

KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS REGARDING MENTAL HEALTH AMONG UNDERGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS IN PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Background: Mental health literacy plays a vital role in nursing students' lives. It can help students in recognizing mental health conditions and seek professional help which can improve their academic performance. As a future healthcare professional, nurses must possess adequate knowledge to treat patients with mental health disorders. It has been observed that the mental health knowledge and awareness of most nursing students is insufficient, which needs more attention from educational and healthcare authorities.

Objective: The objective of this study is to assess the level of knowledge and awareness regarding mental health among

undergraduate student nurses in Peshawar.

Methods: This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional study with a sample size of 169 students. Convenient sampling technique was used. Data was collected using an adopted questionnaire and was analyzed using SPSS Version 22.

Results: Age of participants was between 20-28 on average. Majority of participants were male 152(89.9%), while females were 17(10.1%). Of the total 52% (88) showed higher level while 48% (81) showed lower level of knowledge. This study revealed that 74% (125) of the participants exhibited a high awareness level, while 26% (44) had a low awareness level.

Conclusion: The study concluded that level of knowledge and awareness regarding mental health is not adequate among the nursing students. Knowledge and awareness campaign must be started by colleges and government so that the mental health literacy of nursing students may be improved.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is an integral part of overall health and well-being.¹ According to WHO, health is complete well-being of a person including physical, social and mental health. It affects how people think, feel and interact with the world around them. When people understand mental health conditions, treatment options and preventive strategies, they can notice problems early. Early recognition gives them the chance to manage these issues before they become serious. Public awareness is very essential because it has a very significant impact on health.^{2,3} It also reduces stigma and encourages people to reach out for help when they need it. Personal beliefs are influenced by culture and life experiences.⁴

Globally, 1 billion people approximately have a mental health condition, affecting 1 in 7 people, yet majority of these people (71%) with severe mental disorders receive no care. Mental health receives just a small portion of total health budgets (2%) on average, with low-income countries spending even less and only 10-13 mental health workers per 100,000 people. Awareness is rising, as 62% across 31 countries reported stress affecting daily life, and 23% felt lonely often.⁵

Pakistan has one of the lowest psychiatrist/psychologist ratios at 0.19(19) per 100,000 people, with only 400 psychiatrists for over 240 million, and mental disorders affect 10-16% of the population, burdening 24 million people for urgent care. Mental health has over 4% of the disease burden, higher among women, but receives just 0.4% of the health budget. A Problem of cultural stigma and preference for spiritual healers is also there in Pakistan due poor knowledge and awareness.

Awareness campaigns, like WHO initiatives, are improving literacy but still resistance from people makes it even tougher.⁶

These beliefs affect how people view mental health and whether they feel comfortable seeking professional support. Nursing students' mental health carries even more weight. Their studies are demanding and clinical practice can be intense. They are often exposed to patient suffering and difficult situations.^{4,5} This exposure can create stress and anxiety which ultimately leads to depression.⁶

Limited mental health literacy and stigmatized beliefs make it harder for students to cope. Symptoms may be overlooked by themselves. When help is delayed, the consequences affect both the student and the larger clinical environment.^{6,7,8} Mental health knowledge is the ability to recognize mental health conditions and seek professional help for treatment and recovery. Research shows that interventions such as mental awareness can improve knowledge, reduce stigma and encourage students to seek professional help.⁶ In Pakistan, mental health nursing is taught only in the later years of education. Students in the early years therefore have little formal exposure to mental health education.^{9,10} Many begin clinical practice without a structured understanding of mental health. This gap shows why early and consistent education is so important. In Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa mental health knowledge and awareness among nursing students is not well studied. Low literacy levels cultural stigma and limited access to mental health services make it likely that issues go unnoticed. A study on mental health knowledge and awareness in this zone would provide valuable understanding. The findings of this study could help design culturally sensitive interventions and policies. They could improve student knowledge, well-being and strengthen the quality of healthcare in this region.^{11,12}

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: To assess the level of knowledge regarding mental health and its awareness among undergraduate nursing students in selected colleges of Peshawar.

