

Research on the Impact of College Students' Participation in Social Practice Activities for Special Children on Their Attitudes and Behavioral Intentions

Dongxia Wang*, Susu Ding

Renji College, Wenzhou Medical University, Wenzhou, China

**Corresponding author*

Keywords: Special Children, College Students, Attitude, Behavior, Social Service

Abstract: Studying the influence of college students' participation in social practice activities serving special children on their attitudes and behavioral intentions not only enriches the existing research on attitudes towards special children but also provides certain data support and reference value for the research on college students' attitudes and behavioral intentions towards special children and the development of special children's education. It also meets the current practical needs of research on attitudes towards special children. Firstly, the research subjects were divided into the practice team group and the ordinary college student group, and questionnaires were conducted on both groups at the same time intervals. The questionnaire, combined with demographic information, examined the degree of acceptance, understanding, and related behaviors towards special children from three dimensions. Secondly, the demographic information and attitudes towards special children of the college student group and the practice team group were compared at the baseline state. Thirdly, independent sample t-tests, Kruskal-Wallis H or Mann-Whitney U tests were used to compare normal and non-normal continuous data respectively; for categorical variables, χ^2 tests were used when the minimum sample size was greater than 5, and Fisher's exact tests were used when the minimum sample size was less than or equal to 5. In addition, a linear regression model was used to explore the impact of contact with special children on college students' related attitudes, and the data with differences at the baseline were included as covariates in the multivariate linear regression model for adjustment. Finally, a non-restricted cubic spline model was used to fit the curve of the sum of scores in each dimension of the practice team group towards special children and the change over time. The survey found that ordinary college students had relatively low attention and contact with special children; however, contact with special children was beneficial to improving college students' attitudes and understanding of special children, and a series of targeted suggestions were put forward.

1. Introduction

The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed "to do a good job in special education". From 2015 to 2017, a total of 28,900 disabled students were admitted to regular colleges and universities through the college entrance examination, and 5,464 disabled students entered higher

special education colleges through single enrollment and single examination [1]. The most crucial and fundamental part of special education is the education of special children. In China, special children refer to those with physical defects, such as deafness, hearing impairment, blindness, low vision, intellectual disability, and language disorders, among others [2]. Due to their limitations in intelligence, emotions, or behaviors, special children need to receive special education. Unfortunately, the public often views them with sympathy because of their mental and behavioral abnormalities, and some even hold implicit or explicit discriminatory attitudes, failing to recognize them as worthy of respect and having independent value [3]. Although China has issued some policies and regulations to ensure the social integration of this special group, the public's concepts and attitudes have not shown a positive integration perspective, and even discrimination against special groups in society, such as the intellectually disabled, still exists [4]. In this study, the integration perspective towards special children refers to the public's understanding and attitude towards their integration into normal social life. A positive integration perspective includes acceptance in terms of cognition, emotion, and behavioral tendencies, manifested as understanding, respecting special groups, believing that it is necessary to provide them with special assistance, and being willing to accept them. A positive integration perspective is conducive to social harmony and promotes social equity and progress [5].

As typical representatives of the youth group and an important force for social change, college students' values reflect the mainstream value orientation of the youth group. Their understanding and attitude towards special groups to some extent influence other people in society [5]. To fully implement the "National Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)", further strengthen the function of practical education in colleges and universities, and adhere to the unity of theoretical learning and social practice as well as learning from practice, is the only way for college students to grow and succeed. Therefore, conducting social services by special education majors in colleges and universities is the best way to achieve practical education. Thus, exploring the changes in college students' cognition and acceptance of special children through practical service contact has practical significance for promoting their own social development and social harmony and progress.

Moreover, previous studies have explored college students' attitude tendencies towards special groups and found that direct contact experience is the most effective way to reduce their prejudice against special children [6]. Therefore, some studies have attempted to use direct contact methods to reduce college students' prejudice against special groups [7].

However, previous studies that explored the attitudes of special education students and special education teachers towards special children have strong limitations and are rarely generalized to college students, who constitute the backbone of the population. Moreover, previous studies have mostly focused on investigating the current status of the public's cognition, beliefs, and attitudes towards special groups, but lack intervention studies and discussions on the process characteristics of attitude formation and change [8]. Furthermore, the few intervention studies that exist also have some problems. For example, they neglect baseline tests of attitudes, and the results are questionable; the research design is relatively simple, only comparing the differences in attitude changes between those with and without service experience; and they lack multiple baseline measurements during the service process and the examination of control groups. Therefore, this study intends to take college students as the research subjects and conduct a group comparison experiment to explore the impact of college students' participation in social service activities for special children on their attitudes and behavioral intentions, in order to reveal effective methods and strategies for changing attitudes and behavioral intentions towards special children.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Research subjects

The experimental subjects of this study are 38 members of the summer social practice team of Wenzhou Medical University and 40 randomly selected college students from different majors and grades of universities in Zhejiang Province and other provinces.

