

PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE TOWARDS PARTICIPATION OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Abdul Rasid Aida Roha., Ong Tah Fatt**., Wahidah Tumijan***
(UiTM), Malaysia.*

Abstract

Desire to be accepted by other people is one of the basic human needs. Social isolation or rejection is very stressful to person with disabilities. Social acceptance by normal people towards physical activity participation for the disabled plays a vital role in motivating them to be more physically active. A review of literature indicated that there are several factors that influence public acceptance towards participation of people with disabilities in physical activity. The present study aims to examine the factors that influence public acceptance towards people with disabilities involvement in physical activity. Based on the Theory of Reasoned Action and Cultural Values Theory, four factors (public attitudes, exposure, ethnicity and subjective norms) were examined in this study. A stratified and convenience sampling technique was adopted to collect data from public without disabilities (N=444), who were exercising at four public recreational parks in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The instrument was developed based on previous study and opinion of a panel of experts. Regression analyses were employed to examine the relationship between the variables. The result showed that the relationship between subjective norms and acceptance has the highest value ($R^2=0.179$), compared to attitude ($R^2=0.146$), ethnicity ($R^2=0.073$) and exposure ($R^2=0.044$). The result indicated that stressing on family supports, mutual contacts and promoting positive attitude of the public are promising approaches to improving public acceptance towards participation of the disabled in physical activity. Emphasizing the related factors can help to reduce the public stigma, which is one of the main obstacles to providing healthy lifestyles for the disabled.

Keywords: Attitude; Ethnicity; Exposure; public Acceptance; People with Disabilities; Physical Activity.

Previous research has identified that there are still less participation among people with disabilities in physical activity compared to people without disabilities. According to the Healthy People 2010 report, 56% of adults with disabilities do not engage in any leisure time physical activity compared to 36% among adults without disabilities (Bult, Verschuren, Jongmans, Lindemen, & Ketelaar, 2011). Referring to The Person Disabilities Act 2008, it is stated that disabled people shall have the right to participate in recreational, leisure and sport activities on an equal basis with person without disabilities. Specific to the access to the context of recreation, leisure and sport, the Act has empowered people with disabilities to seek variety of physical activity options and to request inclusion in community life (Robertson & Long, 2008). Though many countries have taken serious initiatives in promoting physical activity participation among people with disabilities, somehow, the society itself still lack of support for this population (Bult et al., 2011). It is believed that, many of the obstacles encountered by people with disabilities involvement in physical activity are generated by societal attitudes (Ozer et al., 2012).

Negative societal perceptions of disability can have a devastating impact upon the self-confidence and self image of people with disabilities, which can deter the involvement of person with disabilities in physical activity. Bedini (2000) reported that persons who are different, are often avoided or rejected on the basis of societal stigmatisation on physical activity participation. A review of literature indicated that there are several factors that influence normal people (community) acceptance towards people with disabilities in physical activity. Basically, past research often approaches these issues from two perspectives, which focuses on the external and internal factors. The external factors are related to subjective norms, ethnicity (cultural background) and exposure (previous experience, knowledge) (Blue, 1995; Rimmer, Rilley, Wang, Rauworth, & Jurkowski, 2004; Tachibana, 2005; Wagner A. Kamakura & Novak, 1992). Attitude was identified as the main internal factors that relates to the public acceptance towards people with disabilities participation in physical activity (Blue, 1995; Daruwalla & Darcy, 2005).

According to Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), behavioural intention is the main determinant of their behaviour. Intention is influenced by two factors which are subjective norms (influence of social factors towards the performance of behaviour) and individual's attitudes (attitudes towards performing the behaviour) (Fen & Sabaruddin, 2004). Subjective norms, represents an individual's perceptions of what significant others would think about her/his performing the behaviour (Park & Levine, 1999). It obtained multiple normative beliefs and motivation. Normative belief is a perception that is valence and can be measured continuously. In the same way, one's motivation to comply with the perceived expectation of others can be weaker or stronger.

