

P01-528

VIEWS OF GENERAL PUBLIC, MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND PATIENTS' RELATIVES ABOUT SCHIZOPHRENIA: AN ITALIAN MULTI-CENTRIC SURVEY

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Introduction: Views on the causes and psychosocial consequences of schizophrenia of the Italian population, patients' relatives and mental health professionals can influence detection and outcome of these disorders.

Aims: To investigate the opinions on schizophrenia in a sample of 614 lay respondents, 465 mental health professionals and 709 key-relatives.

Methods: The survey was conducted in 30 randomly selected geographical areas with the Questionnaire about Opinions on mental illness (QO).

Results: The results show significant differences among the three groups as regards opinions about patients' civil rights and social competence of patients with schizophrenia. In particular, the belief that patients' behaviors are unpredictable is maintained by 18% of mental health workers and by 35% of family members and the general public. As regards causes, 68% of relatives, 20% of mental health workers and 34% of general public believe that schizophrenia is caused by psychosocial factors only. Forty-eight percent of the relatives affirmed that they are fully convinced of the usefulness of pharmacological treatment compared to 28% of professionals and 25% of the Italian population. With respect to civil rights, about half of the relatives is fully convinced that patients with schizophrenia should not have children compared to 17% of mental health workers and to 19% of the general public.

Conclusions: These results underline the need to conduct sensitization campaigns about schizophrenia focused on specific aspects of the disease, such as unpredictability, civil rights and opportunities to recovery of patients, taking into account the target population to which they are addressed.