

SOCIAL DISTANCE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS DISABLED PEERS

Spela Golubovic

Faculty of Medicine, University of Novi Sad

Srdjan Milasinovic

Academy of Criminalistic and Police Studies, Belgrade

Nina Brkic Jovanovic

Faculty of Medicine, University of Novi Sad

Summary Background: With the development of the society and social care, scientific and technical progress, the attitude towards the people with disabilities has changed. According to the Quebec classification of disability it represents a process created together with risk factors, children's personality, life habits and environmental factors that match child's age, gender and socio-cultural identity. The attitude represents a tendency to react positively or negatively towards certain objects, features or situations. Attitude, as a model of behaviour not firmly and definitely determined, can be formed, but also changed, mainly based on experience and interpersonal relationship as well as ones knowledge and feelings. Aim: The main goal of this research is to determine the adolescents' attitude towards peers with disabilities. Method: The research was conducted on 132 high school students, out of which there were 64 students in one group and a peer with a form of disability among them. The other group had 68 students, where none of them had a disability. For the needs of this research, a questionnaire has been created in order to determine the attitudes of students towards disabilities.

The questionnaire consists of 20 questions where the participant can circle only one of the following options: yes, no or I do not know. The questions can be divided into 3 components – the first one regarding the cognitive component of the attitude, the second one regarding the emotional component and the third one regarding the behavioural component. Results: Belonging to a certain group determines formatting and expressing one's opinion. Both groups of participants gave the same answers in terms that both groups believed that they were insufficiently informed about the people with disabilities. Those questions tackled the knowledge of different types of disabilities, source of information, and care for the disabled. Further results indicate that contact with the people with disabilities determines the development of a positive attitude towards them. The biggest social distance has been expressed during the analysis of emotional components of attitude, included in the questions regarding interpersonal relationship. It seems that spending time and having experience with the disabled does not significantly affect the preparation of adolescents in creating close emotional contact. Conclusion: We emphasize that there is still heavy prejudice which makes the full integration and socialization of the people with disabilities harder. It is commonly accepted that all people learn and that their full inclusion represents the ultimate goal. However, this requires a change in the attitude of the wider social community. The final goal is determined not just by one's capabilities but also by the possibility for all other relevant factors to conform to the needs of an individual. So, going from the main idea of inclusion, that all individuals are different, the society should change and adjust so that they could meet the needs of all individuals.

Keywords: social distance, peers, disability, attitudes.