

Professional and personal attitude of medical students towards disabled persons

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Objective: To observe the response of the final year physiotherapy students in Rawalpindi and Islamabad regarding their attitudes towards disabled persons.

Methodology: A cross sectional survey was conducted, using purposive sampling among the students of final year students in different colleges of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Out of 82 students included in the study, 62 were females and 20 male; age ranged from 20 to 25 (mean 22.5) years. All were almost four weeks from graduation. ATDP Scale (A and B) forms were filled by participants.

Results: Mean personal score ATDP-A was 15.45 ± 10.29 . Analysis of professional ATDP-B scores revealed a mean of 8.15 ± 12.21 ($p = 0.0001$).

Conclusion: It was, therefore, concluded that the mean personal ATDP-A score did differ significantly from the mean professional ATDP-B score showing that students of final year medical students had a more positive personal attitude towards disability as compared to it professionally. (Rawal Med J 2013;38: 332-3347).

Keywords: Students, disabled persons, attitude.

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen an increased interest in attitude of rehabilitation professional towards disabled persons with the belief that their attitude is more positive than the others.¹ It was also noted that the attitude differs in different cultural system towards the disable person.² The attitude of health care professional is more positive than the students, so it need to develop the proper training and understanding the concept of disability.³ One study has shown the remarkable and significant difference in the attitude of first and fourth year medical students towards disabled person; fourth year students had more positive attitude than the first year students.⁴ Another study showed that occupational therapy students had more positive attitude than physiotherapy students.⁵ An educational program for one year for nursing students showed a significant change in the attitude of students toward disability.⁶ The concept of general disability and special disability also creates the difference in the attitude of people in community.⁷ Some studies showed that the attitude of non disabled and disabled persons is different towards the disabled person; disabled person had positive attitude towards disabled as compare to non

disabled people.⁸

The validity of some scales is also challenged and some studies focused on different instrument of measuring the attitude of professional towards the disability and a multidimensional attitude scale was introduced.^{9,10} Some studies described the influence of disability and discrimination in the development of professional and personal attitude.¹¹ A study on comparison of attitude of medical staff and disabled person towards the disable person noted that the person with disability had more positive attitude than the medical staff and students.¹² In a descriptive analysis, attitude was measured by ATDP-B; the occupational therapist had more significant and positive attitude towards the person with disability than rehab nursing and physiotherapists.¹³ The aim of this study was to observe the response of the final year physiotherapy students in regarding their attitudes towards disabled persons in our community.

METHODOLOGY

This comparative cross sectional study recruited 82 final year physiotherapy students through purposive sampling techniques. There were 20 males and 62 females. The age was between 19 and 26 years

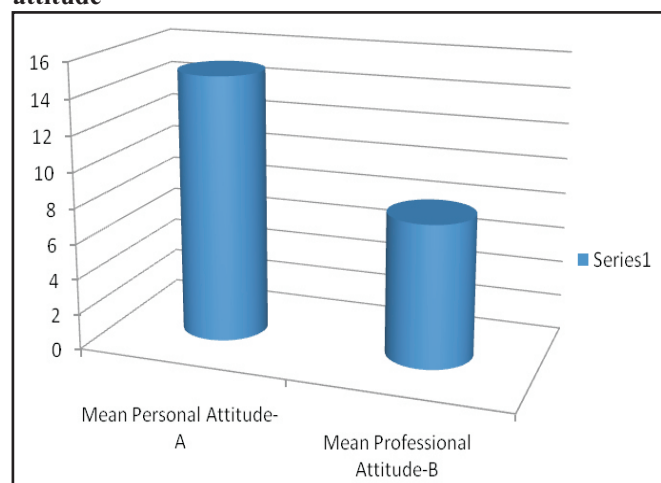
(mean 22.5). All participants were five weeks from the graduation at the time of data collection. Form A of ATDP-A, developed by Yurker et al, was used to assess attitude toward the disabled persons. The ATDP-A contains 30 items presented in a 5 point Likert format, with response ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Total score may range from 0-180, with high scores reflecting positive and low score reflecting negative attitude. The ATDP-A takes 15 minutes to complete.

One copy of the ATDP-A was distributed to each of the students and they were divided into two equal groups of 20. Group 1 was asked to complete the scale according to their professional views only. Subjects in group 2 were asked to respond with their personal views only. As soon as the groups had responded as requested, the procedure was reversed, with group 2 being asked for professional responses and group 1 for personal views. This reversal procedure was used to balance for order effect. The research hypothesis was that "The professional score mean would differ from the personal score mean." The null hypothesis "No difference between group means" was tested using a two-tailed *t*-test for correlated samples.

RESULTS

The mean personal score of ATDP-A was 15.45 ± 10.29 . Professional ATDP-A score revealed a mean of 8.15 ± 12.21 . The *t*-test for correlated samples yielded a $t=13.59$ (DF=81, $p < 0.05$).

Fig 1. Mean difference in Personal and Professional attitude



It was, therefore, concluded that the mean personal ATDP-A score did differ significantly from the mean professional ATDP-A score ($P=0.0001$) (Fig 1).

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrated that the respondents could distinguish between professional and personal attitude toward disabled persons. The personal attitude becomes more positive than professional although the participants were technically not professionals. However, they were so close to graduation that they could be consider newly qualified members of the profession. The finding that respondents had significantly more positive attitude when responding personally rather than professionally has important implication for clinical practice. It suggests that personal interaction may be so positive as long as acting personally, but once professionally they step outside of the role. It is alarming sign for curriculum development and academic authorities to re think and re plan the contents.

The task specific, clinical oriented workshop regarding the awareness about the disability must be recommended to change the attitude of newly professional toward the disable persons. The authors are fully cognizant of the fact that in certain situations, attitudes, which are expressed verbally, may be little relationship to expressed behavior.¹⁴ In one study, the difference in final year and first year students was noted.¹⁵ In this study, the personal attitude of respondent was positive, as it is very difficult to change the personal attitude of people.¹⁶ The attitudes towards the persons with disability change after the medical education and there is no difference final year and house officers.¹⁷ The personal attitude may be affected by the gender towards the disabled person and the physical education has important factor in the development of attitudes.¹⁸ The scale ATDP used in study also had some shortcoming and new scales will be helpful for the proper evaluation of attitudes.¹⁹ The curriculum also plays an integral role for the development of attitude, as nursing and occupational students it created a positive change.^{20,21}

CONCLUSION

The present study found that the personal attitude of final year students were significantly more positive than the professional attitude as measured by the form A of ATDP scale. Thus, it appears that senior physiotherapy students can dissociate personal from professional attitude. Thus, there is need of change in curriculum like disability-oriented workshop, session with disabled persons and interactive discussion forum.

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