UQÀM | Chaire de déficience intellectuelle et troubles du comportement
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Special Olympics Quebec volunteers: their attitudes toward people with intellectual disability

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Background

- The contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) has highlighted that improving attitudes and reducing prejudice toward individuals can occur through intergroup contact;
- Positive contact ⇝ improve attitudes (Seewooruttun & Scior, 2014);
  - Based on the mere-exposure effect (Zajonc, 2001);
- Volunteer involvement in Special Olympics provide direct contact with people with ID (Li & Wu, 2019);
- After one week of implication ⇝ positive change in attitude (Li & Wang, 2013);
- Thus, positive contact and familiarity with individuals with ID is considered an important factor in combating stigma.

Aim

The objectives of this study were :

1. to document the effects of the involvement of volunteers at the Special Olympics (SO) Quebec Summer Games on their attitudes toward people with an ID and;
2. to draw a portrait of the factors that can influence these attitudes.

Method

88 volunteers (53 females; 77% over 50 years old) completed the **Attitudes toward Intellectual Disability questionnaire** (ATTID; Morin et al., 2013) at two measurement times. Pre-test was prior to their involvement in the 2017 SO Quebec Summer Games and post-test was three weeks after their participation.

Table 1. Previous contact

	N	%
Contact frequency		
Often	17	19
Very often	35	40
Quality of the relations		
Good	33	38
Excellent	40	45

Analyses

1. A **two-sided one-sample t-test** was performed to compare volunteer means over time, according to the various ATTID factors.
2. A **two-sample t-test** was then performed to compare the volunteer means to those of the general population.

Results

Table 2. Volunteers' ATTID scores

		Mean (SD)			
Component	**Factor**	**Pre-test**	**Post-test**	**T.Test**	**P Value**
Affective	Discomfort	1.54 (.55)	1.42 (.51)	1.667	0.097
	Sensivity / Compassion	2.69 (.9)	2.55 (.94)	1.012	0.313
Cognitive	Knowledge of capacity and rights	2.11 (.57)	2.10 (.57)	0.102	0.919
	Knowledge of causes of ID	2.98 (.91)	3.03 (.96)	-0.312	0.756
Behavioral	Interaction	2.18 (.66)	2.15 (.63)	0.304	0.761

Note. Scores are rated on a **scale of 1 to 5**. The **lower** the scores, the **more positive** the attitudes toward people with ID. A score of **3** is considered a **neutral attitude**.

Table 3. Volunteers' ATTID scores compared to the general population

		Mean (SD)			
Component	**Factor**	**Volunteers'**	**General population**	**T.Test**	**P Value**
Affective	Discomfort	**1.54** (.55)	1.73 (.52)	-3.164	0.002
	Sensivity / Compassion	**2.69** (.90)	3.16 (.79)	-4.796	<0.001
Cognitive	Knowledge of capacity and rights	2.11 (.57)	2.14 (.57)	-0.481	0.632
	Knowledge of cause of ID	2.98 (.91)	2.85 (.69)	1.319	0.190
Behavioral	Interaction	2.18 (.66)	2.27 (.63)	-1.248	0.215

Discussion

These **results are inconsistent with previous studies** that show that volunteer attitudes towards people with ID can be improved following their involvement in the SO Games (Kim et al., 2020; Li & Wang, 2013; Li & Wu, 2019).

- The latter studies were conducted with participants of Malaysian or Chinese origin.
- Cross-cultural research has suggested that people from **Western cultures have more positive attitudes** than people from more traditional cultures (Chen et al., 2002; Scior et al., 2010).
- In the present study, volunteers' attitudes were as positive, if not slightly more so, than those of the general population (Morin et al., 2015).

The lack of significance of the results could be explained by the fact that:

- 59% of the sample reported having frequent or very frequent contact with people with ID;
- 83% of the sample reported having good or excellent relations with people with ID.

The link between contact and attitudes toward people with ID is not straightforward (Seewooruttun & Scior, 2014), but it would seem that beyond quantity, quality contact with people with ID would predict more positive attitudes (McManus et al., 2011).

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank the *Chaire de déficience intellectuelle et troubles du comportement* for their financial support.

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