

ATTITUDES OF PROFESSIONALS AND NON-PROFESSIONALS TOWARD THE MENTALLY RETARDED IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

WALTER HARKER

State of Florida Department of Education
U. S. A.

With the world-wide acceleration in most aspects of life in this mid-twentieth century, it was felt by this writer that in dynamic Brazil the activities of such responsible private agencies as Sociedade Pestalozzi do Brasil will shortly awaken the Brazilian public and the Brazilian government as its agent to coordinate and fund programs for habilitation of the mentally retarded. It is with this hope for those far-sighted professionals with whom this writer has so closely worked on the project assessed, that this article was begun with the thought that it may serve to spotlight existing attitudes toward the retarded, to show differences in attitudes of selected population groups, to help strengthen those attitudes which are forward-looking, and to help show to those persons not yet concerned the direction needed to be taken. In other words, only by knowing prevailing attitudes can attitude change be undertaken.

PROBLEM

The problem of this study was: *in general*, to attempt to discover new implications and therefore to direct thought toward new generalizations concerning the attitudes of various groups of Brazilians toward habilitation of their mentally retarded; *specifically*, to see if there is a significant difference of opinion in vocational and educational attitudes among the groups studied.

HYPOTHESIS

The basic null hypothesis for the purpose of study was that there are no significant differences between the attitudes of the group of professionals and the two groups of non-professionals. In other words, it was hypothesized that in the whole population the theoretical frequency would conform to theoretical or normal distribution.

METHOD

The 297 item questionnaire, written by Dr. John E. Jordan of Michigan State University, which is based on the Guttman facet-analysis technique of attitude assessment, and which Dr. Jordan has been using internationally in assessment of attitudes toward the retarded, was procured, and with his permission modified for the Brazilian situation, translated by a translator for the Brazilian Federal

Government, and administered first to the available 31 professionals working with the retarded at the Sociedade Pestalozzi sheltered workshop (psychologists, physicians, special education teachers, speech therapists, social workers, psychiatrists, etc.) and then administered to groups of 30 each, selected by area random sampling, of small business and industry owners or managers, and housewives.

After this was completed and tallied, the results were sent to Dr. Jordan for his large international project, and this writer selected from the entire questionnaire those items, basically educationally or vocationally slated, which were appropriate to this study.

In evaluating the data gathered, the procedure of qualitative analysis using the cell frequencies made available by tabulation of the data, and application of Chi-square tests determined if the actual cell frequencies varied significantly from the theoretical or expected cell frequencies.

The table was used to compute the selected confidence level of .05 with in almost all cases two or three degrees of freedom.

RESULTS

The hypothesis of no significant difference between the attitudes of the professionals and the non-professionals was found invalid at the .05 level in 27 of the 34 areas of attitude assessed. In general the null hypothesis can be termed invalid, and it would appear a significant difference does exist.

DISCUSSION

As the results were tabulated the pattern which later proved to be significant began to emerge. Some examples follow of significant differences.

In a question asking attitude as to whether it is usually right or wrong for a retarded person to marry a non-retarded person, 16 of the 31 professionals felt it wrong, while 23 of the 30 employers and 25 of the 30 housewives felt it wrong.

In a question asking attitude as to whether mentally retarded school children should be separated away from normal children, 13 of the 31 professionals felt it was usually right while 18 of both of the other groups of 30 felt it was usually right. This also was significant.

A significant difference also appeared on the question as to whether it was right or wrong to reserve certain jobs for the retarded. Of the 31 professionals, 27 said it was wrong while only 15 and 16 of the employers and housewives, respectively, felt it was wrong.

A surprising significance developed when 11 of the 31 professionals said they would not have a retarded person as a fellow worker,

ATTITUDES TOWARD THE MENTALLY RETARDED

while only 5 each of the other groups said they would not. Also, 8 of the professionals would not have such a person working for them, while only 5 of the actual employers would not and only 3 of the housewives would not. A reversed question later in the inquiry brought almost exactly the same results.

Answers to the question, "Would you want the retarded in your class if you were a teacher?" brought 14 negatives from the professionals and only 3 from the employers, only 2 from the housewives.

