



## THE ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS OF HUMANITIES TOWARD PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

### STAVOVI STUDENATA DRUŠTVENIH NAUKA PREMA OSOBAMA SA OMETENOŠĆU I INKLUZIVNOJ EDUKACIJI

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#### ABSTRACT

Although the attitudes toward people with disabilities had improved, there is still evidence that they remain stigmatized. The aim of this research was to determine the differences in attitudes toward people with disabilities among participants based on their sociodemographic characteristics and attitudes toward inclusive education.

The sample consisted of 261 students that were surveyed using the Multidimensional Attitudes Scale toward Persons with Disabilities, and a questioner designed by the authors regarding attitudes toward inclusion.

Students who have had previous contact with people with disabilities had more positive attitudes. The majority of them had positive attitudes towards inclusive education and had the opinion that children who are enrolled in inclusive classes do not disrupt typically developing children’s’ educational process.

It is of great importance to examine attitudes of students toward people with disabilities, because it is considered that attitudes of students represent future attitudes of the population.

**Key words:** attitudes, students, disability, inclusion.

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## SAŽETAK

Iako su se stavovi prema osobama sa ometenošću popravili, oni su i dalje stigmatizovani. Cilj ovog istraživanja je da se utvrde razlike u stavovima prema osobama sa ometenošću među ispitanicima u zavisnosti od njihovih sociodemografskih karakteristika, kao i da se utvrde stavovi prema inkluzivnoj edukaciji.

Uzorak se sastojao od 261 studenata, a korišćeni instrument je Multidimenzionalna skala o stavovima prema osobama sa ometenošću, koja je dopunjena upitnikom konstruisanim od strane autora o stavovima prema inkluzivnoj edukaciji. Studenti koji su imali prethodne kontakte sa osobama sa ometenošću imaju pozitivnije stavove.

Većina uzorka ima pozitivne stavove prema inkluzivnom obrazovanju i smatra da deca koja su uključena u takav sistem obrazovanja ne ometaju proces usvajanja znanja svojih vršnjaka. Od velikog je značaja ispitati stavove studenata prema osobama sa ometenošću zato što se smatra da studenti predstavljaju buduće stavove opšte populacije.

**Ključne riječi:** stavovi, studenti, ometenost, inkluzija.

## INTRODUCTION

Attitudes of general population toward people with disabilities are predominantly negative and result in prejudice and exclusion of people with disabilities (Roessler & Bolton, 1978). Those attitudes are often based on lack of understanding, fear of the unknown and learned stereotypes (Brillhart, Jay & Wyers, 1990; Jaffe, 1967).

Discrimination is defined as unjust difference in actions toward different population categories, denying them their rights and responsibilities as rightful citizens (Thornicroft et al., 2009). Those negative attitudes have behavioral implications, because our attitudes toward someone affect the way we treat them (Antonak & Livneh, 1988). Prejudice and discrimination can be manifested as avoidance (Snyder, Kleck & Mentzer, 1979), lack of sympathy towards others or social avoidance (Crandall & Moriarty, 1995). Stigma includes three elements: problems of knowledge (lack of knowledge about a certain population or disinformation), problems of attitudes (prejudice) and problems of behavior (discrimination) (Thornicroft, Rose, Kassam & Sartorius, 2007) and it deepens social isolation of the stigmatized population (Farina, Fisher & Fischer, 1992). Stigma and discrimination unable social integration and they lower the person's quality of life (Stolzman, 1994) and as a result lead to potential problems regarding person's confidence (Roessler & Bolton, 1978).

Internalized stigma or self stigma refers to prejudice that people with disability have towards themselves (Corrigan & Watson, 2002) and a concept of internalized stigma is crucial in explaining psychological effects of stigma (Corrigan, 1998). Being aware of stereotypes that affect us is not necessary to develop self stigma, but it is needed for a person to have accordance with those stereotypes and internalize them (Link, Mirotnik & Cullen, 1991).