Attitude towards behaviour (the attitudinal component), in turn, is obtained by summing the products of behavioural beliefs and evaluation of outcomes which the consequences of the behaviour are favourable or unfavourable. Attitudes consist of three components which are, affective (feelings/emotions), cognitive (beliefs/knowledge) and behaviour, all being generated by the attitudes object. At the most basic level, personal attitude may be describes as a belief and opinions held by an individual about referent object. Societal attitudes on the other hand, refer to prevailing beliefs influenced by and espoused by any cultural orientation, historical background, governments or other prevailing conditions (Daruwalla & Darcy, 2005). Societal attitudes tend to be a more crucial part to change compared with individual attitudes. The values of the subjective norms and attitude components, as well as their relative weight in predicting behavioural intentions are vary from person to person depending on a variety of cultural, individual and social factors. Understanding these differences has important theoretical and implications for our understanding of the social influence process

The perception and acceptance of community towards people with disabilities in the world varies depending on the region and culture. According to the Culture Values Theory by Schwartz (1999), Cultural Values represents the implicitly and explicitly shared abstracts ideas about what is right, desirable and good in the society. Culture and way of life influence people overall attitude and practices with respect to disabled people in develop country (Lua & Neni, 2011). The majority of research on public acceptance toward persons with disabilities has focused on Western industrialized populations, this resulted considerable problem occurs when trying to generalize results to developing countries (Wang, Chan, Thomas, Lin, & Larson, 1997). Malaysia is a multicultural country which comprises three major ethnic groups: Malay, Chinese and Indian. These three ethnic groups have their daily practices differs in various aspects such as religion, language and culture (Kamaruddin, 2007).

Hellriegel and Slocum (2004) define ethnicity as identification with a cultural group that has shared traditions and heritage, including language, national origin, religion, customs and foods. Some people identify strongly with these cultural roots but some people do not. Thus, a cross-ethnic study of public acceptance toward persons with disabilities is crucial in understanding whether an acceptance is universal or ethnically specific.

Exposure is one of the important factors that influence someone's acceptance towards disable people in their life. The more frequently public interacted with disabled people, the more likely they will engage in future interactions. Therefore real experience with disable people in physical activity seem more favourable than stimulated experience to fully accept them in physical activity (Flower, Burns, & Miller, 2007). According to Batsio, Bebetos, Panteli, and Antoniou (2006), past experience (exposure), specific subject education (physical education for disabled students), information and knowledge are the main elements for developing positive relationship towards peers with disabilities in physical education class.

It is believed that, lack of awareness and limited knowledge accompanied by the false beliefs and negative attitudes toward people with disabilities are widespread in developing countries (Ozer et al., 2012). Belongingness, acceptance and sense of being supported are essentials for people with disabilities to get involve in physical activity with normal people. Researchers have emphasized that more future studies on public acceptance towards people with disabilities involvement in physical activity should be focused on the prominent factors that have strong association with participation or non participation in physical activity among the disabled population (Perry, Conner, & Shelar, 2008; Rimmer et al., 2004;

Werner & Grayzman, 2011). In relation to the recommendations, the present study aims to examine the factors that influence public acceptance towards people with disabilities involvement in physical activity, with reference of Theory Reasoned Action and Cultural Value Theory. To examine the relationship between the internal personal factors (attitude, exposure, and ethnicity) and public acceptance towards people with disabilities involvement in physical activity. To examine the relationship between external personal factor (subjective norms) and public acceptance towards people with disabilities involvement in physical activity. To identify the importance of each factors in influencing public acceptance towards people with disabilities involvement in physical activity.

