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Attitudes Towards the Inclusion of College Students With Intellectual Disabilities

What is this research about?

In recent years, inclusive post-secondary programs in the United States have been made increasingly available. Inclusive university and college programs provide individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) the ability to pursue academic learning with their peers. However, very little research has been done looking at the attitudes of college students towards the inclusion of students with ID in their classes. The current study examined the general students' interactions with individuals with ID and their attitudes about inclusive programs in college. The study also investigated the characteristics of individuals that were related to differences in attitudes towards the inclusion of individuals with ID in college classes.

What did the researcher do?

The researchers asked 256 college students from a university in the United States (ages 17 - 26 years) about their attitudes towards students with intellectual disabilities. Students who were in their first semester of an inclusive program completed surveys about their interactions and willingness to interact with people with ID, their perceptions of abilities of people with ID, and their attitudes about including students with ID in college classes.

What did the researcher find?

Over 30% of respondents reported close relationships with someone with ID (e.g., friend or family member), while 43% reported having acquaintances or casual

What you need to know:

Many college students have positive attitudes about the inclusion of individuals with ID in classes. A college student's attitude about the inclusive classes can vary depending on the individual's sex and comfort level. Inclusive post-secondary programs are becoming more common in US colleges and universities, and it is important to promote interactions between students with ID and their peers in order to encourage positive attitudes towards inclusive classes.

relationships (e.g., neighbors, classmate). An additional 25% reported that their closest interaction with someone with ID was as strangers in the same environment (e.g., a store). Many of the respondents reported infrequent contact with people with ID - 75% reported interactions once or twice a month, or less. Although the frequency of interactions was limited, most students (87%) reported feeling somewhat comfortable to very comfortable with individuals with ID. Overall, the students reported positive attitudes towards individuals with ID. Female students and students with higher comfort levels were more willing to interact with students with ID on campus, perceived their abilities as higher, and noted more benefits associated with their inclusion in classes.

How can you use this research?

This study showed that, overall, college students' attitudes were positive towards including individuals with ID in college programs. Also, the study found

differences in attitudes depending on respondents' sex and self-reported comfort level. It is important for policy-makers and administrators to be aware of the positive attitudes of college students towards the inclusion of individuals with ID in order to encourage the expansion of inclusive programs in colleges and universities. It is also important to promote opportunities for interactions between college students and their peers with ID, which may help to improve the comfort levels of students. We need to support students with ID who are pursuing post-secondary education, as well as other college students who are in inclusive programs.

About the Researchers

Megan M. Griffin is an Assistant Professor in the Special Education Department at the University of New Mexico. Dr. Griffin's research involves the development of inclusive post secondary educational opportunities for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Dr. Griffin's research interests also include the inclusion of people with disabilities and their families in faith communities, and applied behaviour analysis.

Citation

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This research summary was written by Stephanie Fung for the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research. This research summary, along with other summaries, can be found on our [blog](#) and at asdmentalhealth.ca/research-summaries

About the Chair

The Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research is dedicated to studying ways to improve the mental health and well-being of people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and their families in Canada.

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