This especially affects people with disabilities, because having a disability alone has an impact on identity development, which affects the perception of self value (Goffman 1963). Antoanek (1980) states that finding the origin of those negative attitudes is of crucial value and that this is the only way of possibly preventing their occurrence in the future. Therefore, the existence of proper instruments that measure attitudes toward people with disabilities (Tait & Purdie, 2000) that will indicate which demographic data has the most impact (English, 1971; Tait & Purdie, 2000) on their development is essential. Even though it is stated that general public's opinions on people with disabilities have improved over the years (Siperstein, Norins, Corbin & Shriver, 2003), there is evidence that these populations are still stigmatized (Ali, Hassiotis, Strydom & King, 2012). With this being said, the value of our research is clear and especially knowing that negative attitudes toward people with disabilities in general will result in having negative attitudes toward inclusion of this population in education system and consequently treating them poorly (Cialdini, Petty & Cacioppo, 1981).

Abundant number of instruments were designed to measure attitudes toward people with disability (Tringo, 1970) and majority of them assess the level of discomfort in situations of proximity with this persons. It is believed that mentioned discomfort origins from misinformation related to this population, as well as hesitations in approaching them, or lack of knowledge about what to expect from this interaction (Gething & Wheeler, 1992), which is frequently disguised by having a positive approach (Vilchinsky et al., 2010).

The aim of this research was to determine the differences in attitudes toward people with disabilities between participants in terms of gender, year of studies, population size in origin city, parental education level, previous contact with people with disability, having a family member with disability and attitudes toward inclusive education.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Participants**

The respondents filled out the online questionnaire voluntarily and anonymously. The sample consisted of 261 participants, 20 male (7.66%) and 241 female (92.34%). 57 participants originate from a city with a population count over 500.000 (21.84%), 39 participants originate from a city that has between 100.000 and 500.000 inhabitants (14.94%), 53 participants originate from a town with population count between 50.000 and 100.000 (20.31%), 54 participants originate from a town with population count between 10.000 and 50.000 (20.69%) and 58 participants originate from a place with less than 10.000 inhabitants (22.22%). 75 participants attend Faculty for special education and rehabilitation (28.74%), 58 attend Faculty for psychology (22.22 %), 65 participants attend Teacher training faculty (24.90%), and 63 participants study at the Faculty for preschool teacher training (24.14%).

The data collected shows that 38 participants are first-year students (14.56%), 55 participants are second-year students (21.07%), 69 participants are on their third year of studies (26.07%), 30 participants are fourth-year students (11.49%), 21 participants are on their super senior year of studies (8.05%), 46 participants are enrolled in master studies program (17.62%) and two participants attend the doctoral studies (0.77%).

Highest obtained education level of respondents' mother is for 23 participants elementary school (8.81%), for 151 participants is high school (57.85%), for 31 is college (11.88%), for 37 is university (14.18%), for 13 is master studies (4.98%) and for six is doctoral studies (2.30%), while the highest obtained education level of participants' father is for 17 participants elementary school (6.51%), for 160 is high school (61.30%), for 33 is college (12.64%), for 40 is university (15.3%), for five is master studies (1.95%) and for six is doctoral studies (2.30%).

Only 53 participants have a family member with disability (20.31%) and 208 of them do not have a family member with disability (79.69%), while 226 of them have had previous contact with a person with disability (86.59%) and only 35 of them did not have any type of previous contact (13.41%). 194 participants stated that they support inclusive education (74.33%), while 67 said they do not support it (25.67%). 94 participants believe that children who are enrolled in inclusive classes disrupt typically developing childrens' educational process (36.02%) and 167 of them believe the opposite (63.98%).

