illness is not a new issue in any countries and Malaysia is unexceptional from this problem because it is believed that the number of psychiatric patients in this country is increasing from day to day [1]. [2] stated that one in six Malaysians suffered from a various form of mental illnesses. Furthermore, lack of education regarding mental illness among society eventually leads to social stigma towards those who suffered from it because society failed to comprehend the mental state of the mentally ill patients[3]. Consequently, a negative perception towards mental illness causes mental patients failed to seek professional assistance [4]. The mental disorder usually affects various spectrum aspects in the life of patients such as on one’s thinking, emotion, behavior and it also causes functional impairment [5]. The World Health Organization reported that mental illness is among the five major illnesses that cause worldwide disability and in 2020, it is to be expected that, this disease will rank as the second highest in the near future [6].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to a similar study conducted in Australia in 1995, it becomes increasingly apparent that there is a significant increase of consciousness and knowledge about common mental illness such as depression among society [7]. Moreover, a cultural stand-point shaped by superstitious dogmas regarding mental disorder; coupled with a misconception about mental illness, is believed to be decreasing over the years because society nowadays is adopting new knowledge in understanding mental illness through information provided in scientific findings and research [8]. Hence, society has been making progress in acquiring knowledge regarding this matter. On the other hand, there are a few negative views pointed towards the behavior of mental disorder patients with the assumption that they are irresponsible, failed to make their own wide-ranging decisions and other negative beliefs that eventually lead to discrimination [9]. Although there is no specific information on widely negative attitudes of society towards mental illness patients [10], these negative attitudes lead to discrimination upon the patients in various realms including discrimination in the workplace, learning institution or even between family and friends [11]. This attitude could carry infectious behavior that could remain in a long run demanding any members of the community to conform to the idea that mental illness patients should be shunned [12]. The gap of social distance between society and the mentally ill can be widening especially when negative attitude thrown by society are endless [13]. Furthermore, according to [14], the negative attitude of society towards mentally ill patients should be taken seriously because it will be a substantial hurdle for the patients to seek help and care. Therefore, these attitudes ultimately reduce the self-esteem of the patients and consequently they will experience the lack of satisfaction towards life and have to face social exclusion [15].

Negative attitudes and behaviors towards mentally ill patients can be referred to as a stigma [16]. Stigma involves negative stereotypes and prejudices and is often measured in terms of social distance [17]. Furthermore, based on studies conducted in North America and Western Europe, it clearly testified that the stigma towards mental illness is a major problem in society [18]. Prejudice and discrimination of people towards mental illness...
those suffering from mental illness could cause damage to social values of a particular society [19]. Moreover, [20] stated that stigma against psychiatric patients can contribute to negative outcomes affecting the patients such as self-stigmatization might remain in the patients’ mind and it could destruct the self-esteem of the patients. Furthermore, the negative stigma of mental illness interferes with the patients’ rights to participate entirely in societal activities as they are being ostracized by society[21]. Other than that, mental disorder patients lost the opportunity to have adequate housing, loans, insurance and also employment [22].

The study of stigmatization in society has shown that people with mental illness have decided to stop taking treatment, isolated themselves from their loved ones, or gave up what they want to achieve [23]. For instance, in South Africa, 40% of mental disorder patients argued that they have discontinued socializing themselves due to the negative stereotypes indicated to them and because of it, they started to isolate themselves from society [24]. Stigmatization of mental illness remains widespread and becomes a problematic issue such as discrimination towards the patients [25]. This is something that requires serious attention from all society because it is one of the reasons why psychiatric patients refused to continue their treatment and the fear of social rejection will be dwelling in their mind in the long run [26]. Additionally, another common misconception towards these psychiatric patients is that they cannot live independently and fail to make substantial contributions to society [27]. On the contrary, history depicted that serious mental illness patients had actually contributed immensely to society in terms of politics, academic life, culture, sports, art, business, and science [28]. In short, the negative stigma about mental illness is a severe notion that needed to be straightening into the right path.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted quantitatively in the form of descriptive in order to identify the perception of students from Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin on mental illness. The data were collected for a month from July 23rd 2018 until August 21st 2018. The number of the respondents who answered the questionnaire was 353 people where all respondents allocated between 10 to 15 minutes to complete the entire questionnaire. Average respondents who gave daily feedback were 11 people. Eventually, the results of the research were stated in statistical format and the collected data were then exported to an Excel spreadsheet for data cleaning and analysis. The background of respondents, who were the students of Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, was based on demographic information such as age, gender and ethnic.

IV. RESULTS

Table 1 shows the background of respondents representing gender, year of study and faculty representing a respondent's information. All the data were analyzed and the results were presented in the table. (Refer to table 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental patients tend to behave violently</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>87.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on behavior, I can easily identify mental patients</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>69.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental patients have lower IQ</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental patients have strange behavior</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>90.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental patients are not suitable for marriage</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 depicts that the majority of students as many as 84.7% disagreed with the conception that mental patients do not have a good future. Based on the analysis obtained, it is crucial to figure that UniSZA students agreed that mental patients needed thorough care, family support and solid partners to recover. Evidence can be supported from the results of the analysis which rated as high as 97.2% of students believed mental patients can be treated for recovery. (Refer to table 3)
V. DISCUSSION

Negative perceptions towards mental patients will affect the behavior and emotions of psychiatric patients themselves. Negative perceptions will lead to social exclusion where eventually the patients refused to seek a cure for their illness. Meanwhile, positive perceptions can bring mental patients to socialize with society without alienating themselves. The findings also showed that 87.3% of people believed mentally ill patients are violent. Furthermore, 66.6% agreed that these patients are not suitable for marriage. Therefore, knowledge about mental health should be emphasized to change the negative perception and to make people understand more about this matter [29].

However, there is still a positive outlook on psychiatric disorder patients because some considered these groups as an ordinary human being needed to be respected. The results of this study found that 84.7% people agreed that mental illness patients can also have a glimpse towards a good future like other people. Furthermore, 97.2% of students also agreed that mental disorder patients can grasp the opportunity to recover if they seek professional assistance accompanied by family support. This positive perception is supported by the study conducted by [30] and [31] who argued that not all societies will look negatively upon psychiatric patients.

VI. CONCLUSION

Overall, the objective of this study is to examine the perception of UniSZA students toward mental illness patients has been achieved. The results of this study showed that society, particularly in Malaysia, needs more exposure to knowledge related to mental disorder and how to interact effectively with these patients. The impact of this study will help the community to learn more about their role in helping mentally ill patients by encouraging them to get treatment rather than alienating them from the community.

REFERENCE


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