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RESEARCH ARTICLE

RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT, SELF-ESTEEM, AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED PERSONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to examine the attitudes of Nigerians towards physically challenged persons. The population of the study constituted civil servants. A total of two hundred and twenty participants comprising males and females were randomly selected from the Enugu and Kogi states civil service as the research participants. Data for the study was generated using three research instruments, including the 24-item Scale of Attitude Toward Disabled Persons (SADP), The Religious commitment inventory (RCI-10), and Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (R-SES). The multiple regression analysis results showed that religious commitment significantly predicted attitude towards physically challenged persons. However, the findings also found no significant influence of self-esteem on attitude towards the physically challenged. It is recommended that more research be conducted to fully understand the determinants of attitudes towards the physically challenged in society.

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Introduction: -

Over the years, physically challenged persons have suffered a great deal of neglect and inattention from the government and the general public in Nigeria. Perhaps, the physically challenged persons are usually not given elaborate consideration in National Development Plans. Thus, they are the most vulnerable social group as evidenced by unacceptably low literacy level, high level of unemployment, poor access to development, support network, and social capital (Ihedioha, 2015). It is noted that persons with physical challenges are found in every part of the world and at all levels in all society (Adeyinka, Ayeni, & Oleniyi, 2017). The physical challenge describes a person's shortcomings, such as intellectual or sensory impairments, performance limitations, participation restraint, including all forms of psycho-motor difficulties. Physically challenged is a limit of physical function, which does not involve any mental illnesses (Jette, 2006). The Physical Disability Council (2009) stated that physical challenge could be referred to as total or partial loss of a person's bodily functions. The physically challenged have a problem with their bodies, making it challenging for them to carry out certain tasks that other people could easily do (Nwankwo et al., 2020). Physically challenged persons have restricted access to available facilities because of their physical limitations (Elizabeth, Ifiok, & Adejumo, 2020).

People living with physical challenges in Nigeria are often disregarded and exempted by the general society. In some instances, the people without these challenges often perceived those with physical challenges as beggars (Akhinedor, 2007) and unworthy to exist. While many people think that persons with physical challenge deserve the situation, research has pointed the factors that could make anyone physically restrained at any given time, for

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example, road or domestic accidents, lack of child's immunization against polio and other diseases, building collapse and other forms of accidents (Ojo, 2012). Most physically challenged people are denied the enabling opportunities to grasp their full abilities and the right to work, thereby ensuring that they live as the poorest of the poor. While some physically challenged persons often develop complexity syndrome in society (Kafui & Huagie, 2018).

One of the significant challenges faced by physically challenged persons is a negative public perception (Ihedioha, 2015). In contemporary Nigerian society, the common perception held by policy-makers and the general public is that people with physical challenges are issues of charity and welfare (Lang & Upah, 2008). Accordingly, Okafor (2003) highlighted social stigma and discrimination as the most challenging and threatening threat to people living with physical challenges. Akhinedor (2007) stated that stigmatization and labeling of the disabled and the belief about disabilities and their causes and consequences lead to negative attitudes toward people with disabilities.

Similarly, the center for law enforcement education (2004) stated that people with physical challenges constitute the least cared for individuals, whereas they are subjected to extensive inhumane treatment from societies, including their respective families. Perhaps, often they are considered disgraced and restricted to certain places (Okafor, 2003).

Previous researches (e.g., Farooq, 2012; Jennifer & Keri, 2003; Narayanan, 2018; Sabbath & Mazagwa, 2014; Eugene & Nkosivile, 2016) has highlighted some challenges faced by people with physical challenges to include discriminations, stigmatization, academic exclusion, inability to secure jobs. Others include transportation (Samsudin, 2016), access to physical infrastructure (Nel, Rankoana, et al., 2015). In addition, Nwankwo et al. (2020) noted that people living with physical challenges encounter various difficulties in workplace. However, the present study is concerned with the attitude meted towards the people with physical challenges.

