

**DISPOSITION TOWARDS THE RIGHTS AND FULL PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE
WITH DISABILITIES IN THE SOCIETY**

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Abstract

This study investigated the extent to which South-West Nigerians upheld myths about disabilities and react to the inclusion of people with disabilities in societal activities. The descriptive survey technique was used to investigate the influence of gender and marital status on attitude to myths, reactions to human dignity, living independent life, enjoying citizenship rights, and involving in social life of the society as related to people with disabilities. A 'Societal Life Participation Questionnaire' was administered on 562 respondents drawn from four of the six states in South-West Nigeria. The data collected was analysed using frequency counts, percentages, semi-inter-quartile range, and t-test statistics. The result indicated that while few respondents demonstrated awareness of the nature of disability and highly favoured the dignity and participation of people with disability in societal life, majority were still of low and moderate belief in unscientific facts about disabilities and in their attitude about the dignity, enjoyment of citizenship rights, independent living and social participation of people with disabilities. Recommendations were made towards functional inclusion of people with disability in societal life. The implications of the findings for community life counselling activities were drawn.

Key words: myths, inclusion, disability, societal life,, community counselling, Nigeria.

Introduction

The concern for the integration of people with disabilities into the society is now a global one. For instance, the Council of Europe's mission statement on the integration of people with disability in community life states that '*persons with disabilities have the right to independence, social integration and participation in the life of the community*' (Council of Europe, 2006). Human dignity, full citizenship, independent living and active participation in the life of the community are central to the Council of Europe's activities on integration of people with disabilities. The overall aim is to promote social cohesion in Europe by reconciling the principles of equal rights for all individuals with or without disabilities. This however, according

to the Council of Europe's statement is yet to be achieved despite some progress reported in some areas. Many people with disabilities in Europe today are still faced with barriers to equal opportunities and full participation in society. The deprivations are manifested in forms of low levels of education and vocational training, high unemployment rate, low income, obstacles in the built environments, social exclusion, intolerance, clichés and stereotypes, direct or indirect discrimination, violence, ill-treatment and abuse, (Council of Europe, 2006). The struggle to avoid failure in protecting the rights of citizens with disabilities and improve their opportunities is therefore global and a continuous effort.

All nations, bodies and individuals concerned with the welfare of people with disabilities would identify with the Council of Europe's Mission Statement. Nigeria also believes in the global move towards the actualisation of fundamental human rights of those with disabilities. It was stated in the Nigeria National Policy on Education that the national objective is to make the nation a 'land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (N.P. E, 6th Ed.2013). In an attempt to achieve this objective, the educational system was to lead to respect for the worth and dignity of individuals, faith in man's ability to make rational decisions, moral and spiritual values in interpersonal and human relations, shared responsibility for the common good of the society, respect for the dignity of labour, and promotion of the emotional and psychological health of all citizens. In order to achieve this national objective, the Federal Government engaged on many programmes such as in-school integration programmes, awareness campaigns and teacher education programmes.

Despite some negative reports, there were proofs from school based integration practices that those with disabilities and those without disabilities were already getting closer in their educational, psychological and social life styles. For example, Akinpelu (1998) reported improved self-perception by adolescents with hearing impairment in Nigerian integrated schools; Olofintoye (2005; 2010) discovered removal of labeling and stigma, and genuine social mixing among integrated secondary schools students in Western Nigeria ; Joachim (2006) argued that integration led to disappearance of prejudice against those with disabilities and better adjustment and participation in the larger society. However, the purpose of school based integration is to train the students in an environment that closely resembles the one in which they would function after schooling (N.P.E.

2013), so as to promote their adjustment in the larger society. But are the community members now positively or favourably disposed towards the participation of those with disabilities in societal life? The attitude or disposition one holds about a situation is personal opinion and feeling about it which is capable of dictating the behavioural pattern one puts up in particular situations. The feelings expressed toward the disabled could equally influence the adjustment status of the disabled.