### **Masuring instrument**

The instrument used was *Multidimensional Attitudes Scale toward Persons with Disabilities* (Findler, Vilchinsky & Werner, 2007), that was revised and translated into Serbian language (Milacic-Vidojevic & Colic, 2016). The instrument represents a half-projective scale, where the respondent should select feelings, thoughts and actions of an imaginary person during an encounter with a person with disability. The assumption is that a respondent will project their own feelings, thoughts and actions onto that person (Dragojevic, Milacic-Vidojevic & Hanak, 2010). The instrument consists of 44 items, which are in a form of statement and measured by a five-step Likert type scale, where numbers indicate the level of accordance with the statement (1-can not occur, 5- will most likely occur).

Besides the standardized instrument, we used self constructed questionnaire which included questions regarding sociodemographic information about the participants, as well as two questions regarding attitudes toward inclusion of children with disabilities, regarding whether the respondent supports this type of setting, as well as attitudes about whether if children with disabilities who are included in regular classrooms are impeding typically developing childrens' educational process.

## Measures and statistical analysis

The data was inserted and interpreted by an IBM SPSS Statistics 23 program.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By performing a t-test analysis, we did not obtain statistical significance ( $p > 0.5$ ) by comparing gender ( $f = 0.685$ ;  $p = 0.409$ ) and attitudes toward people with disabilities (*Table 2*).

Table 1. Difference in stances toward people with disabilities in terms of participants' gender

Gender	N	AS	SD	F	p	t	df
Female	240	88.98	18.387	0.685	0.409	1.553	257
Male	19	82.26	14.586			1.892	22.786

It is important to highlight that sample variation is explained by the data that among students who graduated at faculties for humanities, more than 71% are female (Republic Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Our results are similar to the research of Tamm and Prellewitz (2001) who did not obtain gender differences in terms of attitudes toward people with disabilities. However, Townsend and associates (1993) found in their study that woman have more positive attitudes toward people with disability. Same results were obtained by Antoanac and associates (1995) and Tervo, Azuma, Palmer and Redinius (2002).

In terms of year of studies that our participants attend, they were divided into two groups. First consisted of students that attend lower years (first and second) and the second group consisted by students who attend higher years (third, fourth, super senior year, masters and doctoral level studies). By performing a t-test analysis, we did not obtain statistically relevant difference ( $p > 0.5$ ) between year of studies that students attend ( $f = 0.301$ ;  $p = 0.584$ ) and attitudes toward people with disabilities (*Table 2*).

Table 2. Difference in stances toward people with disabilities in terms of year of studies

Year of studies	N	AS	SD	F	p	t	df
Lower years	93	90.33	18.676			1.180	259
Higher years	168	87.56	17.906	0.301	0.584	1.166	183.300

On the contrary, Antoanac and associates (1995) found that younger students, who consequently attend lower years of studies, have more positive attitudes toward people with disability in comparison with older students.

By performing ANOVA analysis, we found a significant correlation ( $p < 0.5$ ) in terms of population size of respondents' place of origin ( $F = 2.745$ ;  $p = 0.029$ ) while examining the attitudes toward people with disabilities (*Table 3*).

Table 3. Difference in stances toward people with disabilities in terms of population size of respondents' place of origin

Population size of respondents' place of origin	<i>N</i>	<i>AS</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>MIN</i>	<i>MAX</i>
More than 500.000	57	87.49	16.104			39	118
100.000-500.000	39	82.54	22.784	2.745	0.029*	43	150
50.000-100.000	53	89.57	20.128			40	132
10.000-50.000	54	86.91	15.216			52	118
Less than 10.000	58	94.22	16.205			55	133

\* $p < 0.05$

To determine the level of attitude positivity, we further conducted Tuckey test for multiple comparisons (Table 4) and the results indicated that students who come from places that have between 100.000 and 500.000 habitants have the most positive attitudes toward people with disabilities ( $AS=82.54$ ), while students who origin from places with less than 10.000 habitants have the least positive attitudes ( $AS=94.22$ ).

