

The attitude of psychologists, psychiatrists, chronic psychiatric patients and ordinary viewers toward a TV series with the main character of a psychologist

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Popular TV series and sitcoms have received different reactions from people of different classes. The present study was conducted to measure the positive and negative attitudes of psychologists, psychiatrists, chronic psychiatric patients and ordinary healthy viewers toward an Iranian TV series entitled 'The Physicians' Building' whose main character was a psychologist.

Materials and Methods: The study tool was a researcher-made questionnaire that measured the attitude toward the mentioned TV series with 19 items based on Likert scale. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential tests. The participants were selected voluntarily and included 30 psychologists, 25 psychiatrists, 16 under-treatment psychiatric patients and 57 ordinary people (total of 128 participants).

Results: The results showed that in most cases, psychologists' opinion about the series was different from the other groups of participants ($P = .04$). Psychologists strongly emphasized on the bad influences of this TV series in the society ($P = .02$).

Conclusion: There was a significant difference between the attitudes of psychologists toward the studied TV series as compared to psychiatrists, psychiatric patients and ordinary people.

Keywords: broadcast media; TV series; psychologist character; Television; attitude.

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INTRODUCTION

The mass media play a key role in providing ideas and images which people use to interpret and understand much of their everyday experience.¹ Social learning theory and social-cognitive models address how individuals come to imitate the behavior they observe in the media, and to develop mental 'primes' and 'scripts' from the content that is viewed on television, which can then guide their afterward behavior.² Showing therapists in mass media can form the public image of therapists in a way that their behaviors and attitudes can be formed based on what the media have produced not what it actually is in reality.³

In terms of mental health the concepts such as illness, health and treatment are ambiguous and secretive for patients and their families. In some cases, it can be associated with legends, prejudgments and fear. In addition, treatments provided for these patients can also be linked to prejudgments, incorrect judgments and stigmatization.⁴ When negative thoughts have been formed for a group of people, others might not have good manners with them, they can be easily rejected, and their needs and rights be ignored. Therefore, their life becomes restricted and they lose the equal occupational and educational right.⁵

The public media have an impact on the attitude of the community regarding mental health and psychology.⁶ While some media psychiatrists consider TV programs as suitable tools for transferring information to the community, others presume they show a negative image of mental health study and treatment.⁷

Many studies show that media cannot improve the image of caregivers and patients, but project a negative image of them. For instance, Philo and colleagues have measured the public attitudes toward psychiatric patients and found that two-fifth of the case group believed that the mental illness is associated with violence.⁸ A study reported that those who had considered the media as the most effective tool for obtaining information have more negative attitudes toward mental illness.⁹ In another study, those who became familiar with mental illnesses through media were more scared than those who were in contact with psychiatric patients.¹⁰ Domino's study on 146 students watching "One flew over the cuckoo's nest" showed significant changes in them toward negative attitudes.¹¹ Even earlier studies have shown that people who formed negative ideas about mental disorders through media never gave up their judgments even when they were presented with evidences which opposed their ideas.¹² In a study, Jo Hand and Truant showed a movie that depicted a violent psychiatric patient to ordinary people. They found that the audience's evaluation of the dangers of psychiatric patients had significantly increased.¹³

In addition to showing psychiatric patients, showing the therapists on TV can also bring about negative attitudes. Bischoff and Reiter did content analysis on 61 movies of which pictured psychotherapists. They found that women therapists had tendency toward sexual matters and men were inefficient.¹⁴

In despite of the pessimism, today, there are still actors and producers that believe they use psychiatric patients and therapists in different TV programs in order to project realities of life and make it more attractive.¹⁵ 'The Physicians' Building' was a TV series with a psychologist as the main character which was premiered in 2011. Given the prominence of the main character's (Nima Afshar) job as a psychologist and his interactions in private and social life,¹⁶ we decided to study the effects of this character on the public, psychologists and psychiatrists. In addition, Nima's wife was an obsessive compulsive disorder patient. She met him during the treatment and married him after being treated. Therefore, the opinion of some chronic psychiatric patients was also taken about this TV series.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this survey study the population included ordinary people, psychologists, psychiatrists and chronic psychiatric patients. Overall, 142 people were selected by voluntarily, of whom 128 people filled the questionnaire completely and others were excluded from the final analysis.

