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PSYCHIATRIC LITERACY AND THE PERSONALITY DISORDERS

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Introduction: This study explored the unknown psychiatric literacy of the public with regard to the Personality Disorders (PDs).

Objectives: To find out -

- i) Whether a lay person recognises the presence of a psychological problem in a person with a PD.
- ii) What labels lay people give to people living with PDs.
- iii) How lay people rate the quality of life of people living with PDs.
- iv) Whether a history of psychological education or illness improves a lay person's ability to identify a PD.

Aims: To assess how much work is needed to be done in order to increase public psychiatric literacy to a satisfactory level with regard to the PDs.

Methods: A vignette identification methodology was employed. 223 participants responded to the questionnaire 'Eccentric people'.

Results: Lay people recognise people with PDs as being unhappy, unsuccessful at work and as having poor personal relationships, but do not associate these problems with psychological causes. Rates of correct labelling were low; under 7% for 7/10 PDs. History of psychological education and illness were positively correlated with the correct recognition of 70% and 60% of the personality disorders respectively.

Conclusions: The psychiatric literacy of the public with regard to the PDs is low. This raises concerns about the health seeking behaviour and correct diagnosis of sufferers, as well as the stigma attached to them and their social neglect by others. Psychiatric literacy needs to be increased, psychological education achieves this. The media could be an effective tool to increase psychiatric literacy.