

## **DISABILITY ACCORDING THE FUTURE SOCIAL WORKERS PERSPECTIVE**

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### **Abstract**

Human Services are supportive, developmental or educational services provided to the public that are designed to enhance the quality of life and well-being of people and communities. Needs addressed by Human Services include, but are not limited to: personal health (both physical and mental), social relations, and maintaining or growing personal or community capacity (such as child care, education, disabilities, aging, etc) (Pietrowiak R. 2008, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning). The undergraduate social work students' attitudes toward disability are important, because they in the future, can work with disabled people, and, for that reason, their work quality will be influenced by their attitudes. For the realization of this study it is used the technique of questionnaire. The measuring instrument is the SADP (Scale of Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons) scale. The questionnaire is fulfilled from students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the University “Luigj Gurakuqi” of Shkodër city, Social Work branch, and third academic course. It is employed, also, the technique of interviewing the students for the purpose to obtain their opinions related to the disability. The paper aims to measure the attitudes of students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Social Work branch, Bachelor degree, third academic course about disability. The paper aims, also, to analyze students' opinions about disability as future social workers perspective. The data collected from the questionnaires was analyzed by means of the SPSS program, variant 20. There are given the appropriate conclusions. The attitude of students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Social Work branch, and third academic course toward disability is favorable. The students think, in general, that the opinion of Albanian society about disability is negative and they list the relevant reasons. They think that the perception of our society about disability can be changed and they suggest some strategies, as: changing the perception of our society about disability, developing policies that protect disabled people against discrimination, improving living conditions for them, improving rehabilitation programs for people with disabilities. There are given the appropriate suggestions, as the improvement of students' attitude toward disability.

***Key-words:*** *undergraduate social work students, disability, SADP scale.*

## Introduction

Attitudes are important because they shape people's perceptions of the social and physical world and influence overt behaviors (W.D.Crano & R.Prislin, 2008, pg.19).

Hardly any topic in social psychology has attracted more attention than attitude research. Because attitudes are seen as providing guidance in a complex world, social behavior without attitudes is difficult to imagine (W.D.Crano & R.Prislin, 2008, pg.87).

In this context, the attitudes toward disability are very important. When these attitudes are positive, the inclusion process will effectively be realized.

It is important that all of us have positive attitudes toward disability. Especially the undergraduate social work students must have favorable attitude toward disabled people, because they are the future social workers and they will work with disabled people.

## Theoretical Treatment

“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” (Triandis et al, 1984, p. 21, cited from: Hannon F. “Literature Review on Attitudes towards Disability”, Disability Research Series, National Disability Authority (NDA), pg.9).

The traditional and most prevalent conceptualization of attitudes is that attitudes are global evaluations that people can access from memory when called on to do so (Albarracín D., Johnson B.T., Zanna M.P., 2005, pg.80).

Combining elements from several definitions, attitudes may be viewed as learned cognitive, affective, and behavioral predispositions to respond positively or negatively to certain objects, situations, institutions, concepts, or persons. Attitudes may be quite individual and thereby reflective of and related to personality characteristics such as a need for closure. A need for closure is expressed as a desire to complete a task, as in finding an answer to a question or a solution to a problem (Aiken L.R., 2002, pg.3).

Another common definition of attitudes can be traced back to early attitude theorists such as Thurstone (Thurstone & Chave 1929). This view would suggest that attitudes consist of evaluative or affective responses to attitudes objects. More recently popularized by Martin Fishbein and the Icek Ajzen (1975), this essentially one-component view proposes that affective responses are based upon cognition (Fazio R.H., Petty R., 2008, pg.8).

Smith and colleagues (1956) proposed that attitudes can serve one or some combination of three functions: object appraisal, social-adjustment, and externalization functions. *Object appraisal* attitudes classify objects to make responses available that maximize one's interests. *Social adjustment* attitudes mediate self-other relations and establish one's identity. *Externalization* attitudes maintain self-esteem by serving as defense mechanisms for coping with internal conflicts (Milfont T.L., 2009, pg.241-.242).

## **Methodology of preparation and development of this paper**

### **Aims and objectives**

The main aims and objectives are:

- Measuring the attitudes of students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Social Work branch, Bachelor degree, third academic course.
- Analyzing students' opinions about disability as future social workers perspective.

The research question is: "What are the attitudes of undergraduate social work students about disability?"

There are made a lot of studies for measuring undergraduate social work students' attitudes toward disability. For example, it can be cited the study made by Rachael A. Haskell in 2010. This study's aim was to build on prior disability research by exploring the attitudes of undergraduate social work students toward individuals with physical disabilities. The study selected participants from a purposive sample of undergraduate social work students at three universities located on 3 different campuses in Central Florida. Students were chosen from: the University of Central Florida in Orlando; Saint Leo University in the city of St. Leo, in west central Florida, and Southeastern University in Lakeland (Haskell R.A (2010), pg.47-48).