METHODOLOGY

The current study employed a descriptive cross-sectional study to collect data from nursing students of three private nursing colleges in Peshawar from September 2025 to November 2025. Convenient sampling technique was used to collect data from the participants through an adopted questionnaire. The sample size was calculated by Open Epi sample size calculator with a recommended sample size of 169 students with 95% of confidence interval. Inclusion criteria included all students who were enrolled in these three nursing colleges while those students who were not present or were not interested in participating were excluded from study.

Ethical approval and permission were taken before collecting data from the principals of the three nursing colleges that were included in the study. Participants were provided with informed consent and were given 40 minutes to fill in the questionnaire. The participants were briefed about the purpose of the study. The participation was voluntary. Data was collected using an adopted questionnaire.¹³ The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section contained 12 items related to knowledge regarding mental health and the second section contained 7 items related to awareness regarding mental health. The assessment of both knowledge and awareness consisted of two levels low level < 8 and high level ≥ 8 for knowledge and for awareness low level < 5 and high level ≥ 5 with 80% cutoff point. Data were analyzed by using SPSS (Version 22); descriptive statistics such as percentages and were calculated for demographic variables and level of knowledge and awareness.

RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS:

Age of participants was between 20-28 on average. Majority of participants were male 152(89.9%), while females were 17(10.1%). The demographic details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of participants

Gender	Frequency	% age
Male	152	89.9
Female	17	10.1
	169	100

Table 2: Knowledge items regarding mental health

		Correct n (%)	Incorrect n (%)
1	Children of mentally ill patients may also develop mental illness	149 (88%)	20 (12%)
2	Most mental disorders cannot be cured	95 (56%)	74 (44%)
3	OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) is one of the psychological problems	142 (84%)	27 (16%)
4	One of the symptoms of depression is the loss of interest or pleasure in most things	140 (83%)	29 (17%)
5	These are considered very effective methods	149 (88%)	20 (12%)
6	A person with anxiety disorder may panic or try to avoid situations that she/he fears	145 (86%)	24 (14%)
7	Mental disorders don't affect people's feelings, behaviors, or thoughts	125 (74%)	44 (26%)
8	People with mental disorders come from poor families	127 (75%)	42 (25%)
9	Suicidal behavior or thinking or suicidal attempt is one of the psychological problems	142 (84%)	27 (16%)
10	Because of bullying or abuse one can develop psychological problems	118 (70%)	51 (30%)
11	Middle-aged individuals are unlikely to develop psychological problems	100 (59%)	69 (41%)

12	Doing something enjoyable helps to improve mental health	148 (88%)	21 (12%)
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Overall Level of knowledge regarding mental health:

Of the total 169 participants, 52% (88) of the participants had high level of knowledge while 48% (81) of the level demonstrated lower level of knowledge. **(Figure 1)**

