

Evaluating the difference in attitude between students and illiterates towards disabled people.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to see if there is any difference between attitude of students and illiterates toward disabled people. It was hypothesized that the attitude of students will be more positive towards disabled people as compared to the attitude of illiterates. A total sample of 400 participants was selected randomly from students studying in different departments at the University of Swat and the general public at streets who were confirmed to be illiterate. Out of the 400 participants, 200 were students and 200 were common illiterate people. The scale Attitude towards Disabled People (ATDP) adapted version was used to measure the attitude of participants. Scores attained on the scale by the participants were calculated and analyzed by applying the independent sample t-test in Statistical Product and Service Solutions version 16.0 (SPSS v16). The test revealed a statistically significant difference ($t=6.655$, $df=58$, $p<0.001$) between the attitude of students and illiterates. Students reported significantly positive nature of attitude towards disabled people ($M=20.63$, $SD=16.023$) than did the illiterate participants ($M=11.30$, $SD=8.313$). This proved the hypothesis that students have a more positive attitude towards disabled people than that of the illiterate people.

Keywords: Disabled people, Attitude, Students, Illiterates.

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The Attitude towards Disabled People

During the 40 to 50 years of the past, there have been various alterations in our society with relation to the management and treatment of individuals with disabilities. In addition, there have been numerous improvements in medical treatments of such individuals. As a result, a lot of these disabled individuals dwell in the community rather than specific specialized institutions designed for them [1].

Before the twentieth century, the attitudes of people in society toward these people illustrated that these people with disabilities were not healthy and were in fact defective and deviated. For centuries, society as a whole dealt with these individuals as objects of apprehension and pity. The prominent attitude was that such people were unable of participation or contribution to community and that they must rely on welfare of empathetic organizations [1].

An aversive attitude toward disabled people is one of the potential hurdles for people with disability (PWD) to attain equality in society. Although multiple researches have looked into attitudes of people toward disability, a minority of studies among them have evaluated personal attitudes toward disability amongst PWD, and then compared them with the attitude of healthy participants [2].

Disability is a condition which restrains an individual to perform all or some casual physical or psychological

activities. This often suggests a permanent condition, such as blindness, but in some cases, it is rather for the time being. Recently society and the law have emphasized on people with disabilities and their right be accommodated and encouraged to operate to their utmost capability and to be involved in societal and governmental activity without hesitation or resistance. Hence, assistance by ramps, lifts, special parking areas and other special arrangements have been made compulsory in many states [3].

“Attitudes are relatively stable mental positions held toward ideas, objects or people” [4]. “Attitudes are a combination of beliefs and feelings that predispose a person to behave a certain way” [5].

“Attitude is an idea charged with emotion which predisposes a class of actions in particular class of social situations” [6].

An attitude is a mental or neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence on the individual’s response to all objects and situations to which it is related.

“An attitude is an idea (cognitive component) charged with emotion (affective component) which predisposes a class of actions (behavioral component) to a particular class of social situations”.

As obvious from the above definitions, attitudes are

mostly defined in relation to mood, thinking, behavioral inclination and evaluation. Mental, emotional and behavioral evaluations are essential to the notion of attitudes. Mental evaluations refer to thoughts of people about the object towards which an attitude exists. Emotional evaluations refer to feelings individuals have relating to the attitude object. Behavioral evaluations pertain to people's acts with respect to the object of attitude.

While attitudes can also mean individual psychological processes, they connect each individual to a society of other people, works and problems, including individuals who are constantly engaged in helping forms or changing attitudes. Therefore, attitudes are small but integral part of a whole framework by which we understand our social environment.

Various studies have been seen to report that as long and aversive attitude persists and the complete and deserving acceptance of people with disabilities is not likely [7]. Getting aware of the fact that individuals with disabilities are still prone to and oppressed by stereotypical prejudice and discrimination might be the first step in solving the problem of this prejudice.

In the book titled "Everybody Belongs", Shapiro explains how negative rumors and stereotypes keep on making dispositional prejudices toward people with disabilities. These prejudices surface in aversive attitudes and behaviors of people with little academic record, which can reduce the participation of disable people in social, academic and vocational backgrounds.

Rosenthal et al. cite studies including Brodwin et al. [8] which illustrates how negative attitudes of people stop the integration of disabled people into society [8]. In addition to the researches above, Chen et al. [9] cites others that also show the constrictive effects of negative societal attitudes in repelling people with disabilities from "integrating into society".

Negative and aversive attitudes are connected to behaviors such as social rejection and being very introverted to and irritated by people with disabilities.

Negative attitudes which results in discrimination in the workplace continues to be a significant issue for persons with disabilities [5,7]. In spite of the legislation in 1990 ADA at the USA, discrimination at play, ingrained in negative attitudes, continues to negatively affect employment rates [5].

