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Research Article

KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES OF CAREGIVERS TOWARDS PSYCHIATRIC PATIENTS VISITING JHL

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Abstract:

Background: The rate of mental disorders is on the rise around the world and seeing this development, mental health is a priority in health policies in developed countries. Developing countries such as Pakistan however, have failed to realize the importance of providing government support towards this aspect of the health sector. As a result it is seen that there is a general lack of awareness and education towards the management of these conditions among the general public.

Objective: The objective of this research is to assess the predominant viewpoint that exists towards mental illness in Pakistan by recording the prevalent knowledge, attitudes and practices among the general public.

Material and Methods: Descriptive Study (Purposive). The study was conducted at Jinnah Hospital located on Allama Shabbir Ahmad Usmani Road, Lahore. All male and female caregivers of psychiatric patients coming to psychiatry ward and OPD Jinnah Hospital, Lahore. Caregivers of patients who were suffering from a condition other than psychiatric illness.

Results: A significant percentage of caregivers (45.0%) were previously unaware of the condition that their patients were diagnosed with. More than 40.0% of the caregivers felt that the main problem they faced was psychological stress from their relatives. A large percentage (38%) of the caregivers believed in supernatural beliefs such as evil spirits, sorcery and astrological influences as the cause of psychiatric illnesses. The majority of caregivers (73%) preferred non pharmacological therapy through the help of psychologists rather than medicine (12%) and peers and fakeers (10%).

Conclusions: Results of the study confirm that there is a lack of awareness and knowledge about mental illnesses seen in the general public. The presumption that there is a social stigma attached with mental illness is confirmed. Supernatural beliefs such as evil spirits, sorcery and astrological influences are common in caregivers of patients with psychiatric illnesses. Caregivers prefer non pharmacological therapy through the help of psychologists rather than medicines or peers and fakeers.

Key words: Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices, Caregivers, Psychiatric patients.

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INTRODUCTION:

The rate of increase of mental disorders is on the rise¹ and seeing this development, mental health is a priority in health policies in developed countries around the world. In contrast, developing countries do not place mental health as an important issue in their agenda. As a result it is seen that there is a general lack of awareness and knowledge about mental illnesses seen in the public. Most people are unaware of the signs and symptoms of these illnesses and are not sure about where they have to take their relatives when such an illness is encountered. The stigma and negative attitude associated with mental illnesses is common worldwide and is a big cause for concern as it can add to the suffering and disability associated with mental disorders². The general perception among people in developing countries is that these patients are emotionally and mentally weak individuals in the society. In the subcontinent, this stigma is so severe that a person diagnosed with a mental illness is perceived as bringing shame to the family. People believe that patients with psychiatric illnesses are incapable of leading normal healthy lives and cannot progress in their careers or earn well. This usually affects their marriage potential as well as society starts to place a lack of trust towards these individuals³.

The view in developed countries is different from developing countries, where people are generally more supportive towards psychiatric patients which appears to be due to provision of better education facilities among the masses. It is true that living with psychiatric patients is very burdensome for family members and this does result in emotional, social and financial problems for the caregivers⁶. The caregivers develop different coping strategies to deal with the situation¹¹. A healthy coping style can improve the status of the patient while an unhealthy coping style is likely to worsen the condition¹². The coping mechanism investigated in this study is religious inclination of the caregiver as an aftereffect of psychiatric illness of the relative.

Regarding knowledge about mental illness, supernatural beliefs such as evil spirits, sorcery and astrological influences are common in patients with psychiatric illnesses¹³. This belief varies around the globe depending upon factors such as education as well as religious and cultural beliefs.

In developing countries such as Pakistan, where education is not yet prevalent among the masses, these beliefs still widely prevail and affect the view the population has towards causes of psychiatric illnesses even in urban centres¹⁴. However in developed countries such as China, people are starting to negate superstitious and supernatural beliefs such as witchcrafts and curses. This is due to

increased modern secular education and increase in secular humanistic values throughout the world¹⁵. The knowledge, attitudes and beliefs that caregivers have towards psychiatric illnesses determine the mode of treatment that the caregivers would choose for the patient. In Pakistan, in the past it has been seen that caregivers have shown skepticism towards taking psychiatric medications and prefer either psychotherapy or traditional treatment methods for patients with psychiatric illnesses. These include dam durood, quacks, taweez and homeopathic treatment¹⁷.

