



## A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE ATTITUDES OF MEDICAL AND NON-MEDICAL STUDENTS TOWARDS DISABILITY

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes of Medical and Non –Medical students towards disability. 250 Medical and 250 Non –Medical Students were included based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Non-probability, random sampling was used. All participants were administered individually with Attitude towards disabled persons (Form - O) scale questionnaire to measure the level of Attitudes. Results of the study explains that both Medical and Non – Medical students have a negative attitude towards disabled persons and hence there is no statistical significance difference between both the groups but however those students who had contact with persons with disabilities have a more positive attitude by SPSS (V 15.0) with the alpha level set at 0.05. Attitudinal scores were found to be negative for both Medical and Non-Medical students. The study reveals that there is no statistical significant difference in attitudes among both the groups.

**KEYWORDS:** Disability, Attitude, Social integration, medical students, on-medical student



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## INTRODUCTION

Disability is an umbrella term covering impairments, activity limitation and participation restrictions. WHO defines disability as "any restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. The conditions included as disability are blindness, low-vision, hearing impairment, loco motor disability, mental retardation, leprosy and mental illness. Autism, cerebral palsy and multiple disabilities (example - mental retardation with blindness) have been listed as disabilities in the National Trust Act of 1999. The National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO 1991) estimated that approximately 100 million Indians are affected with one or more disabilities. Census 2001 has revealed that over 21 million people in India are suffering from one or the other kind of disability. This is equivalent to 2.1% of the population. Among the total disabled in the country, 12.6 million are males and 9.3 million are females. According to the Indian census 2011 disability rate has increased by 22.4% between 2001 and 2011. In Chennai The number of disabled, which was 2.19 crore in 2001, rose in 2011 to 2.68 crore—1.5 cores males and 1.18 crore females. (Census of India 2011). The percentage of scores given below clearly shows that there is vast increase in the disabled population over the years. Moreover, it appears that as our society becomes ever more socially and technologically complex the numbers of people perceived as disabled is steadily increasing. Social obstacles are the real problem for disabled people. Even in a family set up a negative attitude towards disability from family members not only impacts upon a child directly, but also adds to the existing stress levels of a family<sup>1</sup>. Discriminatory action against the physically or cognitively less able in some form or other has been an integral part of almost every society throughout history. Attitudes are feelings or predispositions held by people or individuals towards something or someone. Attitudes are comprised of three components: affective, cognitive, and behavioral. The affective component represents the emotional portion of an attitude, whereas the cognitive component refers to ideas, beliefs, and opinions<sup>2</sup>. The behavioral component describes a person's willingness to interact with the subject at hand and the manner in which they do so. For more than 30 years researchers have investigated attitudes toward persons with disabilities. The literature reveals largely negative attitudes, tracing them to historical cultural values, the socialization process, childhood fears, and incidences of negative behavior by disabled individuals<sup>3</sup>. Those negative attitudes often shape the disabilities and the roles they are allowed to assume in society. These attitudinal or invisible barriers reduce potential opportunities, ultimately resulting in decreased chance at successful integration into the community for individuals with disabilities<sup>2</sup>. Numerous studies investigating attitudes and perceptions have found that the general populations' negative perceptions toward people with disabilities can negatively impact people with disabilities in several harmful ways, including their self concept, self esteem, perception of their disability, and utilization of vocational and rehabilitation services<sup>4</sup>. Understandably, attitudinal research has also been directed toward students as

future professionals, with considerable mention being devoted to strategies for the enhancement of students' attitudes toward persons with disabilities<sup>5</sup>. Hence this study aims to compare the attitudes of medical and non-medical students towards disability.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

A survey methodology study with convenient sampling procedure via questionnaire of repeated measures design, using the respondents as their own controls was used. The researcher administered. Medical and non – medical final year students and both genders were included and Students with any kind of physical disability are excluded. The Attitudes toward Disabled People scale (ATDP form O), also referred to in this study as the Baseline Survey. A random population of Final year students studying engineering and medical from different universities were randomly selected for the survey.

### *Instrumentation*

The ATDP is the most widely accepted and popularly used research tool in studying attitudes toward the disabled<sup>6</sup>. Median reliabilities are high. On the ATDP form O, the preferred version which 23 includes 20 items in a Likert format, reliability is .83 on a test-retest within 5 weeks, 4 – 16 month test-retest is .68; split half is .80, and alpha is .76. Validity of the ATDP is acceptably high, using several approaches including content, predictive, concurrent, and construct validity<sup>7</sup>. The construct validity of the ATDP was assessed by examining the relationship of ATDP scores to scores on many other variables<sup>6</sup>.