Attitude is a social psychological construct representing an individual's positive or negative evaluation of any aspect of their world. Attitudes are learned predisposition to behave in an evaluative manner towards situations. Attitude can be examined in three components. Thus, cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. The cognitive part is the belief, knowledge of an attitude object. The affective component is the emotional or feelings toward an attitude object. The behavioral component is the action or response toward an attitude object. A negative attitude toward disability is one of the potential barriers for people with disability (PWD) to achieve social equality (Qiaolan, et al., 2016).

The term religious commitment is operationalized as a person's inner quality, reflecting self-righteousness and the extent to which a person is committed to religious beliefs and activities and the amount of worth derives from religion's teachings. Alexander (2017) refers to religious commitment as a person's beliefs and behaviors relating to the supernatural value. Religious commitment reveals how religion is in the personal and social life of man (Ebrahim, et al., 2020). Previous research has linked religious commitment with attitude (e.g., Angela & Akotia, 2016; Jonathon & Zuckerman, 2018; Wesselmann., VanderDrift., & Agnew, 2015). For instance, Ilham (2013) found a religious commitment to affect an individual's attitude towards celebrities. Graafland (2017) noted that religiosity strengthens positive attitudes towards pro-social behavior.

Furthermore, self-esteem refers to the extent to which a person perceives him or herself. It has been argued that differences exist between those who have high self-esteem and those with low self-esteem in relation to behavior (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). Research has shown that self-esteem is a significant predictor of attitudes (e.g., Fatbardha, 2017; Ahmed, 2016). Assessing the effect of self-esteem on an individual's attitude is determined by various factors. However, the connection between self-esteem and attitude towards the physically challenged does not mean that a given level of self-esteem leads to a positive attitude towards the physically challenged.

Present study

Attitudes towards persons with physical challenges is an area that requires research attention as negative attitudes will negatively affect inclusion, equality and increase the disability associated with physical restraints. People with physical challenges mainly ascribe significance to being treated with care and having their opinions and involvements accepted. Public attitudes towards the physically challenged persons remain the primary barrier to full participation and inclusion of the physically challenged in the general society. Public concern about what the physically challenged persons can contribute signifies a negative attitude towards the physically challenged. The

physically challenged have been excluded in governance participation, employment in civil service commission and private sectors, including the inability to access capitals for entrepreneurial purposes. People with physical challenges have also been denied attention in terms of education, training, and health services, thereby prompting the majority to resort to begging alms in the streets. Recognizing that public attitudes towards physically challenged persons relate to prejudice and discrimination may be the first step in enhancing the condition of a person with physical challenges. This present study aimed to examine the influence of religious commitment and self-esteem on attitude towards physically challenged persons in Nigeria. The study's main objective is to determine whether religious commitment will influence Nigerians' attitude toward people with physical disabilities and determine whether self-esteem will influence Nigerians' attitude toward people with a physical disability.

It is hypothesized that religious commitment will influence attitude toward people living with a physical disability. Also, self-esteem is assumed to influence attitudes toward people living with a physical disability.

Method: -

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. Civil servants in state government parastatals constitute the population of the study. A total of two hundred and twenty (n=220) male and female participants were randomly selected from the state's civil service in two states of Nigeria (Enugu and Kogi state). While the Enugu state is mostly Christian-dominated, there is a more significant Muslim concentration in Kogi state. Therefore, the states were chosen to capture the religious parameters fully.

Measures: -

Attitude towards the physically challenged was measured with the 24-item Scale of Attitude Toward Disabled Persons SAMP questionnaire designed to assess the attitudes toward the physically challenged.

Religious commitment was measured using the religious commitment inventory (RCI-10; Worthington et al., 2003)

Self-esteem was measured with Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (R-SES)

Result: -

Table 1: -Table showing the result of the multiple regression analysis conducted to determine the influence of religious commitment and self-esteem on attitudes towards physical challenges.

