

INTRODUCTION

Mental health describes either a level of cognitive or emotional well-being or an absence of a mental disorder. From perspectives of the discipline of positive psychology or holism, mental health may include an individual's ability to enjoy life and procure a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience. Mental health is an expression of our emotions and signifies a successful adaptation to a range of demands (*World Health Organization, 2005*).

In the other side, mental illness is defined as a psychiatric illness. Its manifestations are primarily characterized by behavioral or psychological impairment of functioning, measured in terms of a deviation from some normative concepts. It is associated with distress or disease, not just an expected response to a particular event, or limited to relations between a person and society (*Sadock & Sadock, 2007*).

Mental disorders tend to begin early in life and often run a chronic recurrent course. They are common in all countries, where their prevalence has been examined. Because of the combination of high prevalence, early onset, persistence, and impairment, mental disorders make a major contribution to total disease burden (*Abas et al., 2003*). Mental illness doesn't indicate weakness, lack of intelligence, or a defective character. It isn't caused by poor upbringing, although environmental factors often play a role. It affects people of all social, economic, geographic, age, gender, religious and occupational groups (*Thompson, 2006*).

Knowledge about mental illness is defined by *Jormfeldt (2006)* as “the knowledge and beliefs which aid in the recognition, management or

prevention". This includes the ability to recognize specific disorders, knowing how to seek mental health information, knowledge of risk factors and causes, and knowledge of self treatments and professional help. Recent studies have shown that mental health knowledge is not a single dimension, but rather represents knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders that emerge from a general pre-existing belief system (*Lauber et al., 2005a ; and Griffiths et al., 2009*).

Accordingly the attitude toward mental illness is affected by public and professional's attitude. The professional's attitude may negatively influence the public and people with mental illness. The attitude, the nursing staff hold towards the patients under their care may influence their behavior and subsequent actions. For example, the opinions of mental health professionals regarding the causes, treatments, and psychosocial consequences of mental illness have been shown to influence its detection and outcome (*Crisp et al., 2004; and Kingdon et al., 2007, 2008*). During the last few decades an increasing body of research has shown that stigma and discrimination related to mental illness is widespread throughout the world (*Krauss, 2005*).

People with mental illness are known to experience more stigma than those with other health problems (*Gale, 2006*). Whilst young people have more negative attitudes to mental health, it seems that young people with mental health problems are more likely to experience higher levels of stigma than adults (*Rose et al., 2007*).

Prevalence of mental illness:

Varcarolis and Hatler (2009) ,stated that there is a critical need to understand how pervasive mental illness is and how treatable it is. In all

countries, there is a significant gap between the prevalence of mental disorders, on one hand, and the number of people receiving treatment and care, on the other hand. Mental disorders are prevalent in all societies. They create a substantial personal burden for affected individuals and their families, and they produce significant economic and social hardships that affect society as a whole (*World Mental Health Day, 2009*). According to *The World Health organization* (WHO), the proportion of people with mental illness in Egypt is about 16.93% of the adult population (*WHO, 2010*).

Significance of the study :-

Exploring trends in nurses' attitudes towards mental illness would have implications for nursing practices worldwide. This study was carried out to explore the general nurses' opinion about mental illness for a number of reasons: First, nurses are responsible for ensuring that patients with severe mental illness receive the services they need in a timely manner. Second, nurses need to be able to provide mental health education and care with a positive attitude in the community, as community care is the most accessible form of care worldwide.

Third, In view of the severe scarcity of mental health personnel, the role of nurses becomes more critical in caring for the mentally ill. Fourth, a positive attitude towards mental illness is a necessary prerequisite for the provision of holistic care to the patients. Finally, assessing the knowledge and attitude of the psychiatric nursing staff is crucial since they are directly involved in patient management .
