# A Study on Knowledge, Beliefs and Attitude towards Mental Illness among Family Members of Mentally Ill Patients

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**Background**

Mental illness has a social stigma attached to it and many patients especially their families suffer from shame, guilt and hopelessness in the context of Nepal. All aspects of mental illness from recognition of symptoms, treatment adherence to rehabilitation are influenced by stigma of that illness. Knowledge, beliefs and attitude of family members are paramount since they are directly involved in the care and management of mentally ill patients.

**Methods**

A structured multi-choice questionnaire with 38 items scored on Likert scale was administered in the form of an interview to a total of 50 subjects selected by non-probability convenient sampling technique attending the psychiatric out-patient department in B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Science, Dharan. The scores for each item were summed and the rage, mean and standard deviation of the scores were tabled for each concept. Analysis of variance and correlation were used to test the statistical significance of difference between the mean scores.

**Results**

The study revealed that most of the patients whose family members were included in the study were Schizophrenic followed by depression, mania, bipolar affective disorder, psychosis and obsessive compulsive disorder in decreasing order. However majority of the respondents were male falling into the age group of 20-30 years and belonged to the major hill caste. The study further revealed that the respondent's level of knowledge was good on aspects concerning the cause and treatment of mental illness. Although some prejudices in relation to the traditional approaches to treatment were evident among the subjects, most of them verbalized a negative response to some of the culturally defined norms and stigma associated with mental illness. The level of the burden of the respondents differed in several aspects and found to increase significantly among those holding more negative beliefs towards mental illness.

**Conclusions**

Efforts are required to be taken to reduce social distance and rehabilitate the mentally ill patients in the community. These efforts should be directed towards raising public awareness and dispelling stereotypes in this area as negative beliefs are bound to affect the social support system as well as help seeking behavior of mentally ill patients.

**Keywords:** attitude; beliefs; knowledge; mental health; mental health services; mental illness; stigma.