

Attitude of Medical Professionals Towards Persons with Disabilities

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Author's Contribution

¹The study conceptualized, supervised the project and revised the manuscript, ² study conceptualized & Drafting the manuscript, ^{3,4} Data collection & Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To assess the attitude of medical professionals towards the disabled persons.

Study Design: Cross sectional Prospective Survey

Place and Duration: The study was conducted in different hospitals of Rawalpindi and Islamabad from October 2015 to January 2016.

Materials and Methods: This cross sectional study recruited 230 medical staff members consisting of doctors and nurses through purposive sampling technique. The inclusion criteria were having age group between 30 and 50 years, with an experience of more than 5 years in service. A self reported questionnaire was used to gather data by using "Interaction with disabled persons" (IDP) scale. SPSS was used to carry out the data analysis.

Results: Females constituted 66.7% participants in the study population while males were only 33.3%. Nurses had the highest percentage with 54.7% while doctors were 45.3%. All the participants had a mean personal score of 76.74 and standard deviation of 12.02 (n=230) on this questionnaire suggesting that respondents had a more negative attitude towards people with disabilities. Female participants had a mean IDP score of 78.16 ± 11.81 and male had 74.08 ± 11.92.

Conclusion: From the results of the study, it is concluded that medical staff members had a more negative attitude towards people with disabilities.

Key words: Disability, Attitude, Persons with disabilities.

Introduction

The people having disabilities comprise a considerable portion of the population of the world. According to an estimate these people makes up to 15% of the world population, among this population almost one fifth or more portion of these encounter severe difficulties.¹ As reported previously by world Health organization; among the world population, almost 2.9% are severely disabled and 12.4% were having moderate long term disability.²

Children aged 0–14 years have, on average, 5% worldwide occurrence of severe and moderate disability, and it increases to 21% in individuals aged 15–59 years, while persons of 60 years and above age have 46% prevalence. Low and middle income countries encounter higher percentage of moderate and severe levels of disability for all age groups as compared to high income countries.²

The disability not only affects the persons which are suffering from it but it also affects the one fourth of the population globally in terms of family members of the care givers. It seems that these mentioned statistics must be quiet less as around 80 percent of the world's population lives in more than 100 developing countries, where persons with disabilities are mostly unseen, unheard and uncounted.

Persons with disabilities face quite a lot of barriers and attitude can be one of the most complex one to participation. As was stated in a study, "People with disabilities historically have experienced discrimination and devaluation based solely on being different from the non-disabled public".^{3,4} It was pointed out by a study that persons with disabilities may hold a stigma, an unwanted differentness from what is expected. Another author further described the propositions of differentness, pointing that individuals who are special are often shunned or snubbed on the basis of communal stigmatization.³ In our economic guided world, having major concerns in investment and generating maximum rates of return the inequalities regarding opportunities, either in the form of jobs, education or health care are created for people with disabilities. Even now in the twenty first century there are people today who are strongly in favor of non-treatment of newborns with severe disabilities, much as were the nineteenth century.⁵ Almost all persons with disabilities are recipients of medical attention, support and treatment. As such, they are often subject to the opinions and judgments of service providers in order to gain access to needed services. Hence, the attitudes of medical professionals are very significant in reducing the miseries of their lives. The objective of the current study was to assess the attitude of medical professionals; doctors and nurses towards the disabled persons.

Methodology

This cross sectional study recruited 230 medical staff members consisting of doctors and nurses, through purposive sampling technique. The inclusion criteria were having age group between 30 and 50 years, with an experience of more than 5 years in service. The study was conducted in different hospitals of Rawalpindi and Islamabad from October 2015 to January 2016. A self reported questionnaire was used to gather data by using "Interaction with disabled persons" (IDP) scale. This is a twenty point likert scale developed to assess the attitudes towards persons with disabilities by evaluating

discomfort levels in social relations as a central factor underlining negative attitudes. The demographic data included information regarding age, status, gender, contact, to whom do they have contact and how often they are in contact.