The fact that the social desirability of responding in particular ways to the problem of disabled people may be on the increase, borne in mind when designing surveys and when interpreting results. To date, attitudes to disable people have often commonly been studied through direct mediums and typically involve self-report surveys. Apparatus widely used to study attitudes towards people with disabilities as a group includes the Attitudes towards Disabled Persons Scale (ATDP) developed and the Scale of Attitudes toward Disabled Persons (SADP) developed by Antonak and Livneh

[6]. These assess attitudes from a perspective of society rather than a personal one with questions focusing on how people are or should be dealt with at the societal level [10]. All these scales are subject to concerns about the impact of socially preferable responses and false positive scores.

Singer [11] investigated 152 college students in the USA and concluded that they viewed drug addicted people, people with psychosis and other mental health problems more negatively than people with physical disabilities. Negative attitudes and behaviors are not only limited to these students but can also be found among professional health practitioners as well as from the general public and young individuals [12].

In another UK-wide survey, Attitudes to Mental pathology, 50% of participants strongly associated mental illness with violence and crime, a dissociative personality or coerced hospitalization. They thought that these ailments and disabilities might be causing tendency of violence and crime in the individuals who have them. Only 12% of respondents were aware that 25% of the population in UK has a highly likely chance of suffering from mental illness during their lifespan.

Objective

To determine the difference in attitude between students and illiterate people towards disabled individuals. To check whether attitude of students is more positive towards disabled people as compared to illiterates.

Hypothesis

Reflecting on all the pre-existing literature on the topic it was reckoned that people who are more educated and qualified are well mannered and more conscious of how they react to people with disabilities as compared to the people who have little to no literacy. Keeping those points in mind the following hypothesis was constructed.

The attitude of students will be more positive towards disabled people as compared to the attitude of illiterate people.

Method

Participants

The sample was randomly selected. It consisted of post-graduate and under-graduate students from various departments at the University of Swat and illiterate people from general public who were spotted and selected conveniently at the streets of Swat district who participated voluntarily with consent when told about the purpose of the study. Total sample size was 400, in which 200 participants were students and 200 were illiterate people, both of whom answered the same items on the scale.

Instruments

The scale used was "Attitude towards Disabled People" (ATDP) modified version. The scale consists of 30 items. The fundamental assumption underlying the development of the

Attitude Toward Disabled Persons scale was that disabled people may be viewed by both the disabled and nondisabled as either different from physically normal persons or as essentially the same. On this assumption, the present authors collected a series of items each describing disabled persons as either “different from” or “similar to” physically normal persons. Some of the items referred to the characteristics disabled people have, and others referred to how they should be treated. Such items in the scale were extremely helpful in recognizing the different attitudes people show toward individuals with disabilities. These items were designed to ask of how to deal with people having disabilities in a Likert scale format which perfectly illustrated the attitudes of the participants toward disabled people (Appendix 1).

Procedure

A total sample of 400 participants was selected randomly from different departments of the University of Swat and general public from the streets of the Swat district in Pakistan. These subjects participated voluntarily and were selected with their consent. Participants were told about the purpose of the study and were given the questionnaire titled “Attitude toward disabled people” (ATDP). Before giving the questionnaire, the participants were guided about the procedure and instructions for filling the questionnaire. The illiterate people were asked orally, by translating the items into understandable words. They were asked about their viewpoints and their replies were marked on the scale. In such a way, the data was collected. After collection of the data, the scoring was carried out according to the procedure described in the manual of the Attitude towards Disabled People (ATDP), the scores range from -90 to +90. The statistical analysis for approaching the results was done with the help of IBM SPSS Statistics version 16 – A statistical Package application for Windows computer.

Results

For drawing conclusions of the study, statistical analysis was carried out with the help of SPSS. The participants score on the “Attitude towards Disabled people” (ATDP) was analyzed by applying independent sample t-test. The test revealed a statistically significant difference between the scores of students and illiterates, i.e., $t(395)=6.655, p<0.001$. Students reported significantly positive levels of attitude towards disabled people ($M=20.63, SD=16.023$) than did the illiterate participants ($M=-1.30, SD=8.313$).

Discussion

The current study was conducted for the purpose of investigating if there is any difference between students’ attitude towards disabled people and illiterate people from general public. Based on literature review, the following hypothesis was constructed:

The attitude of students will be more positive towards disabled people as compared to the attitude of illiterate people.

To investigate this hypothesis, a total sample of 400 was selected randomly from different departments of University of Swat and group of people from general public. The Attitude towards disabled people scale was used. The obtained scores were analyzed using t-test. It revealed a statistically significant difference between students and illiterates ($t=6.655, df=58, p<0.001$). Students ($M=20.63, SD=16.023$) reported significantly positive levels of attitude towards disabled people than did the illiterate participants ($M=-1.30, SD=8.313$).

