



## A REVIEW OF KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE REGARDING ELECTROCONVULSIVE THERAPY AMONG THE GENERAL PUBLIC

**Mr. Shivkant Sharma**

Research Scholar

### Abstract

**Background:** Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) is an established and effective treatment for several severe psychiatric disorders. Despite its clinical efficacy and improved safety profile, ECT continues to be surrounded by stigma, misconceptions, and negative public attitudes.

**Objective:** This review aims to analyze existing literature on the knowledge and attitude of the general public toward Electroconvulsive Therapy and to identify factors influencing public perception.

**Methods:** A narrative review of published literature was conducted using articles from psychiatric, medical, and public health journals. Studies focusing on public knowledge, awareness, beliefs, and attitudes toward ECT were included.

**Results:** The reviewed literature indicates that public knowledge about ECT is generally inadequate. Negative attitudes are common and are often influenced by lack of mental health literacy, media portrayals, cultural beliefs, and educational level. Studies consistently report misconceptions regarding pain, safety, memory loss, and coercion.

**Conclusion:** The general public continues to hold limited knowledge and unfavorable attitudes toward ECT. Public education initiatives and accurate media representation are essential to improve awareness, reduce stigma, and promote informed decision-making regarding mental health treatments.

**Keywords:** Electroconvulsive Therapy, Knowledge, Attitude, General Public, Mental Health Awareness

## **Introduction**

Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) is a psychiatric treatment involving the induction of a controlled seizure through electrical stimulation of the brain under general anesthesia. It is considered one of the most effective treatments for severe depression, catatonia, bipolar disorder, and treatment-resistant schizophrenia.

Despite decades of clinical use and substantial scientific evidence supporting its efficacy and safety, ECT remains highly stigmatized. Public perception is often shaped by misinformation, sensationalized media portrayals, and lack of exposure to accurate mental health education. These factors contribute to fear and resistance toward ECT, even when it may be life-saving.

Understanding public knowledge and attitudes toward ECT is essential, as community perception directly influences treatment acceptance, help-seeking behavior, and support for individuals undergoing psychiatric care.

## **Methodology of the Review**

This review is based on a narrative analysis of published literature. Relevant studies were identified through manual searches of peer-reviewed journals and academic databases. Inclusion criteria consisted of:

- Studies assessing knowledge, awareness, or attitude toward ECT
- Research involving the general public or community samples
- Articles published in English

Studies focusing solely on healthcare professionals or clinical outcomes were excluded.

## **Overview of Electroconvulsive Therapy**

Modern ECT is administered under general anesthesia with muscle relaxants, making it a safe and controlled procedure. Advances in technique have significantly reduced adverse effects, particularly cognitive side effects. Clinical guidelines recommend ECT for patients who do not respond to pharmacological treatment or who require rapid symptom relief.

However, outdated images of ECT as a painful and punitive procedure persist in public memory, contributing to ongoing stigma.

## **Knowledge of Electroconvulsive Therapy Among the General Public**

Multiple studies have reported low levels of accurate knowledge about ECT among the general public. While some individuals have heard of ECT, detailed understanding of its indications, procedure, and safety is often lacking.

Common misconceptions include beliefs that ECT is administered without anesthesia, causes permanent brain damage, or is used as a form of punishment. Educational status, previous exposure to mental illness, and access to mental health information are frequently identified as factors influencing knowledge levels.

## **Attitude Toward Electroconvulsive Therapy**

Public attitudes toward ECT are predominantly negative or ambivalent. Fear, anxiety, and moral concerns are commonly reported. Negative attitudes are strongly associated with misinformation and media portrayals depicting ECT as cruel or inhumane.

Studies indicate that individuals with better knowledge of ECT tend to have more favorable attitudes, suggesting that education plays a critical role in shaping perception.

## **Factors Influencing Knowledge and Attitude**

Several factors influence public perception of ECT, including:

- **Educational level:** Higher education is associated with better knowledge and positive attitudes.
- **Media influence:** Films and television often portray ECT inaccurately.
- **Cultural beliefs:** Cultural stigma surrounding mental illness affects acceptance of psychiatric treatments.
- **Personal experience:** Familiarity with mental illness or prior exposure to ECT improves acceptance.

## **Implications for Public Health and Mental Health Practice**

Negative public attitudes toward ECT may delay treatment, reduce adherence, and increase stigma toward individuals receiving psychiatric care. Public mental health education programs, awareness campaigns, and responsible media representation are essential to address misconceptions.

Healthcare professionals play a key role in providing accurate information and advocating for evidence-based mental health treatments.

### **Conclusion**

This review highlights that knowledge regarding Electroconvulsive Therapy among the general public remains limited, and attitudes are often negative. Improving public understanding through education, awareness programs, and stigma-reduction strategies is crucial to ensure informed acceptance of ECT as a legitimate and effective psychiatric treatment.

### **Recommendations**

- Incorporate mental health education into community awareness programs
- Promote accurate and ethical media portrayal of ECT
- Encourage public discussions led by mental health professionals
- Conduct further large-scale studies to assess changing public attitudes

### **References**

1. Abrams, R. (2002). *Electroconvulsive Therapy* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
2. Fink, M. (2009). *Electroconvulsive therapy: A guide for professionals and their patients*. Oxford University Press.
3. Sadock, B. J., Sadock, V. A., & Ruiz, P. (2015). *Kaplan & Sadock's Synopsis of Psychiatry* (11th ed.). Wolters Kluwer.
4. Freeman, C. P. L., & Kendell, R. E. (1986). Public attitudes to electroconvulsive therapy. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 149, 505–509.
5. Lauber, C., Nordt, C., Falcato, L., & Rössler, W. (2005). Public attitude to electroconvulsive therapy in Switzerland. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 40(9), 745–752.
6. Gazdag, G., Dragasek, J., & Rihmer, Z. (2005). Hungarian public opinion on electroconvulsive therapy. *Psychiatric Services*, 56(10), 1243–1246.
7. Andrade, C., Arumugham, S. S., & Thirthalli, J. (2016). Adverse effects of electroconvulsive therapy. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 58(4), 355–365.

8. Sienaert, P. (2014). What we have learned about electroconvulsive therapy and its relevance for the practising psychiatrist. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 59(1), 5-12.
9. World Health Organization. (2013). *Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020*. World Health Organization.
10. Kellner, C. H., Greenberg, R. M., Murrrough, J. W., Bryson, E. O., Briggs, M. C., & Pasculli, R. M. (2012). ECT in treatment-resistant depression. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 169(12), 1238-1244.