Traditionally in Nigeria, the attitude towards people with disabilities was negative. They were seen as misfortunes from the gods, stigmas to their parents and the community, feared, pitied, avoided, tortured, banished, disrespected, ignored, exploited, left unprotected or unconsolated, or even killed by their parents before the community was aware of their presence (Mba,1981; Fadipe,1982). They were never seen as victims of biological or developmental deficiencies. However, with the in-school integration practices yielding some positive results and in view of various awareness programmes on the nature and welfare of people with disabilities one would expect the societal attitude towards these people with disabilities who now live with them to have changed for the better. This study investigated the disposition of some Nigerians towards the societal life of those with disabilities by seeking answers to the following:

- i. To what extent do the people of south-west Nigeria still belief in some myths about disabilities?
- ii. Will there be any significant gender difference in the attitude of the respondents towards the societal life of people with disabilities?
- iii. Will marital status significantly influence the respondents' attitude to the

societal life of people living with disabilities?

Methodology

The descriptive research method was employed in this study. The respondents for the study were chosen by stratification and simple random sampling techniques. Stratification was necessary to allow both male and female respondents to participate at a comparable distribution. 562 respondents consisting of 316 males (56.23%), and 246 females (43.77%), selected from four randomly sampled states from the six states in western Nigeria participated in this study. Of the sample, 201 (35.8%) were married, while 361 (64.2%) were single. The sample consisted of civil servants with at least secondary school education and teachers of primary and secondary schools.

The researcher's 'Societal Life Questionnaire' (SOLIQ) designed and validated was used for the study. The instrument had reliability co-efficient of 0.77 following a test-retest method. The section 'A' of the

questionnaire sought personal information while the section 'B' contained 25 items. The first five items were on attitude to myths about disability, 6-10 on the dignity, 11-15 on citizenship rights, 16-20 concerned independent living while 20-25 asked question on social participation of those with disabilities. The responses to the questionnaire ranged from strongly agree, agree, and disagree to strongly disagree. The scoring ranged from 1-4 points, with one point indicating less favourable attitude while four points meant high favourable attitude. Numbers, percentages, semi-inter-quartile range and t-test were used to determine the nature of the respondents' attitude to those with disabilities with reference to their participation in societal life.

Results, Discussion and Conclusion.

- i. To what extent do the people of South-west Nigeria still believe in the myths about disabilities?

Table 1: Belief in myths about disabilities?

Group of Respondents	t-test	Belief s.d.	Low		Moderate		High	
			N	%	N	%	N	%
Males (316)		50 13.16	15.8	236	74.7	30	9.5	
Females (246)	N.S	36 12.73	14.6	181	73.6	28	11.4	
Married (201)		22 12.64	10.9	153	76.1	26	12.9	
Single (361)	S	62 13.16	17.2	268	74.2	31	8.6	

N = 562. df = 560. t.t = 1.96. S = significant. NS = not significant. P= 0.05.

Table 1 shows the responses to myths about disabilities with reference to gender and marital status. The result demonstrates that majority (73.6 - 76.1%) of people in South-West Nigeria have moderate belief in the unscientific facts about disabilities. Of the sample, 8.6 - 13.16 % recorded high belief in the myths, while only 14.6 - 17.2 % demonstrated low belief in myths about disabilities. Male and female respondents did not differ significantly in their responses unlike the married and the single

respondents whose responses differ significantly. The analysis revealed that the single (unmarried) respondents with a mean score of 13.16 demonstrated more belief in the myths than their married counterparts with a mean score of 12.64.

ii. Will there be any significant gender difference in the attitude of the respondents towards the societal participation of people with disabilities?