Table 4 – Results of Tuckey test for multiple comparisons

Population size of respondents' place of origin	I-J	Std. Error	<i>p</i>	Lower bound	Upper bound	
More than 500.000	100 000-500 000	4.953	3.732	0.675	-5.30	15.21
	50 000-100 000	-2.075	3.427	0.974	-11.49	7.34
	10 000-50 000	0.584	3.410	1.000	-8.78	9.95
100.000-500.000	Less than 10 000	-6.733	3.349	0.264	-15.93	2.47
	More than 500 000	-4.953	3.732	0.675	-15.21	5.30
	50 000-100 000	-7.028	3.789	0.345	-17.44	3.38
50.000-100.000	10 000-50 000	-4.369	3.774	0.775	-14.74	6.00
	Less than 10 000	-11.686*	3.719	0.016*	-21.90	-1.47
	More than 50.000	2.075	3.427	0.974	-7.34	11.49

100.000	500 000						
	100 000-500 000	7.028	3.789	0.345	-3.38	17.44	
	10 000-100 000	2.659	3.472	0.940	-6.88	12.20	
	Less than 10 000	-4.658	3.412	0.651	-14.03	4.72	
10.000-50.000	More than 500 000	-0.584	3.410	1.000	-9.95	8.78	
	100 000-500 000	4.369	3.774	0.775	-6.00	14.74	
	50 000-100 000	-2.659	3.472	0.940	-12.20	6.88	
	Less than 10 000	-7.317	3.396	0.201	-16.65	2.01	
Less than 10.000	More than 500 000	6.733	3.349	0.264	-2.47	15.93	
	100 000-500 000	11.686*	3.719	0.016*	1.47	21.90	
	50 000-100 000	4.658	3.412	0.651	-4.72	14.03	
	10 000-50 000	7.317	3.396	0.201	-2.01	16.65	

\*p<0.05

Our results are compatible with research conducted by Palmer, Redinius and Tervo (2000) that measured the attitudes of students of related professions and found that students who come from rural areas which consequently have less habitants, have negative attitudes toward people with disabilities in comparison with students who origin from bigger cities with more dense population.

By performing ANOVA analysis, we found a significant correlation (p<0.5) between participants' faculty type (F=4.363; p=0.005) and attitudes toward people with disabilities (Table 5).

Table 5. Difference in stances toward people with disabilities in terms of faculty that students attend

Faculty	N	AS	SD	F	p	MIN	MAX
Faculty for special education and rehabilitation	75	94.57	17.605	4.362	0.005*	59	143
Teacher training faculty	65	87.74	18.085			45	131
Faculty for psychology	58	86.14	16.802			43	114
College of pre-school teacher training	63	84.43	18.822			39	150

\*p<0.05

To determine the level of attitude positivity, we further conducted Tuckey test for multiple comparisons and the results indicated that students who attend College of pree-school teacher training have the most positive attitudes toward people with disabilities (AS=84.43), followed by students who attend Faculty for psychology (AS=86.14), than students who attend Teacher training faculty (AS=87.74) and the most negative attitudes have students who attend Faculty for special education and rehabilitation (AS=94.57) (Table 6).

Table 6. Results of Tuckey test for multiple comparisons

Faculty	I-J	Std. Error	p	Lower bound	Upper bound	
Faculty for special education and rehabilitation	Teacher training faculty	6.835	3.026	0.111	-0.99	14.66
	Faculty for psychology	8.435	3.122	0.037*	0.36	16.51
	College of pree-school teacher training	10.145	3.051	0.006*	2.25	18.04
Teacher training faculty	Faculty for special education and rehabilitation	-6.835	3.026	0.111	-14.66	0.99
	Faculty for psychology	1.601	3.225	0.960	-6.74	9.94
	College of pree-school teacher training	3.310	3.157	0.721	-4.85	11.47
Faculty for psychology	Faculty for special education and rehabilitation	-8.435	3.122	0.037*	-16.51	-0.36
	Teacher training faculty	-1.601	3.225	0.960	-9.94	6.74
	College of pree-school teacher training	1.709	3.249	0.953	-6.69	10.11
College of pree-school teacher training	Faculty for special education and rehabilitation	-10.145	3.051	0.006*	-18.04	-2.25
	Teacher training faculty	-3.310	3.157	0.721	-11.47	4.85
	Faculty for psychology	-1.709	3.249	0.953	-10.11	6.69

