

ASSESSMENT OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF HEALTH AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Background: Today the world has focused its attention on a healthy life-style. Good health does not depend simply on the 3D's notion that is, doctor, drugs & disease. While they are undeniably important there are many other influences on health. Progressing social and behavioral sciences are comfortably paving way into the health profession, such that they are altering the perceptions of health and disease. This study was conducted to evaluate the mindset of medical students regarding the concept of health and fitness.

Material & Methods: A cross-sectional research study design was conducted to find out what the medical students think about 'health.' A simple random sample of 100 students from a lecture session was taken, and a structured interview with 18 questions to gather views on concepts of health was recorded.

Results: 21% responded positively for 'enjoying being with friends & family', 15% on 'having all the parts of my body in good healthy condition' & 13% on 'feeling peace with myself.' All 3 opinions indicated the strong influence of social, cultural & emotional factors affecting health.

Conclusion: Subjective well-being - that is people's evaluations of their lives in terms of both their thoughts, emotions and happiness contribute to the understanding of the philosophy and dimensions of health concepts.

KEY WORDS: Health, Healthy life-style, Biopsychosocial model.

INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on the future physicians and surgeons of this generation and attempts to unravel the definitions of health and well being they have in their minds, because truly they will be the trend setters in health care in the near future. "Healthy dietary habits among medical students are even more important as they are future physicians and the students who personally ignore adopting healthy lifestyle are more likely to fail to establish health promotion opportunities for their patients." ¹It is alarming how medical students being the most up to date on latest health practices are the least active in implementing that knowledge in their lifestyle. In another study it was found that; "The two main barriers identified by the participants of this study were lack of time and stress. Medical students in their 3rd, 4th and final year have to attend all-night calls at least once per week, or stay up late, studying leading to sleep deficits. Most medical students do not get time to exercise and eat healthier meals due to the demands of their studies and clinical rotations in the respective wards. Hence medical students are unable to translate knowledge into better practices due to the above

mentioned barriers."² Positive psychological outputs like hope and motivation lead to efficient work outcomes. ³Hence it is imperative for medical students to feel good so that they can perform well.

This study is focused on medical students in an attempt to evaluate how medical students on the basis of their knowledge and training perceive health with the aid of the questionnaire "What does being healthy mean to you", and the extent of the ironical gap between their ideals and their practices; in order to explore, discuss and train them about the wide variation in people's concept of health so that they are well equipped with the tools of health promotion when they move towards their own clinical practice.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A probability sample of 100 subjects was picked from a routine lecture session being conducted in the Department of Community Medicine at Sindh Medical College, Dow University of Health Sciences, Karachi.

A simple random sampling, including every alternate student was used.

Table 1: What does being healthy mean to you?

Serial	Statements	Frequency
1	Enjoy being with my family and friends	21
2	Living to a ripe old age	5
3	Feeling happy most of the time	12
4	Knowing a job	1
5	Hardly ever taking tablets or medicines	1
6	Being the ideal weight for my height	9
7	Taking regular exercise	6
8	Feeling at peace with myself	13
9	Never smoking	3
10	Never suffering from anything more than a mild cold, flue or stomach upset	1
11	Not getting things confused or out of proportion assessing situations realistically	1
12	Being able to adapt easily to big changes in my life such moving a house or new job	0
13	Drinking only moderate amounts of alcohol or none at all	0
14	Enjoying my words without too much stress	0
15	Having all the parts of my body in good working condition	15
16	Getting on well with other people most of the time	1
17	Eating the "right" food	6
18	Enjoying some form of relaxation or recreation	1
19	None	4
	Total	100

Inclusion Criteria: all students both male and female, batch of fourth year MBBS, age group app. 20 to 22 years, no prior information about the topic of research was disclosed. Any student found discussing answers among themselves or copying each other's work were to be excluded.

A structured questionnaire adapted from text 3⁴ (Table 1) was selected to stimulate thought and discussion, as there may not be any right answers,

Individual views were registered.

100 students were asked to respond to the given questionnaire. The rationale was to find out; 'What does Being Healthy Mean to you'? Out of a total of 19 questions, students were to choose 6 statements and arrange them in order of importance.

RESULTS

Table 1, 2, and 3 show the cumulative result of the survey 'what does 'Being Healthy' mean to you?

DISCUSSION

Feeling at peace with oneself is the psychological aspect of health and it is eventually the state that every individual no matter which socio-economic status, religion, geographical distribution he belongs to, craves for in life. But how many of us health care practitioners have ever thought outside the box and included this in our definition of health? The younger generation has rightly included this as a part of one's health and shown that medicine is beyond prescribing drugs and performing surgery. It is part of a doctor's job to attentively listen to their patients and cater to their psychological needs simultaneously. Further research also reinstates this finding; "The first level dealt with the possibility of living a fairly comfortable life. The second level was concerned with positive self-esteem and the third and most crucial one described the existence or non-existence of a mental state of mind defined as **peace of mind**."⁸ Another author states "recent research has demonstrated that perception of injustice at work