OBJECTIVES:

The objective of this research is to assess the predominant viewpoint that exists towards mental illness in Pakistan by recording the knowledge, attitudes and practices of caregivers. These statistics could be used to raise awareness among the masses and tackle the stigma that exists widely. Caregivers can be educated on how to manage psychiatric patients and how to react delicately in the situation when a family member is diagnosed with a mental illness.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION:

- **Knowledge:** Facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject.
- **Attitude:** An attitude is an expression of favor or disfavor toward a person, place, thing, or event.
- **Practices:** The actual application or use of an idea, belief, or method, as opposed to theories relating to it.
- **Psychiatric illness:** Behavioral or mental pattern that may cause suffering or a poor ability to function in life.
- **Caregivers:** A caregiver is an unpaid or paid person who helps another individual with an impairment with his or her activities of daily living.

MATERIAL AND METHODS:**STUDY DESIGN:**

- Descriptive study (purposive)

STUDY SETTING:

- The study was conducted at Jinnah Hospital, Lahore located on Allama Shabbir Ahmad Usmani Road, Lahore

DURATION OF STUDY:

- 4 months (April-July 2016)

SAMPLE SIZE:

- 100 caregivers of psychiatric patients coming to psychiatry ward and OPD Jinnah Hospital, Lahore

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE:

- Non probability / purposive sampling

SAMPLE SELECTION:**Inclusion criteria:**

- All male and female caregivers of psychiatric patients coming to psychiatry ward and OPD Jinnah hospital, Lahore

Exclusion criteria:

- Caregivers of patients who were suffering from a condition other than psychiatric illness.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE:

- All male and female caregivers of psychiatric patients who met our inclusion criteria

were included in our study. Informed consent was taken and assurance was given of confidentiality. Following parameters were noted through questionnaire of all caregivers of psychiatric patients included in the study; personal and social demographic data such as age, gender, education and occupation, knowledge about disease, treatment options, attitude towards their patients, the feelings and distress they face and the different practices they have adopted. All the information was entered in a semi-structured questionnaire.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE:

- The data was entered and analyzed by computer software SPSS version 16.

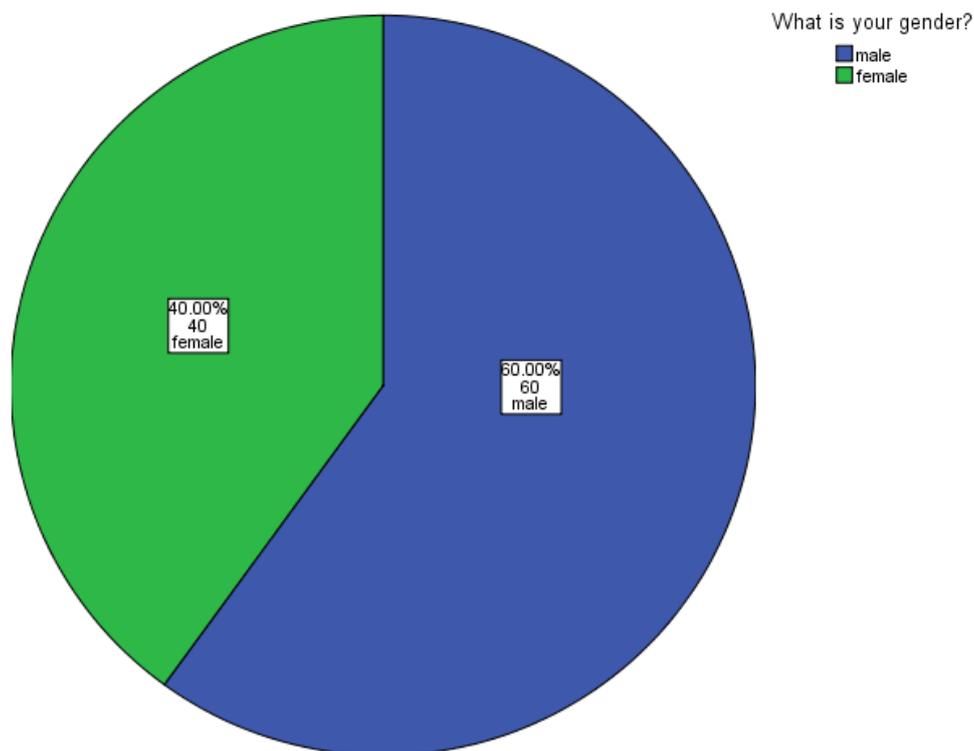
RESULTS AND MAIN FINDINGS:

