

## Letter to the Editor

[The Editor is not responsible for the views expressed by the correspondents]

### Awareness of General Nursing Midwifery's (GNM) Students about Depression, Suicide and Mental illness

SIR, — Nursing, a crucial global healthcare profession, emphasizes mental and physical well-being. Nurses' pivotal role in healthcare, highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, includes significant contributions to mental health care by promoting well-being, providing psychiatric care, addressing psychological issues, and raising awareness<sup>1</sup>. Hence, the study aims to assess awareness among general nursing midwifery students regarding depression, suicide myths, and mental illness beliefs, recognizing the integral role of mental health in holistic healthcare.

This cross-sectional study, approved by the institutional ethics committee (JSS-SON/M/395/2023-24), was conducted at a tertiary care general hospital in Mysore by the Department of Psychiatry. It aimed to assess the awareness and knowledge of GNM program students regarding depression, suicide myths, and mental illness. A purposive sampling method targeted 120 final-year students, with 69 participating after obtaining written consent. A Google form link was used for a pre-designed semi-structured questionnaire, with instructions provided by the researcher. The tools included a socio-demographic data sheet. The semi-structured questionnaire measured awareness of depression and suicide, along with beliefs about mental illness. Validation involved consultation with three mental health experts.

Among 69 participants, mostly unmarried (85.15%) females (81.16%) from rural areas (69.57%), with parents having lower education (60.87%) and engaged in farming (53.62%). 91.30% had no family history of mental illness. Beliefs about depression varied, with 46.38% attributing it to recent misfortune and 62.32% viewing it as personal weakness. While most agreed depression is treatable, 28.99% believed in medication alone, 24.64% in counselling alone, and 68.12% in a combination. Views on depression and sadness differed (27.54% neutral, 34.78% agreed). Regarding mental illness beliefs, 47.83% associated it with past bad deeds, 42.03% with karma, and 60.87% disagreed about evil spirits causing it. 47.83% believed in the healing power of religious rituals and individuals. Concerning suicide, 60.87% thought talk does not lead to action, 59.42% believed suicidal individuals desire death, and 72.46% linked suicide to mental illness. Opinions on warning signs varied (53.62% without warning, 44.93% disagreed). 57.97% disagreed that improvement post-suicide attempt ensures safety, and 66.67% believed not all suicides can be prevented.

Participants exhibited diverse awareness of depression, resembling varied responses among Indian healthcare professionals<sup>2</sup>. Studies on nursing students and hospital staff showed moderate knowledge about depression<sup>3,4</sup>. The students likely gained insights from senior nursing professionals or classroom discussions during the COVID-19 pandemic, where their extensive involvement in patient care, especially for psychiatric conditions in COVID-19 patients, contributed to their understanding<sup>5</sup>. More than half of the students don't think mental illness comes from past deeds, karma, or evil spirits. They also believe religious practices aren't very helpful in treating mental illness. Recent studies show nursing students are active in community healthcare and mental health awareness, addressing stigma, stress, substance use, and suicide prevention<sup>6,7</sup>. Government programs, both national and local, along with community organizations, are helping students understand mental health better<sup>8</sup>. Nearly one-third of students are aware of suicide myths, contrasting with an Indian study where 86.4% of college

students lacked awareness<sup>9</sup>. Compared to general students, nursing students show mixed awareness<sup>10</sup>, with a lower knowledge reported in one study but relatively higher awareness in the current study. This variation may stem from nursing students' voluntary participation in suicide prevention activities and awareness programs<sup>11</sup>.

Studies delved into students' awareness and beliefs regarding depression, mental illness, and suicide myths. Limitations include a small sample size and the absence of inferential statistics. The current study noted diverse responses in students' awareness of depression and suicide, with a generally fair belief towards mental illness.

**Acknowledgement :** We thank the participants and institutions authorities who supported this study.

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