



RESEARCH ARTICLE

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ATTITUDES OF NIGERIANS TOWARD PERSONS WITH PHYSICAL CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The present study aimed to examine the factors influencing the attitudes of Nigerians toward people with a physical disability. The study hypothesized that education and exposure to the physical challenge would influence attitudes toward people with a physical disability. The design of the study was cross-sectional. The participants comprise one hundred (100) workers drawn from state and local government civil service in the Enugu State, Nigeria, using a random sampling technique. Data were collected through a self-administered survey questionnaire, using a modified version of the Scale of Attitudes towards Disabled Persons (SADP). The result revealed that the participants largely showed positive attitudes towards persons with physical challenges. Two hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis and the analysis revealed that educational level did not influence attitude towards the physically challenged. However, it was found that exposure to a person with physical challenges influenced the attitudes toward people with a physical disability.

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Introduction: -

The International Classification of Functioning (ICF) defines disability as an umbrella term covering activity limitations, participation restriction, intellectual or sensory impairments, and performance difficulties (Castaneda, 2018). Although it is difficult to ascertain the total number of persons living with physical disability in Nigeria, it is understandable that a large number of people are living with physical disability in the country. Umeh and Adeola (2013) noted that disabilities prevalent in Nigeria include visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical impairment, intellectual impairment, and physical impairment. These persons are faced with challenges not only from disabilities but from non-disabled others. According to (Okafor 2003), the most difficult challenge and threats to people living with disabilities are social stigma and discrimination. Akhinedor (2007) stated that stigmatization and labeling of the disabled and the belief about disabilities and their causes and consequences lead to a negative attitude toward people with disabilities.

Labeling, stigmatization, and their consequences are issues that cannot be ignored when discussing disabilities. The discriminations accorded to the disabled are made manifest by the terms applied by the non-disabled persons in referring to persons with disabilities. Okafor (2003) stated that the challenges of persons with disabilities are worsened by social stigma, discrimination, and negative descriptive terms such as lunatic, crippled, deaf/dumb, etc. It could be inferred that the discrimination meted out toward persons with disabilities derived its legitimacy from the terminologies used in describing or identifying the disabled by the larger society. Most Nigerians are yet to come to

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terms with the fact that disability is never anyone's wish. The truth, however, is that all human beings are disabled in one way or the other. This is because no human being has an infinite ability. According to Ojo (2012), every act of terrorism, road or domestic accidents, parents' inability to immunize their children against polio and other killer diseases, building collapse, and other forms of accidents leaves their victims as a potential temporal or permanent member of people living with disabilities.

The Present Study

Disability studies in Nigeria are well documented (e.g., Ademodi, 2018; Adeniji, 2020; Eleweke & Ebenso, 2016; J. Eleweke & Soje, 2016; Etieyibo, 2020; Etieyibo & Omiegbe, 2016; Haruna, 2017; Ijezie et al., 2021; McKenzie & Ohajunwa, 2017; Nwokorie & Devlieger, 2019). However, the current study is concerned with persons with physical challenges. In other words, the study examined the factors that influence attitude towards persons with physical disabilities, including muscle, nerve, or bone damage resulting in functional motor difficulties limiting the ability to carry out day-to-day activities. We aim to investigate the role of the level of education and exposure to disability on the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dispositions of Nigerians (non-disabled) toward people with physical challenges. We hypothesized that the independent variable (level of education and exposure to disability) would influence the attitudes of Nigerians towards people with physical challenges.

Studies (e.g., Elmaleh 2000, Artale 2003) have shown that many demographic and psychosocial factors influence people's attitude toward disabilities. Factors such as exposure to disabilities and one's education may influence attitudes toward persons with disabilities. For instance, one study focused on people who either worked with people who are disabled or who have a relation or close friend who is disabled found that people who have been exposed to disabilities showed a more positive attitude toward the disabled than those who had no contact with disabilities. (Goreczny et al., 2011). Conversely, Akhinedor (2007) reported no significant difference in attitudes toward disability as a function of the level of education.

Attitudes are among those components of an individual's psychological makeup, making that person behave not passively or neutrally but selectively and characteristically, especially concerning certain specific stimulus situations. Attitudes are the positive or negative evaluation of an object, person, or event; attitudes help us understand people's responses to stimuli. Attitude, when acquired, can influence behavior even when those attitudes are inconsistent with our expectations. Most of our views, ideas, and how we interact and observe the behaviors of others are done through social learning. People's negative attitudes towards people with physical disabilities will lead to a behavioral pattern, such as avoiding them, not engaging with them, or disempowering them by looking down on them. These attitudes can affect a small number of people involved, but when we look at it on a larger scale, it affects our society as a whole. However, a positive attitude toward the physically challenged will lead to total integration and inclusion of the disabled in the community.

Method: -

Participants:

A total of one hundred ($n=100$) state and local government civil servants in Enugu states, Nigeria, were randomly selected as participants for the study. They comprised thirty-nine (39) males and sixty-one (61) females with an age range of 35-65 years. The rationale for selecting civil servants follows our observation that they are easy to assemble, and they comprise the characteristics in relation to our independent variables. The level of education was classified into high and low, where high represent people with a National Diploma or B. Sc. above and low represents people with a secondary school certificate and below. Exposure to disability refers to whether one has a relation, friend, or significant person with a physical challenge, and it was determined by a yes or no answer.

Measures: -

The 24 items Scale of Attitude Toward Disabled Persons (SADP) Questionnaire developed by Antonak (1982) was used for the study. An item analysis was done on the scale to test its validity and reliability following a pilot study, and the Cronbach alpha revealed a .78 reliability index for the scale.