### *Procedures*

Students from the final year were randomly selected for this study based on the screening criteria. The purpose of the study was explained to the subjects. Written consent form was obtained from each student duly filled and signed. Demographic details were obtained, Medical and non medical were Students assessed using ATDP -Form O.

### *Data Analysis*

Statistical analyses were performed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS trial version 15.0) with the alpha level set at 0.05. The following statistical analysis was done. Descriptive statistical analyses (Mean, range & SD) were used to find out the baseline characteristics (like gender, age, and attitudes towards disabled, contact with disabled) of the samples. Percentage Analysis was used to describe the participants with respect to certain demographic characteristics such gender, age, attitudes towards disabled, contact with disabled. Graphical representations such as bar chart and pie chart have been constructed for describing visually the participant's demographic characteristics. Correlation has been performed to examine the relationship between the attitudinal difference in students when there is a contact with disabled person T-test for Significance of correlation has been performed to test the significance of such correlation.

**Ethical Consideration**

This research was approved by the Research team of SRM University College of Occupational Therapy, Chennai following thorough scrutinization of the relevant papers and consent letter approval from all participants.

**RESULTS**

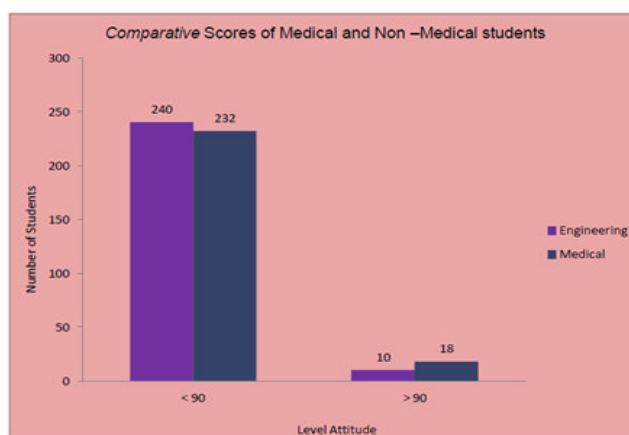
The table shows the Comparison of Attitudinal Scores of Medical and Non –Medical students There was no Statistical significant difference between Non-Medical and Medical students at 95%. [p<0.05].

**Table 1**  
**Comparative Attitudinal Scores of Medical and Non –Medical Students based on levels of attitudes (n=250)**

Comparison between medical and non-medical students level of attitude				P Value
Groups	Score1		Total	
	< 90	> 90		
Engineering	240(50.8)	10(37.7)	250	0.05 (NS)
Medical	232(49.2)	18(64.3)	250	

(P value: P<0.01).

**Graph 1**  
**Comparative Scores of Medical and Non –Medical students based on levels of attitudes**

**DISCUSSION**

Attitude research is particularly important because attitudes predispose action; that is, they influence behaviors. Consequently, these behaviors tend to be either consistently positive or consistently negative toward an object or person<sup>8</sup>. Previous research has indicated that persons with disabilities experience negative attitudes and stereotypes, consequently resulting in decreased chance at successful integration into the community<sup>2</sup>. A disability study on college student's attitudes toward people with disabilities was carried out, with the expectation that, after exposure to content and activities that focus on people with disabilities, the students' attitudes would become more positive. Two groups of students completed a survey. There were no differences in changes in these scores between the two groups of students<sup>12</sup>. A study examined whether participation in the 'Accessible Community' program changed social work students' attitudes towards people with disabilities. A total of 150 social work students in their first year were divided into task groups focusing on variety activities for and with people with disabilities. Negative attitudes were significantly associated with previous volunteering and prior negative attitudes, while positive attitudes were significantly associated with prior positive attitudes<sup>13</sup>. In the present study the failure to find a significant difference between attitude scores of Non –Medical

students and Medical students was unexpected. We thought that aspiring medical would manifest more positive attitudes toward the persons with whom they will work than would the aspiring Non –Medical students. Of course, this belief was based on the assumption that students who are drawn to a career in the medical field will stand out from their peers for the vigor of their humanistic concerns regarding persons with disabilities. The findings suggest the importance of the maintenance of a healthy skepticism in attributing to aspiring medical field, any particular set of beliefs concerning persons with disabilities. As much as one might want to believe that students electing to become a medical profession are outstanding for the positivity of their perceptions of persons with disabilities, the reality may be that there are no differences in this regard than students pursuing a non-medical profession. Is this a cause for concern? But found that college students have positive attitudes toward peers with disabilities and are comfortable attending classes where students with disabilities were included. There are two important factors that influence the result of the study. 1. Impact of curriculum on student's attitudes towards disability-the result concluded that persons who had contact with disabled persons had a better attitude than students who had no contact with them<sup>11</sup>. Difference in attitude based on gender was also analyzed between both the groups. The result indicates that there is no significant difference in score. It is contradicting to the study