Fig. 1: Percentage of males and females included in the study

What is your age?

Table 1: Age of the respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	20-30	36	36.0
	31-40	30	30.0
	41-50	19	19.0
	51-60	15	15.0
	Total	100	100.0

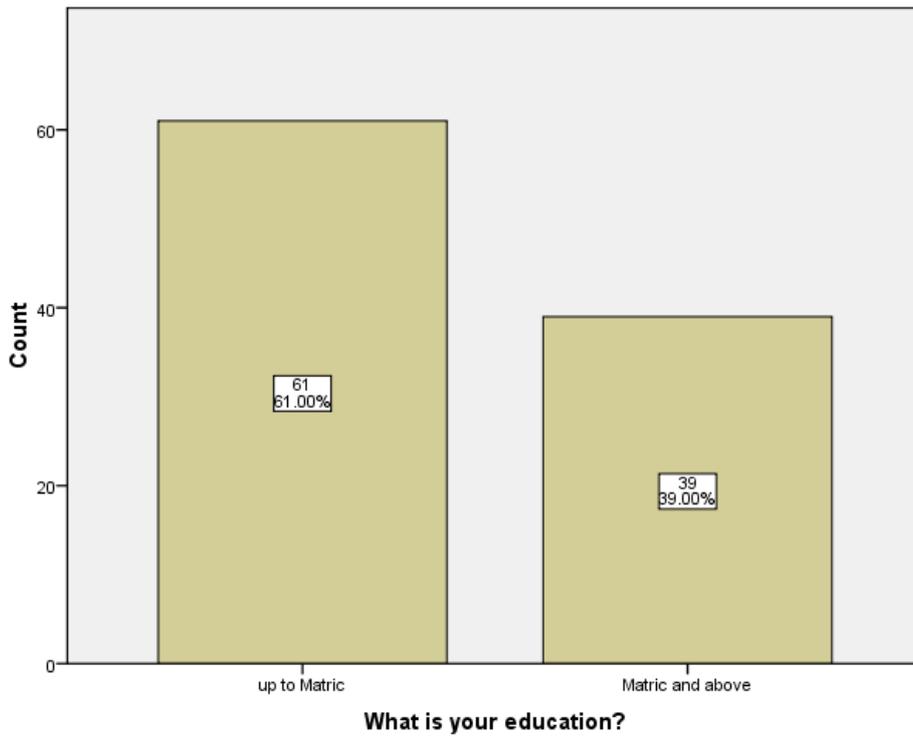


Fig. 2: Educational status of caregivers included in the study

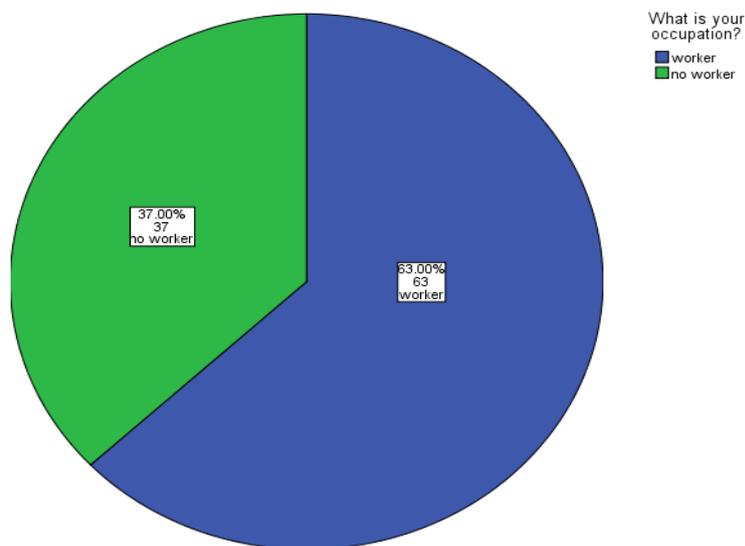


Fig. 3: Occupational status of caregivers included in the study
Table 2: Caregiver's awareness of the condition

		Have you ever heard of this condition before?	
		Frequency	Frequency
Valid	yes	55	55
	no	45	45
	Total	100	100

Caregiver perception Frequencies

		Responses (N)	Percent of Cases
Caregiver perception	Do you think your patient is capable of earning?	25	25
	Do you think your patient can lead a happy married life?	22	22
