Attitudes Towards Conceptual and Philosophical Issues in Psychiatry and Psychiatric Education: A Survey of US and UK Trainees

This survey evaluated psychiatry trainees' attitudes toward conceptual and philosophical issues in psychiatry practice, research and training.

A 20-item Likert questionnaire was administered to 156 psychiatry trainees (53 UK, 103 US) via Webropol (UK) and REDCap (US). The survey assessed demographics, familiarity with conceptual and philosophical issues, attitudes toward its importance, confidence in three domains of conceptual competence, and views on specific philosophical issues. Descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney U tests were used to analyze UK and US responses. Free-text responses provided qualitative data.

Most trainees (82% research, 92% practice) recognized the importance of conceptual and philosophical issues in psychiatry, with 96% supporting their inclusion in training, but only 28% felt their current training had adequately prepared them. Trainees were 'somewhat confident' in recognizing conceptual assumptions implicit in psychiatric work but felt less confident that they possessed the requisite philosophical vocabulary and ability to critically evaluate philosophical issues. Regarding specific philosophical positions, responses revealed a strong endorsement of explanatory pluralism and a rejection of naturalist definitions of mental disorder.

Trainees viewed conceptual skills as important but felt unprepared by current training programs. This article advocates for the integration of 'conceptual competence' in psychiatric education.