Two questionnaires were used for this research: one for eliciting demographic data and another for assessing participants' attitudes toward the TV series. The first questionnaire included information about age, sex, marital status and education. The second questionnaire was researcher-made. In order to prepare this questionnaire, a checklist was written using brainstorming and the related issues and questions were noted by each researcher. Then, all items were gathered and evaluated. Repetitive and inappropriate items were omitted. In the next step, several faculty members of psychology and psychiatry cooperated to evaluate the items in terms of order, language and concept. Some items that were ignored by the researchers were added to the questionnaire. Then, expert panel confirmed the face and content validity of the questionnaire. Its reliability was measured by Cronbach's alpha as 0.76. The questionnaire was finalized with 19 items with Likert three point scale of 'yes' (agree), 'to some extent', and 'no' (disagree). The prepared questionnaires were given in an interview to each subject along with instructions for completing it. All participants signed an informed consent before participating in this study.

The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential tests. Descriptive indices such as distribution, mean and standard deviation and inferential indices of Chi square test were used the analysis took place in the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS Inc, Chicago, Illinois, USA) software version 17. *P* value less than .05 was considered significant.

RESULTS

Among the psychiatrist patients who completed the questionnaire, 61.8% were men, most of them were 26-45 years old and 71.3% were married. Most of the participants (63%) had bachelors or higher educational level.

In response to the question about the negative effect 'The Physicians' Building' TV series on the viewers, 64.9% of the psychologists emphasized on having bad effects while only 28.6% of psychiatrists and 26.6% of ordinary people had the same opinion. However, none of the chronic psychiatric patients responded positively to this question (*P* = .001). Contrary to the other three

groups that considered this TV series appropriate for +12 years old, 70% of psychologists did not recommend it for any age group ($P = .023$).

While 53.3% of psychologists considered the main character believable, only 16.7% found him acceptable. These figures were 84.6% and 42.9% for the psychiatrists. In response to another question that whether psychologists can actually treat a mentally ill person, 78.6% of the psychologists confirmed it, while 50% of psychiatrists, 65.1% of ordinary people and 56.1% of chronic psychiatric patients believed so ($P = .061$). About 7.1% of psychologists, 15% of psychiatrists and 16.9% of ordinary people believed that Nima Afshar was successful in treating his patients. However, none of the chronic psychiatric patients believed in this ($P = .13$). About 70% of psychologists, 50% of psychiatrists, 54.7% of ordinary people and 66.7% of patients did not find a similarity between treatment methods of psychologists in reality and those shown in the TV series ($P = .11$).

About 71.14% of psychologists believed that the series was not appropriate for broadcast in today's social conditions while about 25.4% of psychiatrists, 40.4% of ordinary people and 6.2% of patients shared the same opinion ($P = .02$). About 85.7% of psychologists, 92.9% of psychiatrists, 72.6% of ordinary people and 85.7% of psychiatric patients stated that watching this TV series did not change their opinion about psychologists ($P = .3$).

Another question was about improving public opinion about psychologists. Only 14.3% of psychologists agreed on this issue, but 43% of psychiatrists, 50% of ordinary people and 70% of the patients believed that this TV series played a great role in elevating public opinion about psychologists ($P = .03$).

While 71.4% of psychologists believed that watching this TV series reduces the number of patients in this field, only 10% of psychiatrists, 26.7% ordinary people and less than 6% of the psychiatric patients agreed with this idea ($P = .04$).

psychologists 66.7% believed that this TV series insulted psychologists, but only 21.4% of psychiatrists, 27.9% of ordinary people and 14.3% of patients shared this opinion ($P = .04$). However, 42.4% of psychologists, 23.1% of psychiatrists, 17.9% of ordinary people and 14.3% of the psychiatric patients believed it was an insult to physicians. Psychologists more than psychiatrists believed it insulted physicians ($P = .046$).

In response to the question that whether Nima Afshar was a real model of psychologists in Iran, 21.4% of psychologists, 21.4% of psychiatrists, 21.3% of ordinary people and 28.6% of psychiatric patients responded positively ($P = .2$) (Table 1).

DISCUSSION

According to Francis and colleagues¹⁷, studies

Table 1. The percentages of participants who responded positively to each questionnaire item about the TV series of 'The Physicians' Building'.