	Do you take them to your relative's place?	26	26
	Do you think your patient is a burden on you?	14	14

Table 3: Caregiver's perception about the quality of life of the patients

Caregiver perception according to education Cross tabulation

	What is your education?		Total
	up to Matric	Matric and above	
Do you think your patient can live a happy married life? % within education	Count 12 20.0%	Count 10 26.3%	22
Do you take them to your relatives place? % within education	Count 14 23.3%	Count 12 31.6%	26
Do you think your patient capable of earning? % within education	Count 14 23.3%	Count 11 28.9%	25

Table 4: Caregiver's perception about the quality of life of the patients classified according to educational status.

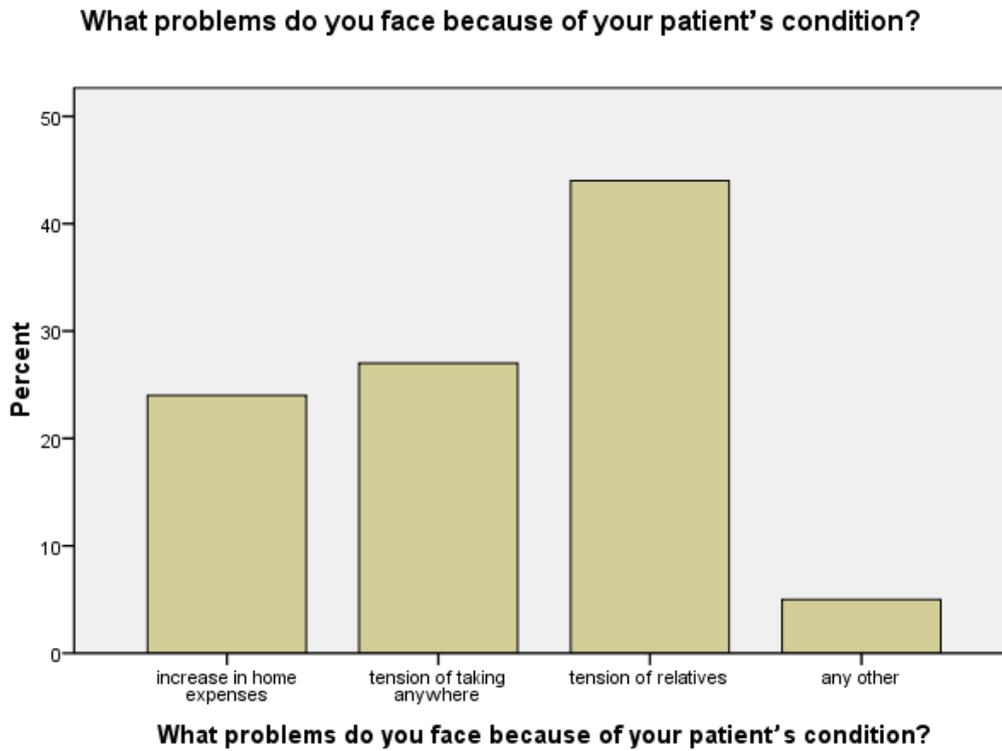


Fig. 4: Problems faced by the caregiver's as a result of their patient's condition.