\*p<0.05



It is interesting that students who will be working closely with children with disabilities in regular schools, respectively teachers, or in schools for educating children with special needs, respectively special educators have the worst attitudes toward people with disabilities among all four groups of students. Our results are in conclusion with previous research conducted in our region (Brojcin, Pavlovic, Mastilo & Glumbic, 2015) that focused on attitudes of students who attend Faculty for Special education and rehabilitation in Bosnia toward people with disabilities. They found that some of the participants in the sample had clearly negative attitudes, while some had mildly positive attitudes. The authors emphasize that it is necessary for students who are being educated in this field to have more positive attitudes toward this population.

In terms of highest obtained education level of respondents’ mother, the participants were divided into two groups. First one consisted of participants whose mother obtained lower educations levels (elementary school and highschool) and the second one consisted of participants whose mother obtained higher education levels (college, university, masters’ degree and doctoral degree level). By performing a t-test analysis, we did not obtain statistical difference ( $p > 0.5$ ) in terms of level of education of participants mother ( $f = 0.997$ ;  $p = 0.319$ ) and attitudes toward people with disability (Table 7).

Table 7. Difference in stances toward people with disabilities in terms of highest obtained education level of respondents’ mother

Highest obtained education level of respondents’ mother	N	AS	SD	F	p	MIN	MAX
Lower education levels	174	89.98	17.730	0.997	0.319	1.809	259
Higher education levels	87	85.68	18.875			1.772	162.860

Our results are incompatible with previous research conducted by Antoanek and associates (1995) which indicated that people who obtain higher levels of education have more positive attitudes toward people with disabilities.

In terms of highest obtained education level of respondents’ father, the participants were divided the same way. By performing a t-test analysis, we found a statistical difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) by comparing students’ fathers education levels ( $f = 0.196$ ;  $p = 0.043$ ) and their attitudes toward people with disabilities (Table 8).

Table 8. Difference in stances toward people with disabilities in terms of highest obtained education level of respondents' father

Highest obtained education level of respondents' father	N	AS	SD	F	p	p2	t	df
Lower education levels	177	90.12	18.818	0.196	0.658	0.043*	2.037	259
Higher education levels	84	85.24	16.432			0.034	2.137	184.726

\*p<0.05

Our results are similar to previous studies (Antonak et al., 1995) that found that people who obtain higher levels of education have more positive attitudes toward people with disabilities, than people who obtain lower levels of education.

By performing a t-test analysis, we found a statistically significant correlation (p<0.5) between existence of previous contact with people with disabilities (F=0.358; p=0.039) and attitudes toward them (Table 9).

Table 9. Difference in stances toward people with disabilities in terms of having a previous contact with person with disability

Having a previous contact with person with disability	N	AS	SD	F	p	p 2	t	df
Yes	226	87.63	18.164	0.358	0.550	0.039*	-2.078	259
No	35	94.46	17.527			0.038	-2.133	46.059

\*p<0.05

Having a previous contact with this population is the best way to reduct stigmatization toward them and to improve attitudes associated with this population (Corrigan & Penn, 1999), regardless of contact type and its intensity (Yuker & Hurley, 1987; Yuker, 1994). Our results are similar to findings of a previous study (Packer et al., 2000) that implied that students of humanities who had previous contact, contact simulation, experience or additional education about this population have more positive attitudes than students who did not have any of the mentioned. Research conducted by Tervo, Azuma, Palmer and Redinius (2002) which measured the attitudes of 90 students are in accordance with our results and the authors emphasize the importance of providing opportunities for humanities students to have frequent contacts with this population in order for them to have their attitudes improved.