Procedure

We requested authorization from the relevant heads of Ministries, Departments, and Agencies in the State Civil Service, and the request was granted. However, some heads of MDAs never responded to the request. The participants were selected using a random sampling technique. A participation letter notified volunteers who wished

to participate in the survey to meet the researchers at a designated location and time. A total of one hundred and forty-six participants showed up at the location. The one hundred and forty-six (146) copies of the questionnaire distributed were completed and returned to us immediately. However, only one hundred (100) copies of the questionnaires were completed correctly and were subjected to statistical analysis. The remaining 46 were discarded due to improper completion and unreturned.

Ethical Consideration

While administering the questionnaire, respondents were provided a verbal and written explanation of the study, including the purpose of the study, an assurance of total anonymity and confidentiality, and a discussion of the importance of respondents understanding they participated in the study voluntarily. Respondents were counseled that they could opt-out or withdraw from the study at any stage of the process. Respondents were encouraged to answer all questions but were asked to disregard questions to which they did not feel comfortable responding.

Result: -

Table I: - Summary table of means on psychosocial factors influence Nigerians' attitude toward people with a physical disability.

Source		Mean	N
Level of Education	High	69.89	73
	Low	70.33	27
Exposure to physical disability	Yes	72.31	27
	No	68.91	73

From table 1 above, all the participants obtained a higher means above the norms, meaning that they all showed a positive attitude toward people with physical disabilities irrespective of their educational level and exposure to physical disabilities.

Table 2: - Table showing the summary table of multiple regression analysis performed to determine the influence of level of education and exposure to a physical disability on the attitude of Nigerians towards people with physical challenges.

	B	95% CI for B		SEB	β	R^2	t	Sig
		LL	UL					
Constant	2.35	2.08	2.51	.134			17.59	.000
LoE	-.49	-.59	-.38	.062	-.476	.221	-7.83	.167
ETPD	-.087	-.207	.32	.062	-.088	.231	-1.45	.000

Note. LoE = Level of Education, ETPD = Exposure to Physical Disability, 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. * $P < .000$. ** $p > .149$

From table 2 above, the calculated value of $F(1,98) = .571$, $P > .05$ (.167) level of significance, revealed no significant influence of level of education on the positive attitude of Nigerians toward people with a physical disability. This indicated that level of education as a factor had no remarkable influence on Nigerian's attitude toward people with physical challenges, meaning that whether high or low education does not influence Nigerians positive attitude toward people with physical challenges. On the other hand, the calculated value of $F(1,97) = 3.21$, $P = .000$ level of significance, revealed a significant influence of exposure toward physical disability on the positive attitude of Nigerians toward people with a physical disability. This indicated that exposure to physical disability as a factor had a remarkable influence on Nigerian's attitude toward people with physical challenges, meaning that being exposed to physical disability does influence Nigerians positive attitude toward people with physical challenges.

Discussion: -

The study was conducted to investigate the influence of level of education and exposure to physical disability on attitude towards persons with physical challenges. Firstly, it was found that all the participants obtained a higher means above the norms, meaning that they all showed a positive attitude toward people with physical challenges, regardless of their educational level and exposure to physical disabilities. The current finding is in agreement with the previous studies (Akhidenor, 2007; Ajuwon et al., 2015; Olaleye et al., 2012; Vincent-Onabajo & Malgwi, 2015). The reason for the result could be attributed to the knowledge about physical impairments and their associated challenges. More so, it was hypothesized that level of education and exposure to physical challenge would influence attitude towards the physically challenged persons. The regression analysis conducted on the data revealed that educational level had no influence on attitude towards persons with physical challenges, which means that the extent that an individual attained in education does not necessarily influence their attitude towards those with physical challenges. The result posits that whether one has primary education or higher education does not account for the variation in attitude towards the physically challenged in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the findings of the study showed that the second hypothesis which stated that exposure to physical disability would influence the attitude of Nigerians toward people with a physical challenge, was found to be true. Consistent with (Abellán et al., 2018; Choi & Lam, 2001), the result indicates that contact with persons with physical challenges had a remarkable influence on Nigerians attitude toward people with physical challenges. The finding means that being exposed or having contact with physically disabled people positively affects people with physical challenges.

Limitations, strength and future directions

A study of this nature has inherent limitations and needed to be mentioned. First, the participants comprise individuals with the same socio-cultural and religious background, therefore, affecting the generality of the findings. Second, data collection was based only on the self-report measures, raising the question of common method variance. Also, because the variables were not manipulated, the study could not establish cause-effect relation between the independent and dependent variables.

Future studies should investigate other influencing variables, including but not limited to self-efficacy, employment status, personality, self-esteem in a more representative sample of not just people from the same socio-cultural and religious backgrounds but from diverse socio-cultural and religious entities. Another important suggestion for future research is to utilize data from other sources and utilize different research designs to determine the cause-effect relationship. This study contributed to the literature by providing further evidence that Nigerians show a positive attitude towards people with physical challenges and be the first to examine education and exposure to disability on attitude among Nigerian samples.

Conclusion: -

The main objective of this study was to investigate the influence of psychosocial factors on the attitude of Nigerians toward people with a physical disability. Based on the outcome of this study, it is safe to speculate that Nigerians would support and advocate for equal rights for people with disabilities. Thus, this study has the potential to contribute to the attitude to disability literature by investigating the level of education and exposure to disability as scarcely explored factors influencing attitude to disability in Nigeria and also help in strengthening policies and activities geared towards integrating and enhancing the plight of persons with physical disability in Nigerian and beyond

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