Caregiver perception Frequencies

		Responses (N)	Percent of Cases
Caregiver perception	Do you think this problem is influenced by witchcrafts or any supernatural phenomenon	38	38

Table 5: Caregiver's belief in supernatural phenomena as a cause of the illness

Caregiver perception according to education Cross tabulation

		What is your education?		Total
		up to Matric	Matric and above	
Caregiver perception ^a	Do you think this problem is influenced by witchcrafts or any supernatural phenomenon	Count 27 45.0%	Count 11 28.9%	38

Table 6: Caregiver's belief in supernatural phenomena as a cause of the illness classified according to educational status

Do you think you have become closer to God since you know your patient's condition?

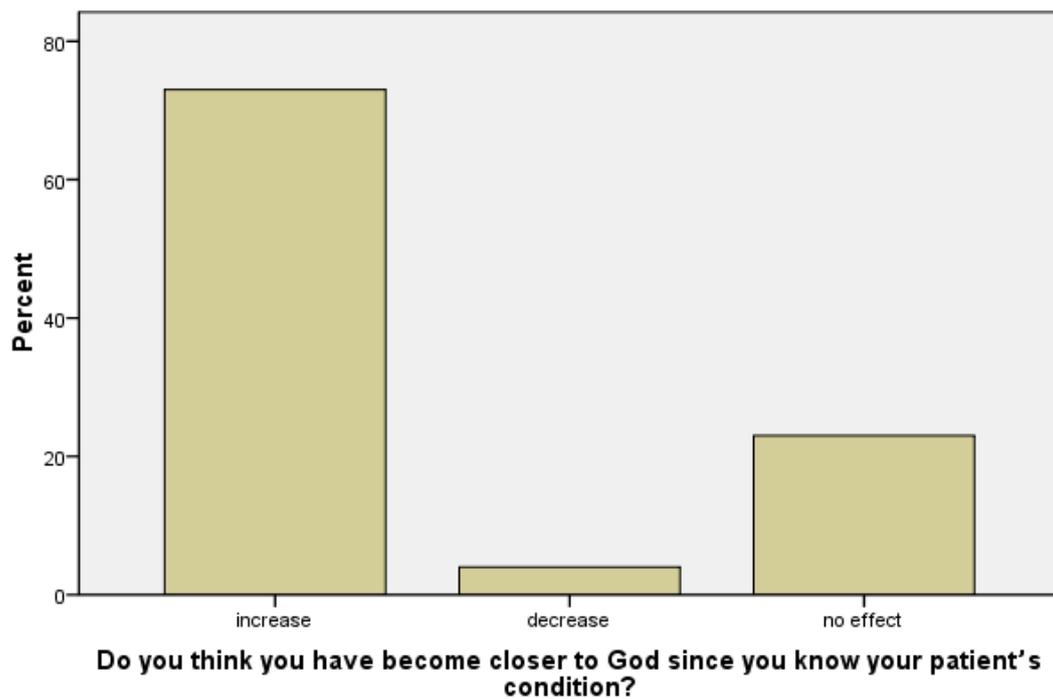


Fig. 5: Caregiver's religious inclination after patient's illness

What in your opinion is the best treatment?