Tables 2. Gender and attitudes towards participation in the society

Community Life Indices	t-test	Attitudinal levels:						
		Positive		Low		Moderate		
Attitude	x	Respondents s.d.	Attitude t- cal	Positive Remark	Attitude Remark	N	%	N
Dignity in the society	2.2 2.86	Males (316)	172	54.4	137	43.4	7	
	15.79							
	S	Females (246)	101	41.1	135	54.9	10	
	4.1							
Enjoying	10.8	Males (316)	44	13.9	238	75.3	34	
			12.72	2.60				

Citizenship								
	1.07	N.S						
Rights		Females	(246)	32	13.0	178	72.4	36
	14.6	12.49	2.57					
Independent								
		Males	(316)	19	6.0	239	75.6	58
	18.4	11.74	2.45					
Living								
	0.11	N.S						
		Females	(246)	14	5.7	192	78.0	
	40	16.3	11.71	2.45				
Social								
		Males	(316)	72	22.8	214	67.7	30
	9.5	13.67	3.21					
Participation								
	0.09	N.S						
		Females	(246)	49	19.9	177	72.0	
	20	8.1	13.64	3.11				

N = 562. d.f = 560. t.t = 1.96. S = significant. NS = not significant. P=

0.05.

From Table 2, it could be observed that the respondents were not highly disposed to the dignity of people with disabilities as only 2.2% of the males and 4.1% of the females indicated high positive attitude in their dignity. Majority of the males, 54.4%, were of low attitude while majority of females, 54.9 %, were moderate in their disposition towards the dignity of people with disabilities. In the same vein, while 43.4 % of the males were of moderate disposition, 41.1% of the females were of low positive attitude concerning the dignity of those with disabilities. The male respondents had a mean score of 15.79 with a standard deviation of 2.61 while the females had a mean score of 15.13 and a standard deviation of 2.82. These male and female respondents demonstrated a significant difference (t. calculated = 2.86, t-table =1.96) in their attitudes about the dignity of people with disabilities with males having more respect for the dignity of people with disabilities.

As to whether those with disabilities should enjoy their citizenship rights, 10.8 of males and 14.6 of females were of high positive attitude. Over 70 % of both sexes responded moderately, while their low responses were about

13 %. No significant difference was noticed in their responses.

Only 2.45 % each of the sexes highly belief that people with disabilities should live independently, 75.6% of females and 78% of males were moderately positive in their attitudes, and about 6% of both males and females were less favourable to this. Gender did not differentiate significantly in community's attitude to independent living expected of people with disabilities. Majority of male and female respondents were moderately disposed to the idea that people with disabilities should participate in the social life of their societies. This magnitude was followed by low attitude as 22.8% of males and 19.9% of females had low positive attitude towards social life of individuals with disabilities within the society. Only about 3% of the sexes were highly disposed towards those with disabilities getting involved in the social life of the society. No significant gender difference was recorded on disposition to the social participation of people with disabilities.

iii. Will marital status significantly influence the respondents' attitude to the societal life of people living with disabilities?

Tables 3. Marital status and attitudes to participation in the society

t-test	Attitudinal levels:					
	Low		Moderate		High	
Positive Attitude	Respondents		Attitude		Attitude	
	x	s.d.	t- cal	Remark	%	
Dignity in	Married (201) 9	4.5	94 15.39	46.8 2.75	98 48.8	
0.71	N.S	Single (361) 49.0	10 2.8	174 15.56	48.2 2.71	177
Enjoying	Married (201) 31	15.4	22 12.36	10.9 2.57	148 73.6	
1.81	N.S	Single (361) 37	10.2	49 12.77	13.6 2.59	274 75.9
Independent	Married (201) 43	21.4	19 11.78	9.5 2.69	138 68.7	
0.32	N.S	Single (361) 82.0	47 13.0	18 11.71	5.0 2.30	296
Social	Married (201) 23	11.4	43 13.48	21.4 3.14	135 67.2	
1.03	N.S	Single (361) 13.76	75 3.19	20.8	260 72.0	26 7.2

N = 562. d.f = 560. t.t = 1.96. S = significant. NS = not significant. P= 0.05.