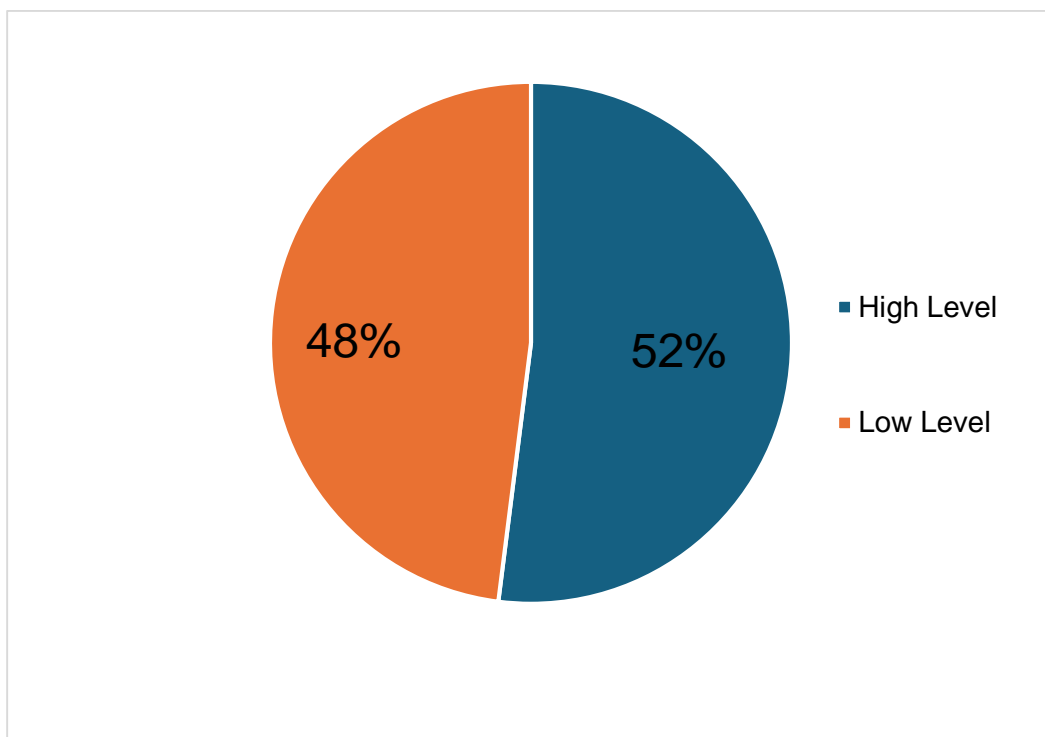


Figure 1: Knowledge Level of Participants

Table 3: Awareness items regarding mental health

		Correct n (%)	Incorrect n (%)
1	By coming in contact with or living with mentally ill person, one become mentally ill.	72 (43)	97 (57)
2	People who are aware of their psychological problems are willing to seek professional help	142 (84)	27 (16)
3	If I had recognized that, I have a mental disorder I would seek my family's help or go to a psychiatrist.	135 (80)	34 (20)
4	If a friend of mine developed a mental disorder, I would listen to her/him without judging or criticizing.	130 (80)	39 (20)
5	Everyone has responsibility for preventing suicides among persons with psychological or psychiatric problems.	150 (89)	19 (19)
6	Family members should observe mentally sick persons whether they are taking medications properly help or go to a psychiatrist.	139 (82)	30 (18)
7	If a friend of mine developed a mental disorder, I would offer her/him support.	144 (85)	25 (15)

Overall Level of awareness regarding mental health:

This study revealed that 74% (125) of the participants exhibited a high awareness level, while 26% (44) had a low awareness level; this indicates that a large majority of nursing students were familiar with mental health concepts and recognized the importance of mental well-being in both personal and professional settings. (**Figure 2**)