Descriptive words evoked significantly different attitudes; employers and housewives were far more "fearful" of retardates, as well as more "horrified," and held more "loathing," "revulsion," "contempt" for them, and were far more "sickened," "uncomfortable," and "tense" around them than the professionals.

Large significant gaps in thinking of when and how to educate the retarded were evident. Professionals were in near agreement for making the program practical and less academic, while non-professionals were almost equally divided (but the groups not in agreement with each other) as to doing that, or using only vocational school, or doing just "handicraft."

A vastly significant difference appeared as to what the major goal of training should be. The professionals were almost totally and evenly divided between forced-choices of "social adequacy" and "occupational adjustment," but the other groups spread themselves thin over these two choices but also heavily choosing "academic proficiency" and "occupational adequacy."

The professionals overwhelmingly believed that the emotional needs of the retarded are stronger than those of normal children, while the other two groups were about evenly divided in their opinions as to "stronger," "about the same," and "not as strong," with a sizeable number of employers *only* feeling they are "nothing to be particularly concerned with."

Another large proportion, 25 of the 31, of the professionals felt the slow learners should be in a "special class," while the other two groups arranged themselves in opinion almost evenly among that choice and "vocational arts," and "regular school until age 16 and then drop out."

Twenty of the 31 professionals felt the slow learner meets with many failures in school, while only 11 employers and 8 housewives saw this to be true, but only 3 professionals felt the retardate to be aggressive in school, and 10 each of the other two groups felt this way.

Twenty-six professionals felt the retardate usually becomes a semi-skilled worker, while this belief was held by only 14 employers

and 12 housewives, 14 and 13 of whom respectively, felt the retardate was usually unemployable.

Also, 26 professionals felt the retardate to have markedly inferior motor development, and conversely 13 employers and 15 housewives felt the retardate's motor development would be about average.

There were some attitudes *not* significantly different.

In response to the question whether the respondent believed sterilization of the retarded to be right or wrong, 14 of each group felt it to be usually right, and there was no significant difference, of course* Questions about allowing children to date and marry retarded showed no significant differences, with all three groups overwhelmingly not permitting this. The same was true in responses to the question "Would you feel sexually comfortable with a retardate?" Twenty-four in each of the 3 groups said "No."

No significant differences were noted in opinions as to whether the groups would separate the retarded from society (they would not), whether they felt care of the retarded as an evidence of national social development (they did), and whether they would provide special classes (they would).

A few of the questions used in the study are omitted from discussion here due to space limitation.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The sample population was necessarily relatively small, and the veracity of attitude answers can always be questioned. Perhaps the time the writer spent in Rio (7 months) was not enough to get the "feel" of the problem.

Further research could be conducted to expand the study, both in size of population and types of populations studied; to verify the results of this study; and to work with the occasional significant differences this writer uncovered between employers and housewives.

There are in fact so many needed projects in this area that they cannot be enumerated. But certainly, even once attitudes have been discovered, *more* research is needed as to what may be *done* about those viewed as not progressive. That is the purpose to which this small project is but a basic first step.

ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to examine the attitudes of various groups of Brazilians toward rehabilitation of the mentally retarded; specifically the question asked was whether significant differences existed in vocational and educational attitudes among the groups

*In contrast to these opinions, a *significant* difference was noted when 12 of the professionals, and only 3 of the employers, and 2 of the housewives said they would *require* sterilization if they "*were in control.*"

ATTITUDES TOWARD THE MENTALLY RETARDED

studied. The results showed there to be significant differences between professionals and non-professionals in 27 of the 34 areas of attitude assessed.

RESUMEN

El objetivo del estudio fue examinar las actitudes de varios grupos de brasileños hacia la rehabilitación de los retardados mentales; específicamente, se preguntó si existían diferencias significativas en las actitudes vocacionales y educativas entre los grupos estudiados. Los resultados demostraron que había diferencias significativas entre los profesionistas y los no-profesionistas en 27 de las 34 áreas evaluadas de actitudes.

RESUMO

Este estudo examinou as atitudes de vários grupos de brasileiros relativamente à reabilitação de retardados; especificamente investigou-se a possibilidade da existência de diferenças significativas entre as atitudes vocacionais e educacionais entre os grupos estudados. Os resultados revelaram diferenças significativas entre profissionais e não-profissionais em 27 das 34 áreas de atitude examinadas.

