



Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices towards Psychotropic Medications among Undergraduates: A Cross-sectional Study at University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka

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University students are a vulnerable population for psychiatric disorders due to the increased mental health challenges they face. Psychotropic medications play a crucial role in managing psychiatric disorders among university students. The present study is a cross-sectional survey to assess knowledge, attitudes, and practices towards psychotropic medications among 959 undergraduates from the University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka. Data were collected using a pre-validated self-administered questionnaire. The prevalence of current use of psychotropic medications among undergraduates was 3.8%, while 7.8% of participants had used them at some point in their lifetime. Male students showed significantly higher use of psychotropic medications (6.0%) compared to female students (2.6%) ($p = 0.010$). The mean knowledge score was 48.71 ± 18.77 out of 101 points, with 70% of students rating their knowledge as low or very low. The mean attitude score was 42.26 ± 3.93 out of 60 points; however, 54.2% of participants opposed the use of psychotropic medications as a therapeutic approach. The mean practice score was extremely low (1.99 ± 6.26 out of 36 points) due to the low number of users of psychotropic medications. However, the findings were alarming, with 7.3% of participants using psychotropic medications without prescriptions, 7.6% misusing them, and 45.7% showing abrupt discontinuation of medications. Multivariate analysis revealed that knowledge of psychotropic medications was significantly affected by gender ($p = 0.026$), faculty of enrollment ($p < 0.001$), academic year ($p = 0.003$), and parental profession ($p = 0.047$), while age ($p = 0.027$) and hometown ($p = 0.007$) affected practices. Gender was a significant factor affecting attitudes towards psychotropic medications ($p = 0.029$), with female students showing a more positive attitude than their male counterparts. Weak correlations were observed among knowledge, attitudes, and practices domains towards psychotropic medications, indicating that these domains function independently in this study population. University of Ruhuna undergraduates demonstrated moderate levels of knowledge, moderately positive but conflicted attitudes, and poor practices towards psychotropic medications. Significant knowledge gaps, conflicted attitudes, and unsafe medication practices highlight the need for health promotion initiatives regarding the use of psychotropic medications among Sri Lankan university students.

Keywords: Knowledge, Attitude, Practices, Psychotropic medications, Undergraduates, University of Ruhuna