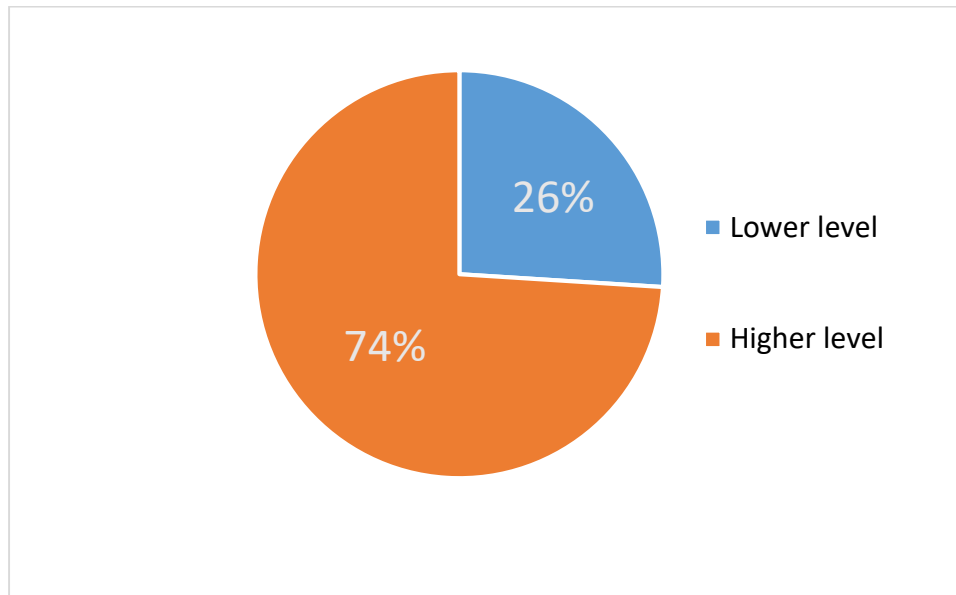


Figure 2: Awareness Level of Participants

DISCUSSION

This study revealed that 52% of the participants had a higher level of knowledge regarding mental health, while 48% possessed lower level of knowledge. This indicates that even though over half of the participants have adequate understanding of mental health concepts, a considerable proportion still lacks adequate knowledge of mental health conditions, its risk factors, and treatment options. A Similar research study conducted in Bangladesh reveals 62% of participants possessed high mental health knowledge and 38% of the participants showed low mental health knowledge, which is significantly comparable to our study suggesting that regional and cultural stigmas may play a role in shaping student mental health literacy.¹³ Another study was conducted in Karachi, showed that 20% of the participants had poor knowledge, 50% of the participants had average knowledge and 30% of the participants had good knowledge regarding mental health.¹⁴ On the other hand, the total awareness score reflected a more positive trend as compared to total knowledge score. 74% of the participants possessed a high level of mental health awareness, whereas only 26% had low level of mental health awareness. This suggests that most students are becoming gradually more conscious of mental health issues. They are now more able to recognize

emotional distress and are open to seeking professional help. The high awareness levels are the result of growing exposure to mental health campaigns, social media advertisements, and gradual shifts in social perceptions and attitudes toward mental illness. A similar study conducted in China, showed increased awareness and reduced stigma in college students after providing them mental health education.¹⁵

IMPLICATIONS

This study is very important for nursing students and nurses because nurses are considered as the backbone of the hospital and healthcare. The knowledge level of a nurse can directly impact patients' delivery of care either positively or negatively. Limited knowledge can have a bad impact on the delivery of care to the patient. Every nurse should have adequate knowledge as it can have a positive impact on the health of patients. The findings of this study conclude that nursing students across Peshawar have limited knowledge regarding mental health issues. Based on the findings of our study, nursing colleges and educational authorities should include mental health related topics earlier in the curriculum. Nursing colleges should combine regular classes with educational activities like workshops, seminars, and clinical training. This will ultimately improve mental health literacy among students, which will further help them in stress management and stay focused on their studies.

Educational authorities like PNC and HEC should make mental health education a compulsory part of the nursing curriculum across Pakistan. Colleges and hospitals should also collaborate to run mental health awareness campaigns and clinical workshops for students and healthcare workers. More studies on mental health knowledge and awareness should be conducted in different regions of Pakistan so that we can compare the mental health literacy of different regions and take steps to improve it.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

This study included a limited sample of 169 students from only three private nursing colleges in Peshawar. This sample size may not represent full picture of the nursing students present in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa and Pakistan. So, the findings of this study cannot be associated to all students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other provinces of Pakistan.

STUDY STRENGTHS

This study holds a significance because it is the first study in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in which mental health knowledge and awareness of nursing students is assessed. This study can bring significant changes in nursing education and policy making, improve the teaching methods in nursing colleges, add more content related to mental health in curriculum, and improve the delivery of care to patients in healthcare settings.

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that more than half of the participants had higher knowledge while majority of the participants had higher awareness regarding mental health. Awareness level of many students was higher but the knowledge level compared to awareness was lower for which more efforts should be made by the colleges because having adequate knowledge about mental health is essential for studies and daily life activities. Awareness campaigns should be started by government in different sites like schools, colleges, factories, communities etc. so that people will have more knowledge and awareness regarding mental health conditions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are suggested to improve mental health knowledge and awareness among nursing students. Nursing colleges should give high importance to mental health. Mental health awareness campaigns, mental health knowledge workshops, and guest lectures by healthcare professionals should be arranged to improve students' mental health literacy and reduce stigma. Additionally, student-counseling centers or appoint trained counselors should also be organized to support students facing stress, anxiety, or other mental health challenges. Educational authorities should include mental health related topics in curriculum in the earlier years of the

nursing program. This will help students build a strong base and understanding regarding mental health conditions.

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