Participants in this study demonstrated a motivation to help individuals with physical disabilities, but on average reported that they only had "a bit" of knowledge about the life conditions of individuals with physical disabilities (Haskell R.A, 2010, pg.89).

Lauren A. Persin made a study in 2012 by with students of Social Work, Bachelor Degree at The Ohio State University. In general, this study suggests that undergraduate social work students at The Ohio State University harbor remarkably positive attitudes towards individuals with developmental disabilities (Persin L.A., 2012, pg.27).

One study by Schwartz and Armony-Sivan (2001) compared the attitudes of 149 Israeli college students studying social work, law, science, and natural science toward the inclusion of individuals with mental retardation and mental illness in the community. Overall, social work students showed more positive inclusion attitudes to people with disabilities than other students. Findings in a study of the attitudes of 194 social work students in Japan indicate that students have a lack of knowledge and experience related to disability issues (Hayashi & Kimura, 2004, cited from: Haskell R.A, 2010, pg.36-37).

### **Sampling**

In the study, we had the participation of 52 students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Social Work branch, and third academic course. 7 students (13,5%) are male, 43 students (82,7%) are female, while 2 students (3,8%) haven't given their gender. In the study we had the participation of students of different ages. 14 students (26,9%) are 20 years aged, 27 students (51,9%) are 21 years aged, 6 students (11,5%) are 22 years aged, 1 student (1,9%) is 23 years aged, 2 students (3,8%) are 24 years aged, and 2 students (3,8%) haven't given their age. The students participating in the study live in different areas of northern Albania. 6

students (11,5%) live in Shkodra district, 3 students (5,8%) live in Tirana district, 9 students (17,3%) live in Lezha district, 1 student (1,9%) lives in Malësia e Madhe district, 6 students (11,5%) live in Tropojë district, 3 students (5,8%) live Puka district, 5 students (9,6%) live in Kukës district, 4 students (7,7%) live in Laç district, 4 students (7,7%) live in Mat district, 2 students (3,8%) live in Kruja district, 1 student (1,9%) lives in Fushë-Krujë, 1 student (1,9%) lives in Mamurras, 3 students (5,8%) live in Mirdita district, 4 students (7,7%) haven't given their district where they live.

### **Apparatus/Materials**

It is employed the SADP (Scale of Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons) scale to measure students' attitudes. It is found in the book Antonak R.F., Livneh H.(1988) "The Measurement of Attitudes toward People with Disabilities", USA, page 159-164). It is employed, also, the technique of interviewing students for the purpose to obtain their opinions related to the disability.

### **Content of the questionnaire**

The SADP, a 24-item summated rating scale, requires the respondent to rate each statement on a six-point scale, ranging from -3, to signify "I disagree very much", through +3, to signify "I agree very much". No neutral response option is provided (Antonak R.F., Livneh H.(1988) "The Measurement of Attitudes toward People with Disabilities", USA, pg.159-160).

### **Content of the interviews**

The contents of the interviews was thought in a way as to collect the opinions of students of Social Work branch, Bachelor degree, third academic course concerning :1)Albanian society attitudes toward disability, 2)stigma and discrimination toward disabled people, 3) main strategies that they will use in the future as mental health professionals.

### **Method of completing the questionnaire**

The questionnaires and the interviews have been filled out by the students themselves. The administration of the questionnaires and the interviews (distribution and collection) was conducted during the months February and Mars 2014.

### **Method of analysis**

The data collected from the questionnaires was analyzed by means of the SPSS program, variant 20. It is estimated the reliability of the test. The internal reliability of SADP questionnaire Alpha Cronbach coefficient=0,743. It is carried out the coding of the variables according to the respective rules defined by the authors. There are created respective indexes according to the guidelines.

It is suggested that protocols omitting responses to four or more items should not be scored. Protocols with omitted items are scored with the omitted responses assigned a value of zero. Half of the items are worded so that an agree response (i.e., +3, +2, or +1) represents a favorable attitude, and half of the items are worded so that a disagree response (i.e., -3, -2, or -1) represents a favorable attitude. The SADP is scored by first reversing the sign of the response (from + to -, or from - to +) for those items which are worded negatively (items #1,

3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 17, 18, 19, and 22). The sum of the responses to the 24 items is then calculated and a constant of 72 is added to the total. This last step eliminates negative scores. Resultant scores can range from 0 to 144, with a higher score indicating a favorable attitude toward disabled people (Antonak R.F., Livneh H., 1988, "The Measurement of Attitudes toward People with Disabilities", USA, pg.160).

**Piloting stage.** It is realized the piloting phase. In this phase the internal reliability of the questionnaire Alpha Cronbach coefficient=0,837. In the piloting phase we had the participation of 25 students of Psychology branch, the second course. Alpha Cronbach coefficient was recalculated after two weeks with the participation of the same subjects and it resulted the same, Alpha Cronbach coefficient=0,837. Now, the internal reliability of the questionnaire Alpha Cronbach coefficient=0,743.