By performing a t-test analysis, we did not obtain statistically relevant difference ( $p > 0.5$ ) between presence of a family member with disability ( $f = 0.301$ ;  $p = 0.584$ ) and attitudes toward this population. Participants who have family members with disability have the same attitudes toward them as students who do not have a family member with disability (*Table 10*).

Table 10. Difference in stances toward people with disabilities in terms of having a family member with disability

Having a family member with disability	N	AS	SD	F	p	p 2	t	df
Yes	53	88.64	20.634			0.967	0.042	259
No	208	88.52	17.577	1.215	0.271	0.970	0.038	72.385

By performing a t-test analysis, we obtained a statistically relevant difference ( $p < 0.5$ ) between supporting inclusive education of children with disabilities ( $F = 0.351$ ;  $p_2 = 0.005$ ) and attitudes toward people with disabilities (*Table 11*).

Table 11. Difference in stances toward people with disabilities in terms of attitudes toward supporting inclusive education of children with disabilities

Supporting inclusive education of children with disabilities	N	AS	SD	F	p	p 2	t	df
Yes	194	86.69	17.254			0.005*	-2.844	259
No	67	93.93	19.860	0.351	0.554	0.009	-2.656	102.509

\* $p < 0.05$

Even though majority of students believe that these children should be enrolled in regular school system, it is worrying that a quarter of our sample (25.67%) does not agree. Our results are incompatible with previous studies (Jobe & Deana, 1996) that examined attitudes of these students toward inclusion of children with disabilities and found that in general, attitudes toward inclusion are positive. The research of Vaz and associates (2015) that included 74 participants who work in schools whose classrooms are attended by children with disabilities found that negative attitudes toward including these children in general education system origin from the lack of knowledge and experience of teachers about working with this population.

By performing a t-test analysis, there was a statistically significant correlation ( $p < 0.5$ ) in terms of opinion that children with disabilities who are enrolled in inclusive classes disrupt typically developing childrens' educational process ( $F = 0.666$ ;  $p_2 = 0.003$ ) (*Table 12*).

Table 12. Difference in stances toward people with disability in terms of opinion that children with disabilities who are enrolled in inclusive classes disrupt typically developing childrens' educational process

<i>Opinion that children with disabilities who are enrolled in inclusive classes disrupt typically developing childrens' educational process</i>	N	AS	SD	F	p	p 2	t	df
Yes	94	93.01	17.715			0.003*	3.019	259
No	167	86.04	18.033	0.666	0.415	0.003	3.034	195.811

\*p<0.05

Results are concerning, because more than a third of our sample (36%) believe that children with disabilities disrupt children without disabilities in classrooms. Even though there is a large number of students who will work closely with children with disabilities after finishing their studies believe this, research of Tripp, French and Sherill (1995) which examined the attitudes of typically developing children toward their peers with disabilities with a sample of 455 children, who were nine to twelve years old, found that children who have classmates with disabilities have more positive attitudes than children who are enrolled in classes without any children with disabilities. This data has numerous practical implications, because it is highlighted in previous research (Vilchinsky & Findler, 2004) that having negative attitudes toward peers with disabilities disrupts their inclusion process, therefore increases mental health issues of children with disabilities.

## CONCLUSION REMARKS

It is of great importance to examine attitudes of students toward people with disabilities, because it is considered that attitudes of students represent future attitudes of the entire population (Brojčin, Pavlović, Mastilo & Glumbić, according to Ćirović, 2011) and attitudes of general public toward this population can have a negative impact on the process of integration and inclusion of people with disabilities.

Instead of conclusion, we give implications for conducting further research in the area of attitudes toward people with disability.

1. Determine attitudes of typically developing children towards classmates with disability.
2. Determine attitudes of parents of typically developing peers toward their childrens' classmates with disability.
3. Determine attitudes toward people with disability in terms of type of disability.
4. Determine attitudes toward people with disability in terms of presence of maladaptive behavior.

5. Determine attitudes toward people with autism spectrum disorders.

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