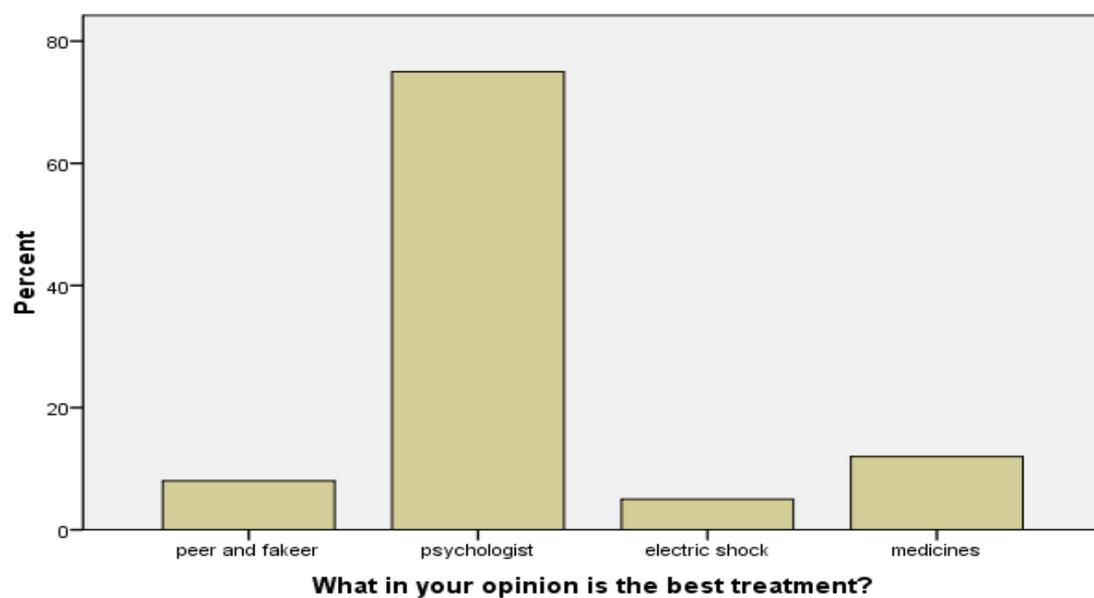


Fig. 6: Caregiver's opinion about the best mode of treatment

Table 7: Caregiver's confidence in the treatment of the disease

		Is this condition treatable?	
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	yes	93	93.0
	no	7	7.0
Total		100	100.0

RESULTS:

A total of 100 primary caregivers were selected, consented and told to fill out a questionnaire. Most of the caregivers were males (60.0%). Females were 40.0% (Fig. 1). 66% of the respondents were between the ages of 20 – 40 years (Table 1). More than 60 % of the caregivers had no formal education (Fig. 2).

A significant percentage of caregivers (45.0%) were previously unaware of the condition that their patients were diagnosed with (Table 2).

More than 40.0% of the caregivers felt that the main problem they faced was psychological stress from their relatives (Fig. 4).

Other problems such as increase in home expenses and the problem of taking the patient out with them were also significant.

The social pressure was such that only 26.0% of caregivers took their patients to their relatives' place (Table 3). This attitude was seen to be more prevalent among people who had only studied up to matric (23.0%) (Table 4). There was a lesser proportion of people (31.0%) with education further than matric who were hesitant towards taking their patients to their relatives place (Table 4).

Few families (14.0%) admitted that their patients were a burden on their lives which shows that families are generally supportive towards their patients (Table 3).

22.0% of the caregivers believed that their patients were capable of living happy married lives (Table 3). People with higher education were more adherent to this view (26%) as compared to patients without higher education (20%) (Table 4). 25% of the caregiver's believed that their patients were capable of earning (Table 3). This question also got a varied response from the respondents as people with higher education who agreed with this statement were 28% while patients without higher education came out to be 23% (Table 4).

A large percentage (38%) of the caregivers believed in supernatural beliefs such as evil spirits, sorcery and astrological influences as the cause of psychiatric illnesses (Table 5). This view was largely present in caregivers who were uneducated as 45% of the uneducated people in the study adhered to this view (Table 6).

73% of caregivers were of the view that due to their patient's ill health they became more religious and sought divine help and patience through prayers (Fig. 5).

Caregivers were inquired about their preferred mode of treatment. 73% of the caregivers preferred non pharmacological therapy through the help of psychologists and 12% chose medicines as the best option (Fig. 6). The number of caregivers preferring the methods employed by peers and fakeers was seen to be significantly low (10%).