METHOD

Data collection was conducted on four urban public recreational parks in Klang Valley Malaysia. The Public Recreation Parks involved were, Taman Tasik Titiwangsa Kuala Lumpur, Wetland Putrajaya, Taman Tasik Shah Alam and Taman Subang Ria, Subang Jaya. The four parks were chosen based on their facilities, transportation and activities that were provided at these parks. Purposive sampling technique will be utilised. Present study use purposive sampling because the specific characteristic of the respondents that used Public Recreation Park in the area of Klang Valley doing physical activity during the questionnaire

where distributed. A total 500 of self administrated questionnaires were distributed to the public. Questionnaires were distributed to the public during their resting time after doing physical activity at the Public Recreation Parks. A total of 444 usable questionnaires were obtained, resulting in a response rate of 88.8%. High response rate was achieved as respondents were in a captive environment and researcher was present onsite to facilitate the completion of the questionnaire.

The present study employed quantitative research design using closed ended questionnaires. The survey questionnaire was divided into three sections. All the questionnaires were developed based on the review of literature and were adopted and adapted to form an appropriate questionnaire for the current study. Section A contained 6 items about demographic profiles whereby respondents were asked to provide information regarding their gender, marital status, age, race, education level and occupation. Section B consists of 32 items measuring attitude (17 items), subjective norms (4 items), exposure (6 items), and ethnicity (5 items). Section C consists of 6 items measuring intention to accept people with disabilities involvement in physical activity.

Items on Subjective Norms were adapted from Werner and Grayzman (2011), whereas items on attitude were adapted from Findler, Vilchinsky, and Werner (2007). The Acculturation Scale developed by Nguyen and Eve (2002) was adapted for the measurement of ethnicity. Items on Subjective norms, attitude and ethnicity were measured using 7-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Items on exposure were adapted from Toran, Muhammad, Yasin, Tahar, and Hamzah (2010). The measurement of intention which was adapted from the scale developed by Bebetos, Derri, Zafeiriadis, and Kyrgiridis (2013), was rated on 7-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (very probably not) to 7 (definitely yes). This questionnaire was validated using back to back translation. Questionnaire was prepared in bilingual (Malay and English). There is a necessity for the questionnaire to be translated to the Malay Language as a large number of spectators are more familiar with the Malay language, which is also the national language of the country.

In data analysis, two types of statistical techniques were used to analyse the data which are descriptive statistic and multiple regression. Descriptive statistics such as Simple Frequency Distributions was used to interpret the data on demographic profiles of respondents. Meanwhile, all questions on attitude, subjective norms, exposure, and ethnicity were analyze using Hierarchical Multiple Regression to examine the relationship of each variables with the public acceptance intention toward involvement of people with disabilities (PWD) in physical activity. The data gathered was analyzed by using Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) program version 20.0.

RESULTS

Profile of respondents

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Demographic characteristic	Frequency (N=444)	Percentage
Gender		
Male	198	44.6
Female	246	55.4
Marital Status		
Married	163	36.7
Single	278	62.6
Others	3	0.7
Age (years)		
20-29	292	65.8
30-39	76	17.1
40-49	38	8.6
50-59	20	4.5
>60	18	4.1
Race		
Malay**		51.1
Chinese	159	35.8
Indian	58	13.1
Education Level		
Primary	10	2.3
Secondary	122	27.5
Diploma	172	38.7
Degree	115	25.9
Postgraduate	25	5.6
Occupation		
Government	94	21.2
Private		70.2
Social Worker		
Business	87	19.6
Housewife	14	3.2
Private	78	17.6
Student	93	20.9
Others	28	6.3

The majority of respondents were female (55.4%) compared to male (44.6%). With regards to marital status, about two-third (62.6%) of the respondents were still single and were young adult aged between 20 and 29 years (65.8%). In the terms of race, the respondents were mostly Malay (51.1%) followed by Chinese (35.8%) and Indian (13.1%). In this study, majority of the respondents (70.2%) achieved academy qualification of diploma or higher. Many respondents were government servant (21.2%) and students (20.9%).

