**What is this research about?**
This study investigated adolescent knowledge of schizophrenia and their attitudes towards persons with the disorder. This study aimed to understand the how knowledge about schizophrenia is associated with social distancing behavior (or behaving in a way to not wanting to associate with people with schizophrenia).

**What did the researchers do?**
Data for this study was collected as part of the 2005 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (Adlaf & Paglia-Boak, 2005) that was completed by 3648 Ontario students from grades 7 to 12. The average age of students was 15 and 87.8% of students attended schools in urban locations.

To determine students' knowledge of schizophrenia, students were presented with 3 statements:

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<td>1) “People with schizophrenia are likely to be violent”;</td>
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<td>2) “People with schizophrenia cannot work”;</td>
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<td>3) “Schizophrenia is caused by poor parenting.”</td>
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**What you need to know:**
This study surveyed over 3000 Ontario adolescents in grades 7-12 to examine students' knowledge of, and attitudes about, schizophrenia. The study found that although most students had some knowledge of the disorder and did not report negative attitudes towards, or the social exclusion of, people with the disorder, almost 30% of students had no knowledge of schizophrenia. Increasing exposure through awareness campaigns in schools is suggested.
Students were asked to choose from a pre-set list of three possible answers to each statement: “agree”, “not sure”, or “disagree”. Students’ attitudes towards persons with the disorder were assessed using four questions:

1) “Would you make friends with someone with schizophrenia?”
2) “Would you be afraid to talk to someone who has schizophrenia?”
3) “Would you be upset or disturbed to be in the same class with someone who has schizophrenia?”
4) “Would you be embarrassed or ashamed if your friends knew that someone in your family has schizophrenia?”

What did the researchers find?
Results from this study indicate that almost 30% of students reported that they did not know what schizophrenia is. Students who reported not knowing what schizophrenia is, were more likely to be in lower grade levels (grades 7 and 8).

Of the 70% of students who reported that they did know what schizophrenia is, a little over 32% indicated that they would not want to make friends with someone with schizophrenia. 26.5% said they would be afraid to talk to someone with the schizophrenia. And just over 18% said they would be upset to be in a class with someone with schizophrenia.

In terms of their knowledge about schizophrenia, nearly 18% of students who knew what schizophrenia was thought people with schizophrenia were likely to be violent and a little over 9% felt that people with schizophrenia could not work. The researchers also note that just over 50% of students indicated that they were “not sure” if someone with schizophrenia was likely to be violent, and 36.5% indicated that they were “not sure” if someone with schizophrenia could work.

The responses of 3,117 students (47.4% female and 52.6% male) were statistically analyzed.
The researchers also found a relationship between knowledge and social distancing. The more knowledge of schizophrenia a respondent displayed, the less likely they were to report social distancing.

Additionally, lower levels of parental education (based on socio-economic status) was also found to be associated with less social distancing. Female students and students in grade 12 were also less likely to indicate that they would distance themselves socially from someone with schizophrenia.

The researchers conclude that although a minority of students were found to hold stigmatizing attitudes towards people with schizophrenia, the percentage of students that held this attitude was higher than the percentage of adults found to hold such attitudes, as reported in a national survey of adults (Stuart & Arboleda-Florez, 2001).

How can you use this research?
Teachers and administrators may wish to use this research as a starting point for discussions about attitudes and stigma towards students with schizophrenia in particular, and may consider using this as a starting point for discussion about the stigmatization of people with mental illnesses more generally.

Educators interested in learning more about this topic will want to consult the wider body of research on schizophrenia, mental illness, and the stigmatization of children and adults with mental illnesses. Educators may also consider the wider body of research on the myths associated with schizophrenia, and ways that educators and families can work together to support students with schizophrenia at school and in the community.

Original article:
To learn more about this study, we invite you to read the original research article:


Other references:


About the researchers:
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Keywords:
Schizophrenia, mental illness, student health, adolescents, equity

About this summary
The Ontario Education Research Exchange (OERE) is a project of the Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research, an Ontario network promoting the use of research in education. The OERE’s clear language summaries of academic research aim to support this mandate.

This summary has been adapted from the ResearchSnapshot series developed by York University and ResearchImpact and has been developed according to writing and design principles unique to OERE. For more information about this summary or the OERE network please contact oere.knaer.oise@utoronto.ca.

This summary reflects findings from this study only and is not necessarily representative of the broader body of literature on this subject. Please consult the original document for complete details about this research. In case of any disagreement, the original document should be understood as authoritative.