Majority of the patients (93%) were of the opinion that the condition that their patient was suffering from was treatable (Table 7).

DISCUSSION:

This study aimed at assessing the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the caregivers of patients suffering from mental illnesses.

Results of the study confirm that there is a lack of awareness and knowledge about mental illnesses seen in the general public. According to the study, a significant percentage of caregivers (45%) were previously unaware of the condition that their patients were diagnosed with. This is in contrast to developed countries such as Italy⁵ where a study showed that 98% of the participants were aware of psychiatric illnesses such as depression.

The presumption that there is a social stigma attached with mental illness was confirmed. Results showed the majority of caregivers believed that their patients were incapable of leading normal, healthy lives or were able to improve their quality of life.

According to caregivers, the biggest problem they faced in their patient's condition was the social pressure they had to experience from their relatives and few (26%) even took their patients to their relatives' place which showed that caregivers did not prefer to expose their mentally ill patients to their relatives because of this negative attitude.

This stigmatizing attitude of caregivers has been previously documented in studies conducted in India¹² and Iran⁶.

This was seen to be more prevalent among people who had only studied upto matric showing that respondents with higher education dealt with their patient's illness in a more responsible way.

Supernatural beliefs such as evil spirits, sorcery and astrological influences are common in caregivers of patients with psychiatric illnesses. The results of the study showed that a large percentage (38%) of the caregivers believed in these phenomena as a cause of the disease.

The results were similar to a research conducted in India where 58% of the participants believed in magico-religious beliefs as a cause of the illness¹³. A similar study conducted in Lahore; Pakistan confirmed the same results¹⁴. These beliefs were seen to be largely present in caregivers who were uneducated as 45% of the uneducated people in the study adhered to this view. However, in China, a study showed that people are starting to negate superstitious and supernatural beliefs such as witchcrafts and curses. This is due to increased modern secular education and increase in secular humanistic values throughout the world particularly in developed countries¹⁵.

Patients deal with the psychological stress of their patients' illness by different coping strategies, most common of which is resorting to prayers. 73% of caregivers were of the view that due to their patient's ill health they became more religious and sought divine help and patience through prayer. Inclination towards religion in caregivers in order to cope with the psychiatric illness of their relative has been documented in researches carried out in India¹², Ghana¹⁷ and Nigeria⁸.

It has been seen and documented in the past that there is a large proportion of people in Pakistan who believe that mental illnesses are due to spirits and demons and that the treatment for these conditions is by taking the patient to peers and fakeers. Therapeutic treatment has been seen with skepticism in the past. However, this study pointed otherwise. The number of caregivers preferring the methods employed by peers and fakeers was seen to be significantly low. Instead, 73% of the caregivers

preferred non pharmacological therapy through the help of psychologists. People did not place a lot of confidence over the use of pharmacological intervention for therapy as only 12% chose medicines as the best option. In developed countries such as Italy, Spain, Austria, and Brazil psychologists are generally seen as first-choice help for depression problems⁵. A similar study conducted in Lahore showed similar results indicating that a greater proportion of patients preferred medical therapy rather than treatment through traditional means.¹⁴

A positive thing seen was that caregivers were optimistic about the health of their patients and the majority of them (93%) were of the opinion that the condition that their patient was suffering from was treatable. It is imperative to note here that the study was held in a hospital atmosphere and the respondents consisted of caregivers who had been bringing their patients to the hospital and consented for the study. Thus, this included a motivated group.

CONCLUSION:

- Results of the study confirm that there is a lack of awareness and knowledge about mental illnesses seen in the general public.
- The presumption that there is a social stigma attached with mental illness is confirmed.
- Supernatural beliefs such as evil spirits, sorcery and astrological influences are common in caregivers of patients with psychiatric illnesses.
- Caregivers prefer non pharmacological therapy through the help of psychologists.
- Caregivers do not place a lot of confidence over the use of pharmacological intervention for therapy or in peers and fakeers.

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