Public acceptances' factors toward people with disabilities participation in physical activity.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and Reliability analysis of factors

Factors	Mean	SD	Alpha (a) Cronbach's
Attitude	5.12	0.72	0.65
Ethnicity	4.90	1.12	0.76
Subjective Norms	4.76	0.87	0.82
Exposure	4.20	1.59	0.75

The four factors related to the public acceptance towards participation of people with disabilities in physical activity were attitude, ethnicity, exposure and subjective norms. Table 2 showed that, the factors with the highest mean is attitude with the mean score (M=5.12) followed by ethnicity (M=4.90), subjective norms (M=4.76) and exposure (M=4.20). As can be seen in the table above, the reliability Cronbach's Alpha values for the four factors were satisfactory ranging from 0.65 to 0.82, well above the generally limit of 0.60 (DeVellis, 2003).

Relationship between related factors and public acceptance towards people with disabilities participation in physical activity.

Table 3: Regression analysis of independence variables and Public acceptance

Factors (independent variables)	Public acceptance (dependent variable)	
	Beta	R²
Subjective norm	0.423	0.283
Attitude Ethnicity	0.382	0.146
Exposure	0.270	0.073

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the relationship between all the factors (attitude, ethnicity, subjective norms, exposure) and public acceptance (Table 3). Among the four factors, subjective norms ($f = 0.423$) possessed the highest predictive power, followed by attitude ($f = 0.382$), ethnicity $f = 0.270$ and exposure $f = 0.211$. In the analysis, combination of four factors yielded a predictive power of 28.3%.

DISCUSSION

The present study aims to examine the factors that influence public acceptance towards people with disabilities involvement in physical activity. Several interesting findings emerged from the data in this study. Specifically, among the components in Theory of Reasoned Action construct, subjective norms were found to be the strongest predictor of intentions to accept people with disabilities participation in physical activity. This finding may be attributable to the fact that the first stages of public socialization with disable people are more likely to be influenced in their decision making process by the perceptions of other relevant persons or group. Family social support is the stronger predictor to influenced someone decision to accept people with disabilities either in physical activity or in their socialization life (Anderson, Wojeik, Winet, & Williams, 2006). Kuntz, Burge, Brown, and Arsenault (2010) stated that,

the impact of early experiences and their related emotions and cognitions have a major role in influencing the growing child's belief and value system by the parents. Parental and significant others' actions, words, tone of voice, gestures, and so forth are transmitted, directly or indirectly to the child and tend to have a crucial impact on making the decision to accept or to avoid people with disability .

The second strongest predictor of intention to accept or to avoid people with disabilities was the public personal attitude. Adapted from Findler et al. (2007), this study confirmed the existence of three core components of attitude that are, affective, behavioural and cognitive. Most recent definitions refer to the affective component is said to reflect the emotional underpinnings of an attitude, that is, the amount of positive or negative feelings toward the referent. The behavioural component generally relates to the individual's intent or willingness to behave in a certain manner toward the referent, or the actual behavioural response (Cook, 1992). Finally, cognitive component as an individual's ideas, thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, opinions, or mental conceptualization of the referent object. Attitudes held by public towards people with disabilities are complex, multifaceted and difficult to measure. Pre existing negative attitudes have a potential to lead public to become close minded and biased toward people with disabilities in their interaction (Bergman & Hanson, 2002).

In the current study, respondents showed more favourable attitudes towards people with disabilities in physical activity on measure of behavioural compared with cognitive, and affective. This result was consistence from the previous study by Vignes, Coley, Grandjean, Godeau, and Arnaud (2010), where respondents showed more favourable attitudes towards peers with disabilities on measured of behavioural than on affective and cognitive measure. Thus, it would appear that, people do not tend to act on their feeling and thoughts of discomfort with disabled people. The behavioural dimension contained items referring to both avoidant and approach behaviours. Attitudes being guided by the behavioural dimension reflected, one of the many interesting facets of attitudes. In addition, positive attitude will be appearing when we feel and belief towards person, objects or situation in a good way. When individuals attached the desire to behave or act in a certain way based on the positive emotions he has attached to the positive opinion, he/she will react in positive response towards person, objects or situations (Perry et al., 2008).

