SUMMARY

The effect of stigma on the mentally ill and the people who provide care for them is profound. The effort needed to combat stigma against mental disorders and persons with mental illness is a worthy investment. The best approach in fighting psychiatric stigma is still not clearly understood. A number of Nigerian authors have reported on the attitude of the general public towards mental illness, but it seems no specific study has addressed the issue of intervention in this regard. The present study was designed to examine the possibility of using an educational method to fight stigma against mental illness among some selected Nigerians.

The principal aim of the study was to determine the effectiveness of a semi structured educational intervention in reducing stigma due to psychotic illness in North Eastern Nigeria.

The study was a pre-test and post-test control design. One School of Nursing each was chosen from Damaturu (control) and Maiduguri (study sample). The intermediate class (whole population) of each school was selected for the study. These samples have the same curriculum and were yet to do their rotation in Psychiatry. The educational material generated from the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) anti stigma programme was used for the study sample. The Osgood Semantic Differential and the World Psychiatric Association Questionnaire to reduce stigma were used to assess attitude/stigma against psychotic illness. At outset the base line attitude and knowledge of the study and control samples were assessed. Semi-structured education was administered to the study sample over three consecutive days. The attitude and knowledge of both arms were re-assessed one week and one month later.
The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 13.0 and Excel 2003 were used for analysis. Simple descriptive statistics was used to present the basic characteristics of the respondents. The relationship between the sociodemographic variables and knowledge and attitude was examined with the student t test and $\chi^2$. The OSD and WPA Questionnaire were compared with Spearman’s rho. For all statistical tests, a p-value of .05 was accepted as significant.

A total of 126 students (46% males, 11% married) participated at the beginning of the study with a mean age of 23.7 years (SD=3.7). Both the study and control groups demonstrated negative attitude (88.1% thought the psychotic were dangerous; 88.5% would not marry people who had psychotic illness) and poor knowledge (39.4% believed in a magical/spiritual aetiology of mental disorders) about psychotic illness. There were significant improvements in attitude scores in the one week post intervention period ($t=4.3$, df=55, $p<0.0001$) as well as marked drop in number of respondent with poor knowledge (6.1% with magical/spiritual beliefs) about the cause of psychotic illnesses in the experimental group. These improvements were not completely sustained over one month period.

In conclusion, the provision of education to the potential stigmatizer, remarkably improve both knowledge and attitude towards psychotic illness. It is not clear how far such effect would be sustained without continuous education.