

Publication

Normality in medicine: an empirical elucidation

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**Background** Normality is both a descriptive and a normative concept. Undoubtedly, the normal often operates normatively as an exclusionary tool of cultural authority. While it has prominently found its way into the field of medicine, it remains rather unclear in what sense it is used. Thus, our study sought to elucidate people's understanding of normality in medicine and to identify concepts that are linked to it. **Methods** Using convenient sampling, we carried out a cross-sectional survey. Since the survey was advertised through social media, we employed an online survey. We performed descriptive and inferential analyses. Predictors were chosen in a theory-driven manner. **Results** In total, 323 persons from 21 countries completed the survey. Analysis revealed that the overall acceptance of normality in medicine was associated with notions of injustice, authority, discrimination, and with having a medical profession. More precisely, for the field of mental health, injustice insensitivity, genderism and transphobia, and authority were positively associated with a person's acceptance of normality; and, for the field of physical health, injustice insensitivity and having a medical profession were positively associated with a person's acceptance of normality. Finally, participants' acceptance of the use of normality in the area of mental health was lower than in the area of physical health. **Conclusions** What is considered normal has implications for clinical practice, both at an individual and at a policy-level. Acknowledging its normalistic condition, the discipline of medicine has to confront itself with its own contribution to the augmentation of social inequalities through the excessive reliance on the concept of normality. Research that centers the lived experiences of those who are being systematically marginalized because they are deemed abnormal is needed. By empirically elucidating the conceptual relationships between normality in medicine and other variables, we provide points of leverage to deprive normality of its normative power. For medicine, this is needed to first do no harm.

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