	B	95% CI for B		SEB	β	R^2	t	Sig
		LL	UL					
Constant	.084	387	.717	.084	6.606			.000
Religious Commitment	.617	.513	.722	.053	.618	.382	11.613	.000
Self-Esteem	-.065	-.170	.040	.053	-.065	.386	-1.216	.225

Note. B = Unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = Confident Interval; LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit; SEB = Standardized error of the coefficient; β = Standardized coefficient; R^2 = Coefficient of determination.

*P<.000. **p>.225

The table above shows the result of the multiple regression analysis conducted to determine the predictive role of religious commitment and self-esteem on the public's attitudes towards people with physical challenges in Nigeria. The study revealed that religious commitment significantly predicted attitude towards physical challenge at F (1,218), 134.857, P<.000. With R^2 of 38.2. The result indicated that those with high religious commitment showed a more positive attitude towards the physically challenged. Thus, the result supported our first hypothesis, which stated that religious commitment would significantly predict attitude towards the physical challenge.

However, the result failed to confirm our second assumption that self-esteem will significantly predict the physically challenged attitude at F (2,217), 68.315, P>.149. With R^2 of 38.6. Meaning that having high or low self-esteem does not influence one's attitude towards the physically challenged.

Discussion: -

The purpose of the current study was to examine the public's attitudes towards people with physical challenges based on their religious commitment and level of self-esteem. The multiple regression analysis revealed that religious commitment statistically significantly predicted attitude towards physically challenged persons. This finding indicates that people who are more committed to their religious faith have a more positive perception of persons with physical challenges. The result support previous research, which suggests that religious commitment shows positive and significant correlations with positive attitudes (Meguellati, Mohd, Bouketir, Haji, & MohdYusoff, 2017). This association's probable explanation could be attributed to the love, empathy, kindness, and acceptance associated with more profound and committed knowledge of religion and spirituality. However, research (e.g., Mohammad, Sedigheh, Suhaiza, & Hyun, 2018) reported no significant association between religiosity and attitude.

Furthermore, the multiple regression results showed no statistical effect of self-esteem on attitude towards the physically challenged. This means that how individuals perceive themselves does not influence their response towards people with physical challenges.

The implication of the study

The present study provides an insight into understanding the public's attitude and perception towards the physically challenged based on religious commitment and self-esteem. The study implies that attitude towards the physically challenged is influenced by religious commitment. In general, religious commitment is an essential determinant of the public's attitudes towards the physically challenged. The study also indicates that there are differences between high religious committed individuals and those with low religious commitment regarding attitude towards the physically challenged.

Recommendations: -

The study of the public's attitude towards the physically challenged is vital in identifying, understanding, and defining the factors that hinder or foster the physically challenge's health and social integration, as well as the development and effectiveness of necessary actions capable of uplifting the physically challenged persons in our society. Therefore, it is recommended that further study should be conducted to fully understand the determinants of attitude towards the physically challenged.

Conclusion: -

The present study was concerned with religious commitment and self-esteem on attitude towards the physically challenged persons. The result of the multiple regression analysis conducted revealed that religious commitment influences attitude towards the physically challenged. Previous literature concluded that the amount of contact one influences attitudes toward individuals with disabilities with such individuals (Jason & Kristi, 2012). Also, that young people are most likely to be sympathetic toward this group (Novo-Corti, 2010). Therefore, the present study contributes to the literature by adding that people with a high level of religious commitment show a more positive attitude towards the physically challenged than those with a low religious commitment level. Also, it is concluded that self-esteem as a factor does not influence attitude towards the physically challenged. The findings provide an understanding of Christians' and Muslim's attitudes towards the physically challenged and thereby provide practitioners with an idea to enhance the public's attitude toward the physically challenged. However, the study encountered some limitations. For example, using a sample size of only 220, generated from civil servants in only two states out of Nigeria's thirty-six states, might not reflect reality, which means that the results may not be suitable for generalization.

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