From Table 3, about 46-49% of both married and single respondents had low and moderate positive attitudes concerning the dignity of people with disabilities. Only 2.8% of the single and 4.5 of the married ones showed high regard for the dignity of people with disabilities. Majority of the married, 73.6% and 75.9% of the single moderately believed that this exceptional people should enjoy citizenship rights. Only 10.9% of the married 13.6 % of the single indicated low attitude, while 15.4 % of the married and 10.2 % of the single also showed high regard for the citizenship rights of the special population. Most of the single respondents, 82% were of moderate opinion that the exceptional person should enjoy independent living in the society as against 68.7 % of the married. This trend was followed by 21.4% of the married highly believing that the exceptional should

live independent life, making the highest percentage recorded under high positive attitude towards people with disabilities, and it was followed by 13% of the single in the positive attitude column.

Concerning social participation, about 21% of both married and single were low in their attitudes on the involvement of those with disabilities in social activities in their community. About 67% of the married and 72% of the single, however, moderately agreed that this group of people could participate in the social life of their society. More of the married, 11.4% indicated high positive concern on the social life of the exceptional people than the single people responded with 7.2 %. None of the tests on dignity, citizenship rights, independent living and social participation was statistically significant.

Discussion of Findings

Generally, this study has shown that majority of people in South-West Nigeria still hold on to myths about disabilities, only an average of 10% to 17% had low disposition to these beliefs. This is not far from what the situation used to be in the traditional settings where Mba (1981) and Fadipe (1982) reported hostility towards those with disabilities. However, the negative behaviours following such hostilities could not be practiced today due to civilisation and legality. This adherence to the traditional beliefs is contrary to National Development Goal towards the emancipation of people with disabilities. Also this result has not justified a transfer into the larger society of the positive attitude towards the disabled recorded in integrated schools (Olofintoye, 2005; 2010) and that integration led to disappearance of prejudice against those with disabilities, as noted by Joachim, (2006). This could be due to the fact that all the respondents

might not have passed through integrated schools or trained on the nature of disabilities as only few schools were integrated. That married people were significantly less than the single in their belief in myths about disabilities could be due to their experiences about the causes of disabilities as married people.

Males significantly attributed more dignity to people with disabilities. It could be the personal experiences of these men with people with disabilities that made them believe that they should be respected, honoured, counted worthy, valued and even considered to be better than the use without disabilities in some aspects. The non-significant gender difference on the enjoyment of citizenship rights, independent living and social participation is not far from the fact that prejudice against those with disabilities still persist in the society among the generality of people in the society, sex notwithstanding.

Most of the married and single participants in this study were moderate in their dispositions toward those with disabilities and few ones were of high positive regard while some were still lukewarm towards people with disabilities. Marital status did not make any significant difference on the attitude of south western Nigerians toward the involvement of people with disabilities in the society. The fact that the rate of disabilities in the area of this study is no more rampant probably due to various control programmes might be responsible for this non-difference in attitudes. Also, the availability of some training centres and medium scale employment opportunities for some people with disabilities might be responsible for some forms of positive regard towards those with disabilities since their dependence on those without disabilities would have reduced.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that majority of the respondents in this study still belief in the unscientific facts about the nature of disabilities. Also, there still exist social barriers to the participation of people with disability in the life style of their community as the majority did not believe they should be fully involved. This trend is not far from what was reported about the European community and thereby justifying the fact that though the primitive form of apathy towards those with disabilities no longer exists, the sense of difference was still there as at the time of this investigation. Gender and marital status did not really influence the respondents' dispositions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings in this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Efforts should be made to further reinforce the community awareness programmes about the nature of disabilities and the values of those with disabilities.
- ii. There is need to move beyond law making to implementation that would make those with disabilities to actually participate in the economic activities of their communities, this would enhance the personal dignity of such people among their colleagues.
- iii. The government should continue to promote and enforce the education of children with disabilities.
- iv. There is the need to involve other societal agents of socialization such as the religious centres and media houses move in the socialization campaign.
- v. The exposure of those with disabilities as second class citizens or people with lesser abilities in the work place and the entertainment industry should stop.
- vi. Ante-natal clinics in the study area should be educating their

clients on the causes of disabilities in order to disabuse their minds about

disability related myths. Such women could educate their husbands about the scientific nature of disabilities.

- vii. There is therefore the need to employ professional guidance counsellors in the clinics for effective education and counselling.

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