Questionnaire Items	Psychologists	Psychiatrists	Ordinary People	Psychiatric Patients	P value*
Watching the TV series regularly	25	35	52.8	100	.001
Bad effects of watching the TV series	64.9	28.6	26.6	0	.001
Appropriateness of the TV series for adolescents	21	61.5	72.6	85.7	.001
Acceptability of Nima Afshar's role as an actor	7.1	15	16.9	0	.13
Not accepting Nima Afshar's role as a psychologist	21.4	21.4	21.3	28.6	.2
Not accepting practice of a psychologist	21	33	60	85	.001
Lack of similarity between real treatments and those of Nima Afshar	53.3	84.6	64.5	42.9	.02
Lack of fear to go to psychologist and psychiatrist	83.3	57.1	57.8	66.7	.06
Lack of appropriateness with current situation in the society	21.4	50	34.9	42.9	.061
Lack of changes in my attitude toward psychologists	70	50	54.7	66.7	.11
Improving people's opinion of psychology	92.3	91.7	89.6	100	.3
Agreeing with reduction in people's visit to psychologists as compared to before broadcasting this TV series	71.4	25	40.4	6.2	.02
Is this TV series an insult to psychologists	66.7	21.4	27.9	14.3	.35
Is this TV series an insult to physicians	42.9	23.1	17.9	14.3	.04
Can this TV series affect your decision on visiting a psychologist	66.7	21.4	27.9	14.3	.035
Nima Afshar is good at helping his patients	100	61.5	71.4	71.4	.04
Nima Afshar is a real role model of psychologists in Iran	66.7	84.6	67.2	71.4	.1
This TV series can help in elevating society's mental health	84.6	85.7	86.4	100	.1

*P value < .05 was considered significant.

such the present study have problems with sampling and generalization because of confounding variables. However, it was hoped the cornerstone for future studies be place by this work. So the researchers tried to consider most of the measureable variables and consider an acceptable face and content validity for this study.

Many studies have found negative attitudes toward media and TV series that show psychologists and psychiatric patients.^{18,19} Unfortunately, this point of view has been taken for granted without being challenged by the audience.²⁰

In this study two-thirds of the participating psychologists considered watching this TV series with having bad effects while only one-fourth of the participating psychiatrists and ordinary people agreed with this opinion. In addition, the study indicated that more than 70% of psychologists were worried about the reduction of patients visiting them. Still, less than 20% of psychiatrists, patients and ordinary people agreed with this opinion. Furthermore, two-thirds of psychologists considered the TV series as an insult to psychologists while patients and ordinary people did not agree with this opinion.

In spite of studies that have pointed to negative attitudes, the study of Sancho-Aldridge and Gunter²¹ on 'Shrink' did not find that this movies caused the spread of negative opinions about psychologists. Our study also indicated that watching comic scenes that show psychologists do not affect the audience negatively, at least in the short run. Therefore our finding is contrary to the mainstream of such studies.

Some believe that the main aim of the media is entertaining audiences.²² When it comes to choosing between reality and fiction, many artists have chosen the latter. However, it seems that media are the greatest help of boosting mental health issues due to their popularity. Several successful experiences have been reported in terms of using the media to elevate people's knowledge about mental health and related issues.²³ A psychologist named Roily cooperated in producing a TV series called 'East Enders' about a schizophrenic patient. The result was that 10 million viewers believed that schizophrenia could be treated.²⁴

Based on Bischaff and Reiter¹⁴, knowing the clichés and legends in the social level can assist in planning for treatment and management of patients by making them more knowledgeable in this regard¹⁴. It seems that if there is a positive attitude toward psychologists in the community, this can affect patients' cooperativeness in treatment.²⁵

If a positive change is going to occur in people's and media producers' mind, first the psychologist and psychiatrists should recognize the mental and cultural backgrounds of the society and then try to shift that attitude toward reality.²⁶ In representation of the related study findings, the theory of Cooran and Spark can be applied.²⁷ According to this theory, the audiences are attracted to media that meet their personal needs and in our case the viewers were not actively following the TV series. So, it seems that psychologist audiences carry out the most effective studies than the other groups meeting their requirements beyond seeing the TV series.

CONCLUSION

A significant difference in the attitudes of psychologists was observed compared to the other three groups of psychiatrists, ordinary people and psychiatric patients toward a TV series with the main character of a psychologist. This process confidently can be expanded in future programs.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None Declared.

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