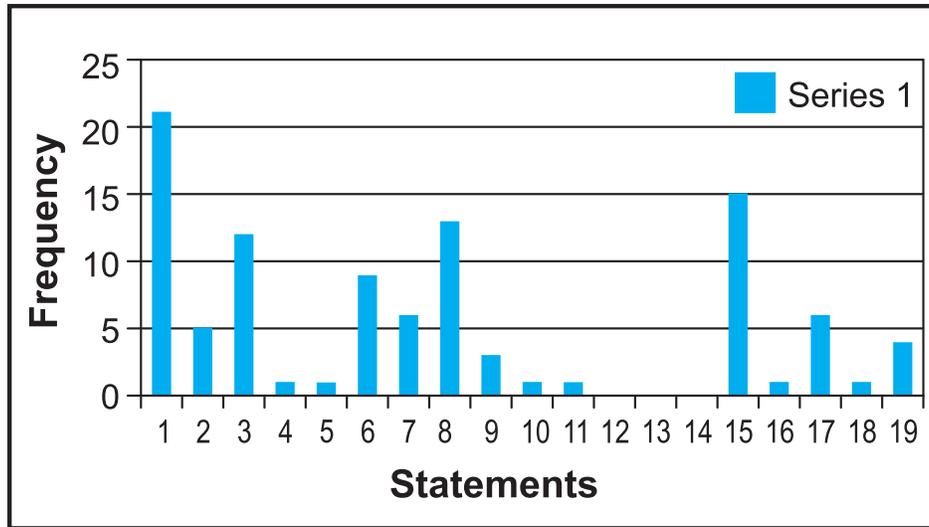


Fig. 1: Bar chart showing students' responses.

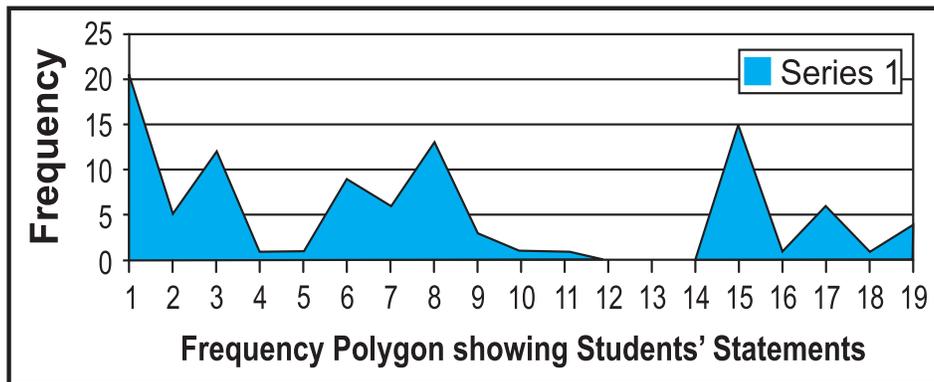


Fig. 2: Frequency polygon showing students' statements.

may increase psychological health related problems.”⁹

There is an unrealized potential in public health practice for frequent and extensive use of research- based information. Public Health was recently described as being ‘everywhere and nowhere’ This image captures the idea that a range of social, environmental and physiological influences shapes public health, thus the dimensions of health can be explored by a holistic approach. Therefore people viewed as a complex individual whose lifestyle, opinions, environment, relationships and stressors are unique to them and greatly affect the presence of or absence of health and illness. The holistic approach of health promotion relies upon internal motivation- what inspires and give joy- as opposed to external motivation, such as fear, incentives and rewards.

For a better understanding of health, ‘models of health’ in reference to a psychologist, sociologist and biomedical scientists’

‘Health psychologists view mind and the body as two parts of a whole human being that cannot be considered independently. ‘If one aspect of the whole is sick it affects the health of the rest. All that is psychological is first physiological’² –Roger Sperry a bio-psychologist says that since mind appears to reside in the brain, all thoughts, feelings and behaviors ultimately have a physical and biological cause.

Sociologists locate sources of ill health in the material and social domains which lay emphasis on the relationship between health status and social indicators such class, ethnicity and gender. People believe that the so-called ‘lifestyle factors’ such as smoking, exercise and an imbalanced diet have an ill effect on health.

The doctors believe in the ‘biomedical model’ that seeks to diagnose and explain ill health in terms of a malfunction of the body’s internal biological mechanism. The body is looked upon as if it were a machine made up of individual parts that

fit together and function like clockwork, all of them interdependent. The biomedical approach of most of the medical services focuses on the internal working of the body, and generally precludes consideration of 'outside' social, economical and environmental factors.

Health is thus intrinsically holistic and we 'violate its richness when we focus only on biomedical defined conditions.³ Health is inherently a social phenomenon embodying the quality of our relationships with one another'. As stated by research "individuals in stressful situations persons with negative affectability experience more heightened physiological arousal than low in negative affectability."

CONCLUSION

In nutshell, this study was aimed to uncover the hidden psychological and social constructs of health in the minds of medical students. It was seen that despite being bombarded with technical medical jargon and being medical professionals, they do have a holistic and unbiased view about health, which did take the importance of social and psychological well being into consideration. Indeed health is not an isolated island of medicine and biology, instead it is an interminable sea of biopsychosocial depths, and our own medical students have preceded us in understanding that. Subjective well-being - that is people's evaluation of their lives in terms of both their thoughts, emotions and happiness contribute to the understanding of the philosophy and dimensions of health concepts.

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