A positive role of information has been reported in the literature. The media has been identified by children as their principal source of knowledge. Studies highlights a cumulative effect of information from reading materials and television, as well as an independent effect of information received from adults.

One hundred and twenty randomly selected southern Indian were participants the study. The attitude toward people with physical disability was tested using a modified version of the Scale of Attitude toward Disabled Persons (SADP). It was concluded that the attitude of the rural people toward individuals with disabilities was unrelated to the sex or educational status of the respondents but was influenced by their age. This suggests that older people in rural communities residing in developing countries should be the main target for educational interventions which promote positive images of disability [13].

A total sample of 274 preservice teacher education students were surveyed at the start and end of a one-semester unit on Human Development and Education which incorporated formal instructions with structured fieldwork practical experience. The latter included interviewing community members regarding their knowledge of Down syndrome and their opinions on inclusive education, and writing a related report. At the end of semester, not only had those student teachers acquired a more accurate knowledge of Down syndrome, but their attitudes towards disability in general had also changed and become more positive, and they reported greater ease when interacting with people having disabilities. The study illustrated the value of combining information-based instruction with structured fieldwork experiences in altering attitudes towards disabled people and their inclusion. It also illustrated that raising awareness of one disability may lead to changes in the overall attitude towards disability in general [14].

On the basis of the idea that the successful implementation of any inclusive policy is largely dependent on educators and academics being positive about it, a great deal of research study has sought to examine educators’ attitudes towards the integration and the inclusion of special children with special educational needs in the mainstream school. This study reviews and explains this large body of research and explores a host of factors that might impact upon teacher acceptance of the inclusion policy. This analysis demonstrated proof of positively strong attitudes of these academics and educators

toward disabled people, but no evidence of acceptance of a total inclusion or 'zero reject' policy to the special educational provision. Educators' attitudes were seen to be strongly affected by the nature and severity of the condition presented to them (child-related disabilities) and less by teacher-related variables. Further, academic environment-related variables, such as the availability of physical, emotional and human support, were persistently found to be associated with attitudes to this inclusion. After a brief explanation of critical methodological issues relevant to the research findings, the paper provides guidance for future research, based on alternative methodologies [15].

Attitudes toward disability are major obstacles in improvement and progress toward better life conditions for physically challenged individuals in developing countries. Researches have shown that people, in general, keeping negative and restricting attitudes towards people with disabilities. Myths, legends, scriptures and folklores are all part of the cultural belief system that shape such attitudes, found mostly in uneducated, illiterate and non-critical laymen. The physically challenged most often suffer more due to peoples' prejudices rather than due to their disabling physical conditions. The social and physical surroundings in which these physically challenged dwell is often designed without much consideration of their special needs and requirements. In this paper, some social programs aimed at altering attitudes of the illiterate people in India toward disabilities of rural individuals in India are discussed. As part of a community-based rehabilitation program, the main goal of these interventions was to bring attention of local communities from the disabilities to the abilities of the physically challenged individuals [16].

In several studies, direct contact with peers having disabilities was shown to have a positive effect on children's attitudes. Children who have extensive contact or a chosen relationship with peers having disabilities may have developed a greater understanding of, and sensitivity towards those peers and therefore perceives them more positively.

The influence of contextual factors on attitudes towards children with disabilities has not been widely studied. The influence of school culture on attitudes was explored in a recent Canadian study, which found that all school culture constructs were positively associated with attitudes, either directly (teacher and peer support) or indirectly (positive teacher and student relationships at the school level), or both.

In all of the participating schools, some children with disabilities were educated in ordinary classes. Only half of the schools had a special education unit and the presence of such units was strongly associated with poorer students' attitudes. This may well be because the special education units are made up of children with cognitive impairments. Indeed, attitudes have been shown to be more negative towards peers with cognitive disabilities than those with physical disabilities. The role of the presence of students with disabilities in the school has been explored by several authors

but findings are quite inconsistent. Some authors observed a positive effect whereas others did not observe any effect.

All the literature given and mentioned including the findings of the current research is suggestive of the fact that the more knowledgeable, educated and literate an individual is the more likely they are to actually be positive and supportive of individuals with disabilities who might be their peers or strangers. Literacy makes attitudes positive toward disabilities and more understanding of them. On the other hand, illiteracy causes misunderstanding and a more flawed, negative and aversive attitude toward people with disabilities.

Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to investigate if there is any difference between students' attitude toward disabled people and that of illiterate people. After analyzing the statistical data collected through the survey method using the questionnaire titled Attitude toward disabled people (ATDP), it was concluded that there is a significant difference between students' attitude and illiterate people towards people having disabilities and that students have a more positive attitude toward disabled people as compared to the attitude of illiterate people.

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