conducted on Attitudes toward Individuals with Disabilities: Does Empathy Explain the Difference in Scores between Men and Women? The study concluded that the mean score was higher for women than for men, suggesting that women have a more positive attitude toward persons with disabilities. This gender difference is consistent with findings from ATDP validation and replication studies. Other studies document similar gender differences in empathy. Differences in how men and women develop and express empathy may explain the gender difference in ATDP scores. The attitudes of professionals, as reflected in educational curricula, professional literature, and clinical practice, so bland and perhaps in some cases, so negative that they do not challenge the students' incoming attitudes, which regard persons with disabilities negatively, indifferently, or prejudicially. It has been argued that the enculturation of students by means of academic and clinical education should foster the development of strongly positive attitudes toward these persons<sup>9</sup>. 2. Contact with disabled person-On analyzing the contact with disabled person both medical and non medical students were found to have contact with them. Among which medical students showed a more positive attitude towards disabled than the non medical students. Medical professionals must examine their feelings, beliefs, and behaviors concerning those persons whom they have a professional mandate to serve. This proposition, coupled with those of which concerned the significance of valued social roles for the images of persons with disabilities, makes the findings from the present research study regarding the contact of students with disabled persons interesting. The results revealed that students who had contact with persons with disabilities in the context of social roles presumed to be valued and had significantly more positive attitudes than did those students who had no contact with disabled persons. More positive attitudes were evident among younger people, people with higher educational attainment, and individuals with a prior knowledge of or regular contact with people with intellectual disabilities. Although it would be inappropriate to assume a cause-effect relationship from the present study, the existence of a clear relationship between valued social role contact and more positive attitudes cannot be ignored. In line with most current research on attitudes to disabled persons, the findings of this study support the hypothesis that contact with disabled individual's influences attitudes in a positive direction<sup>10</sup>.

### **Implications**

#### **Clinical**

The majority of children and young people with disabilities live in developing countries where they face inequalities in education and other opportunities. Negative attitudes constitute one of the major barriers to the development. Impairment is a value-neutral Condition and it is only transformed into a negative condition when social definitions, attitudes, practices, and policies devalue, exclude, and disenfranchise persons with disabilities. It is the responsibility of the occupational therapists to alter the negative attitudes of the people especially the students who make the future society. This comparative study should be taken as an eye-opener as it is evident that immediate measures are

required to improve the attitudes of students towards disability irrespective of their educational background.

### **Administrative**

The outcome of this study can be documented for administrative use in various establishments to guide therapist during intervention and to emphasize to measure and document the attitudes periodically.

### **Research**

An Occupational therapists duty is to work with a client to help them achieve a fulfilled and satisfied state in life through the use of "purposeful activity or interventions designed to achieve functional outcomes which promote health, prevent injury or disability and to develop, improve, sustain or restore the highest possible level of independence. And this role could be done with complete justice only after eliminating the causes inhibiting social acceptance of disability which could make the disabled to have a regular surrounding as everyone else. And to make them independent in a society that accepts them as regular humans with some special conditions and not as people who are a shame to society.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study attempts to compare the attitudes of medical and Non-Medical students towards disability using ATDP – Form O in the Chennai population. The study was conducted mainly on the final year students of both the genders Attitudinal scores were found to be negative for both Medical and Non-Medical students. The study reveals that there is no statistical significant difference in attitudes among both the groups.

### **Limitation**

Like any other studies, this study also had its own limitations left behind for the future studies to overcome. This includes the following, Larger sample size Geographical distribution restricted to Chennai, Sample could be taken only from very few colleges due to legal issues

### **Suggestions for future research**

A further study about the duration, type of contact with disabled can be carried out among students. Study based on socio - economic status of the students can be done. Study among various other rehabilitation professionals could be done. (Physiotherapy, speech/language pathology, social workers, dieticians, audiologists, pharmacists, and nurses). Including a specific curriculum program about disability and then assessing the student's attitudes using pre and post test can be performed. Promoting awareness about the disability among the students can be undertaken

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Conflicts of interest declared none.

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