IBM SPSS (version 21) was used to carry out data analysis. The results were reported in the form of frequencies, percentages, means and SD (standard deviations) to explain the questionnaire scores and demographic characteristic.

Results

The total number of sample was 285 out of which 230 completed the survey. There were 61.7 % participants whose ages were between 30-40 years, while 38.3% lied in the age group of 40-50 years. Females constituted 66.7% participants in the study population while males were only 33.3%. Nurses had the highest percentage with 54.7 % while doctors were 45.3 %. This study showed the interaction of medical staff with people with disabilities which is 81.7 % while 18.3 % staff did not have any interaction. The medical staff which had interaction with disabled persons once every three months were 31.7 %; followed by medical staff that at least had a monthly interaction (21.7%). Medical staff that had contact with someone whom they see occasionally were 40%; 25% contact others and 19.4% had contact with patients that were disabled. All the participants had a mean personal score of 76.74 and standard deviation of 12.02 (n=230) on this questionnaire suggesting that respondents had a more negative attitude towards people with disabilities. Female participants had a mean score of 78.16 ± 11.81 and male had 74.08 ± 11.92 .

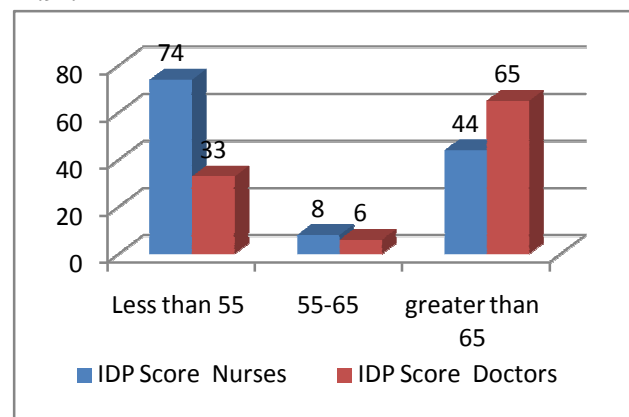


Figure showing trends of IDP score among doctors and nurses

Most of the staff (43 %) had scores above 65 showing negative attitude; 12 % scores were marked between 55 to 65 showing indifferent attitude and 45 % scored less than 55 showing a positive attitude towards disabled. There were 73 female staff members that had scores greater than 65 and 33 males had score above 65; the same number of staff had scores less than 55. Among the staff that scored above 65, doctors had the highest number (n=65) and nurses had the lowest (n=44). The staff members who had interaction with the disabled persons and scored above 65 were 73, only 36 respondents scored less than 65. Staff members that had contact once every three months had the highest number (n= 62) and scored above 65; members that scored well above 65 and also had contact once every month were 39; only 36 respondents scored less than 55 and had daily interaction.

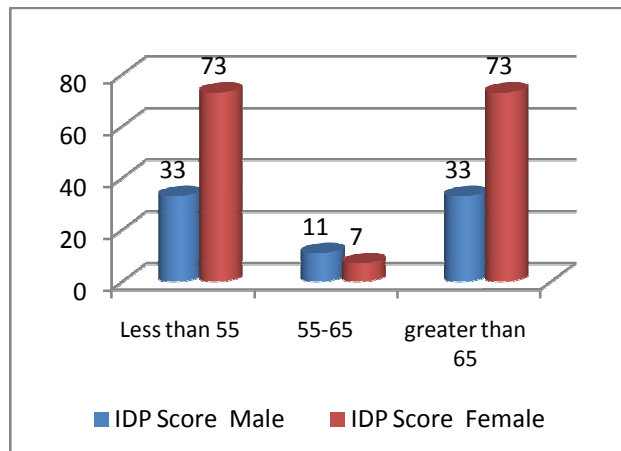


Figure showing trends of IDP score among males & females

Discussion

Disabled population has not been treated well by our society since ages, they have had experienced many problems including rejection, pity, isolation and provision of scarce medical services as they are not normal. Disability was considered as an end result of parent's sin, some societies professed it as punishment by their gods and the children having it were killed or left to die, though all these were part of ignorance, illiteracy and fear.⁶