Values dimensions are used frequently to explain cultural or national differences behaviour of individuals within countries. Malaysia is a country in South East Asia with multi ethnicity. Different ethnicity has different cultures and different lifestyle among its people. The results in the present study showed that, ethnicity is the third factor that is important to influence public acceptance towards people with disabilities participation in physical activity. Previous research by Fong and Hung (2002) has indicated that, Asian culture showed more negative attitudes towards serving disable people compared to Western culture. This is due to the differences of general education approach/standard, legislation against discriminations towards disable people and more support from social organizations for the disabled that exists in the Western world (Tachibana, 2005).

Research has revealed that mere contact or exposure with disable people does not necessarily produce more positive attitude towards these individuals. In fact, negative attitudes may results if publics experience tension or anxiety, or perceived information that reinforces stereotypes (Smith, Austin, Kennedy, & Hutchison, 2005). It is very important to create the situation so that, people without disabilities experience pleasant feelings during their exposure to person with disabilities because uninitiated people may feel uncomfortable with person who has disabilities. The current study is consistence with previous finding where exposure is a less important factor for public to fully accept people with disabilities participation in physical activity. According to Perry et al. (2008), daily interactions between

Public and disabled people provide an opportunity to experience more stress, increased responsibilities or other situation that may affect attitude. Thus, it is important to comprehend how interactions with disable people affect public acceptance towards them.

CONCLUSION

The current study presents a unique contribution to the literature by combining the constructs in

the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Cultural Values Theory (CVT) to better understand the influencing factors regarding public acceptance towards people with disabilities participation in physical activity. The present study, revealed the existence of a significant relationship between four personal (internal and external) factors and public acceptance. The significant relationship between subjective norms and public acceptance highlights the important role for public accept disable people participation in physical activity or in daily life. Therefore, family, friends and public play a vital role in promoting and motivating individuals without disabilities to accept people with disabilities participation in physical activity. Positive attitudes can greatly influence a positive approach towards sharing the space and activities of public without disabilities and people with disabilities (Xafopoulos, Kudlacek, & Evaggelinou, 2009). Meanwhile, negative attitudes towards the disable would caused them to experience limited lifestyle, educational and vocational opportunities, a decreased in overall quality of life and a decline in community participation.

For future study in order, to gain a wider and more representative view of the public's acceptance towards people with disabilities, the scope of study needs to be expanded to include more public from not only urban Public Recreation Park but also include rural Public Recreation Park. The main limitation of this study is the use of self reporting technique in measuring public acceptance towards people with disabilities participation in physical activity. Instead of using survey technique, others method such as interviews, observations method is recommended to enhance the finding of the study. Taking the study of public acceptance further could also include the meaningful assessment of different variables such as personality and age cohort. A comprehensive assessment of public acceptance towards persons with disabilities may facilitate better understanding, as well as provide future directions for other researcher. When, information about people with disabilities increased, negative stereotyping is reduced, more favourable attitude and increased acceptance is expressed towards people with disabilities participation in physical activity (Ibrahim & Her, 1982).

Research on public acceptance towards people with disabilities involvement in physical activity is still lacking in Malaysia. The present study could provide more insights and understanding of the public acceptance issue regarding the disabled people involvement in physical activity. Relevant organization such as Social and Welfare Department of Malaysia can organize an inclusive program or events for the community to involve in activities together with the disable people for example Disabled Sport Day. By doing so, community have more chances to get close and understand what disabled people need in their life. Moreover, built social relationship between disabled people and normal people can improve the level of self confidence among people with disabilities. This could also help the community to develop the awareness of the importance of public acceptance towards the quality of life for the disabled.

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