

LETTER TO THE EDITOR**CHOOSE NOT TO PLACE 'DIS' IN MY ABILITY**

Our thoughts create actions; these actions turn into habits. And habits turn into a lifestyle of unamendable behavior. To nip the evil in the bud, we must provoke thought. Disability; a word not unknown to many, often stereotyped. Differently-abled; a paradigm shifts of thought.

Differently abled people are judged, bullied, looked down upon, and mocked by society with all forms of stereotypical behaviors. These prejudices cause all types of stigma, like not being accepted and not awarded rights, which contributes to injustice and restricted engagement opportunities. In our research, we identified the underlying views and behaviors shown towards differently abled and investigated the relationship between the level of familiarity and stereotypical/ discriminatory behaviors.

The Supreme Court of Pakistan has ordered the government to discontinue the use of derogatory terms such as "disabled," "physically handicapped," and "mentally retarded" in all official documents. The current Government of Pakistan promised to safeguard 2% employment quota for differently-abled yet there are 3 million atypical individuals in the country. Negative attitudes contribute significantly to the success or failure of atypical individuals as they seek ways to work, live independently and participate in community life. It is clear that society's attitudes are important determinants for the acceptance and support of atypical individuals and the opportunities offered to them.

A survey-based research was conducted with a sample of the Pakistani population (n=287). Stereotypes were analyzed by adapted ATDP (Attitude Towards Disabled Persons).

The results found that when the contact rate or level of familiarity is high, the attitude towards the differently abled individual is positive; when the contact rate of the differently abled individual is low, the attitude towards the disabled is negative. The familiarity of contact refers to interacting with atypical individuals, whether in the social, family, professional or clinical level. Higher levels of familiarity, education, training of public with differently abled individuals side by side, and the formation of positive relationships between them encourages a positive attitude towards the differentlyabled.

The proven results showed the root hindrances society proposes to inclusivity and independent living. The result signifies the role every individual plays in reforming these views and providing support and acknowledging their abilities. An ongoing investigation of encounters of stigmatizing behaviors towards differently abled individuals is required in an attempt to determine social determinants that condemn their independence.

In order to bring a change, awareness and inclusivity is an important factor in developing the right attitude towards differently abled. This letter is aimed to highlight and spark Conversations for the initiation and execution of anti-stigma interventions and thereby potentially contribute to rehabilitation programs and participation prospects for them.

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