## Findings of the study

### General data concerning the attitude of students toward disability

Table 1. Data about students' attitudes toward disability

	N	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
<b>Attitude</b>	52	86,34	83,50	97,00	15,26	62	123
<b>Valid</b>	52						

Students' attitudes toward disability are favorable. The mean is 86, 34, the median is 83, 5 and the mode is 97. The maximum score obtained is closed to the ideal maximum, but a few of students has it (1 student or 1,9% of students). The minimum score obtained is 62 (obtained from 1 student or 1, 9% of students). The most of the results obtained is ranked in the range of values from 72 to 100 (32 students or 60, 9%), while a small fraction of the values obtained is ranked in the range of values from 62 to 70 (9 students or 17, 1%). A small fraction of the values obtained is ranked in the range of values from 101 to 112 (8 students or 15, 2%), whereas a very small fraction of the values (3 students or 5, 7%) ranges from 115 to 123.

### The analysis of students' opinions about disability

Table 2. Results of students' opinions (expressed through absolute frequency) for items 1, 17

Item	I disagree very much	I disagree pretty much	I disagree a little	I agree a little	I agree pretty much	I agree very much	Missing	Total
<b>N.1</b>	34	8	4	1	-	4	1	52
<b>N.17</b>	7	19	9	12	5	-	-	52

In relation to the item 1 “Disabled children should not be provided with a free public education”, 46 students (88, 46% of students participating in the study) disagree, so, they support the process of inclusion of disabled children in the schools.

In relation to the item 17 “Disabled children in regular classrooms have an adverse effect on other children”, 35 students (67, 3%) disagree.

Table 3. Results of students’ opinions (expressed through absolute frequency) for items 11, 16, 20

Item	I disagree very much	I disagree pretty much	I disagree a little	I agree a little	I agree pretty much	I agree very much	Missing	Total
<b>N.11</b>	-	3	4	11	25	8	1	52
<b>N.16</b>	1	5	2	8	24	11	1	52
<b>N.20</b>	2	5	6	17	12	9	1	52

In relation to the item 11 “Most disabled people are willing to work”, 44 students (84, 61%) agree.

In relation to the item 16 “The opportunity for gainful employment should be provided to disabled people” 43 students (82, 69%) agree.

In relation to the item 20 “Equal employment opportunities should be available to disabled individuals” 38 students (73, 07%) agree.

**Students’ opinions expressed through the interview.** The students think, in general (48 students or 92,3% of students participating in the study), that the opinion of Albanian society about disability is negative and exists stigma about disabled people. The students base their opinion on these aspects: a) there is wrong mentality about disability; b) the integration of disabled people is not realized in our society, c) there is lack of information for people with disabilities, d) there is pity for these people.

The students think that there is wrong mentality about disability because disabled people are perceived as dangerous, as different from others. The students think that the integration of disabled people is not realized in our society because there are present prejudices and discrimination about people with disabilities, there are difficulties in relation to the integration of disabled children in the schools, there are difficulties in relation to the employment of disabled people. The students think that there is too little information about disability and there is too much pity about people with disabilities. So, according to the students, this factors impact the quality of inclusion process.

A few students think that our society has positive attitude toward disabled people and them base their opinion in the fact there are reduced the prejudices about them.

The students think that our society perception about disability can be changed and they suggest some strategies for this purpose. These strategies are:

a) Changing disability perception. The students suggest as efficient strategies the raising awareness of our society for disabled people. They, also suggest other strategies, as giving more information about disability and sensitizing the society about the rights of disabled people. This can be accomplished through the development of activities about disability in

the schools. Major role plays the media through organization of different programs about disability and about disabled people. Similarly, the provision of information about disability has a great impact;

- b) The development of policies that protect these people against discrimination. According to the students, these policies are necessary for the implementation of inclusion process;
- c) Improvement of living conditions for disabled people. Students suggest the greatest help economically for families with disabled member;
- d) improvement of rehabilitation programs for people with disabilities, such as the creation of more residential centers, improving services for them, increasing advocacy role in order to protect the rights of disabled people.

## **Conclusions**

The students' attitude toward disability is favorable, but it can be improved. In general students support the process of inclusion of disabled children in the schools. In general the students perceive disabled people as they will to work and so, the disabled people must have the possibility to work. So, the students support the idea of employment of disabled people. The students think, in general, that the opinion of Albanian society about disability is negative and there is stigma about disabled people. They think that there is wrong mentality about disability. They think that the integration of disabled people is not realized in our society. A few students think that our society has positive attitude toward disabled people and them base their opinion in the fact there are reduced the prejudices about them. The students think that our society perception about disability can be changed and they suggest some strategies for this purpose, as changing disability perception, the development of policies that protect these people against discrimination, the improvement of rehabilitation programs for people with disabilities, etc.

## **Recommendations**

The following would be necessary:

- a) The improvement of students' attitude toward disability.
- b) The improvement of students' opinions about integration of disabled children in the schools and the improvement of students' opinions about disabled people employment.
- c) These students in the future will be the social workers of the North of our country. The improvement of their attitudes toward disability will influence the improvement of the quality of their work.

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