Back in 2010 a study was conducted where the authors compared different attitudes of the health professionals towards the disabled persons and also the way they interact with them. They concluded that health professionals which are the main delivery line for the provision of services to the disabled as well as common

individuals have a negative thought and attitudes toward the individuals with disabilities.⁷

Similarly another such study titled 'Not in my backyard' reported that there is a big negative attitude which exists among the Swedish mental health professionals. The author also stated that in spite of being the mental health professionals and having wide knowledge in the subject and the problems of disabled and the whole problem they presents with a attitude towards disabled which is stigmatizing. This entails that not only the citizens, the patient care givers but as well as the health care providers should also observe their own moral attitude and try to improve their abilities in interacting with such devastating humanity, so that the stress, problems and sufferings of these mental illness patients can be reduced.

The author further advised that the health providing personals should also increase their level of tolerance so that we may not isolate this suffering part of humanity.⁸

A similar study was also conducted in 2009 which displayed the results of 108 health professionals regarding their attitudes towards the disabled population, which were having decreased mental capabilities. They found that the attitudes of participants towards this populations was highly stigmatized, the study was conducted in a forensic hospital it was also having patients which were with the disorders of active substance use. The study found that the medical professionals have stigmatized attitudes towards illness such as; schizophrenia and this becomes worse towards patients from a secure hospital.⁹

A study regarding the effects of change in curriculum of undergraduate nursing students was conducted. Authors used convenience sampling technique to select the sample; the respondents filled the ATDP (attitude towards disabled people) questionnaire. The results of the survey found that scores of ATDP before or at the completion of related disability module were not statistically significant.¹⁰

A research in a university of Michigan state on undergraduates found the effect of social power, context, and contact towards persons having disabilities. The authors concluded on the point of view that negative perception still exists in attitudes of the undergraduate students toward persons having disabilities. These barriers though are apparent in our every day livings but are invisible and they limit the disabled in their social interactions with disabilities and boost up the theme of negative attitudes more.¹¹

ATDP scale (Attitudes toward Disabled Persons Scale) is a direct method to measure the attitudes of health professionals was also used in a study where a sample of 218 students who were undergraduates was recruited. The findings of the study suggested that if the disabled are kept in authoritarian roles in work, health and education, there will be more opportunities and shift in attitudes towards persons with disabilities.¹¹

In a study in 2004, authors examined the attitude of students in health professionals toward people having disabilities. A cross sectional survey was conducted in South Dakota among 338 university students, using SADP, RSI and ATDP scale. It was found among all students' that their attitudes were less positive in comparison to SADP norms among the health professionals nursing students were having the response which was least positive. There was no difference found in respect to gender differences but those students who had a background related to disability had a more positive opinion and attitude. The author summed up that undergraduate nursing students hold a higher risk of negative attitude and recommended incorporation of specific instructive activities for the promotion of more positive and better attitudes.¹²

A study was conducted in a university in Rawalpindi, Pakistan on the personal and professional attitude of final year physiotherapy students towards disabled persons. It demonstrated that personal attitude of students was more positive than professional attitude. The study emphasized the need to change the curriculum with incorporation of workshops ad sessions with disabled persons in order to improve the professional attitude of health professionals.¹³

A cross cultural comparison study used college students of Japan and United States to study their attitudes towards person with disabilities. Authors found no significant difference in this cross cultural comparison regarding their attitude scores.¹⁴ Contrary to it, a group of researchers found differences among different types of disability. In studies reported by Chinese, high scores have been found which shows more favorable trends towards accepting and recognizing disabled population on the basis of ATDP scale.¹⁵

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