2.2. Research Methods

The attitudes of the subjects towards special children were surveyed through the "Questionnaire Star" online platform. The subjects were divided into the "ordinary college students" group and the "practice team" group. The practice team group would participate in social practice activities related to special children from June 29th to July 13th and have sufficient contact with special children; while the college students group would not participate in related activities during this period. For the practice team group, relevant questionnaires were distributed on June 29th, July 3rd, July 9th, and July 13th; for the college students group, relevant questionnaires were distributed on June 29th and July 13th. Each subject completed the online questionnaire independently and was unaware of the purpose of the questionnaire and the statistical methods used.

The questionnaire was adapted from a thesis titled "Development of a Questionnaire on Disability Acceptance and Disability Discrimination and the Impact of Early Adverse Environments" by postgraduate Li Ye from Hunan Normal University. In this questionnaire, perceptions of special children are divided into three dimensions: the degree of acceptance of special children, the degree of understanding of special children, and related behaviors when facing special children. The questions examining the acceptance dimension include: "I am willing to play games with special children", "I am willing to be friends with special children", "If a special child needs help, I will help without hesitation", "I would feel uncomfortable eating with special children", "If I am required to team up with a special child in a group activity, I would feel uncomfortable", "I would accept some strange behaviors of special children, such as shouting". The questions examining the understanding dimension include: "I think special children can't do anything well", "I think special children are generally dirty", "I think special children are generally not healthy", "I think special children don't like to make friends", "I think the morality of special children is worse than that of ordinary children". The questions examining the behavior dimension include: "I would actively participate in volunteer service activities for special children", "When I talk to special children, I would pay special attention to my words and deeds", "I would encourage people around me to pay attention to and support special children", "I don't want to do things with special children", "I would patiently listen to the words of special children", "I would protect special children who are bullied by others", "I would spend time accompanying special children", "I would be very happy to have a friendship with a special child", "I am afraid of special children", "I would feel uncomfortable when I see special children". Each question provides five feasible options to express attitudes, including "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Don't Know", "Disagree", and "Strongly Disagree". Points from 1 to 5 are assigned based on the positivity of the responses, with higher scores indicating a more positive attitude towards special children. The scores for each dimension will be calculated separately. In addition, seven demographic information items including gender, place of birth, major, and grade were investigated.

First, the demographic information and attitudes towards special children of the college student group and the practice team group were compared at the baseline state. Second, independent sample t-tests were used to compare normally distributed continuous data, while Kruskal-Wallis H or Mann-Whitney U tests were used to compare non-normally distributed continuous data. For categorical variables, chi-square tests were used when the minimum sample size was greater than 5, and Fisher's

exact tests were used when the minimum sample size was less than or equal to 5. Additionally, linear regression models were used to explore the impact of contact with special children on the attitudes of college students. Data with differences at the baseline were included as covariates in the multivariate linear regression model for adjustment. Finally, non-restricted cubic spline models were used to fit the curves of the sum of scores for each dimension of the practice team members' attitudes towards special children over time, with predefined knots at the 5th, 35th, 65th, and 95th percentiles.

The baseline data statistics and linear regression were conducted using SPSS 26.0, and the restricted cubic spline model was conducted using the R language software package. $P \leq 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

2.3. Data analysis

For the questionnaires distributed to the members of the practice team at four time points, only those who responded to the questionnaires at all four time points were included, with an effective response rate of 87.18%, totaling 134 questionnaires. For the questionnaires distributed to the college student group at two time points, only those who responded at both time points were included, with an effective response rate of 97.5%, totaling 78 questionnaires. The baseline demographic information and the understanding of special children at baseline were summarized for both the practice team group and the college student group. The results showed that there were no significant statistical differences between college students and the practice team in terms of gender, place of birth, major, grade, and understanding of special children. However, there were significant statistical differences in the dimensions of acceptance ($p < 0.001$), understanding ($p < 0.001$), and behavior ($p < 0.001$) towards special children. The respondents in the college student group demonstrated a higher level of understanding of special children.

3. Conclusions

3.1. Lack of Understanding of Special Children

It can be found that regardless of the practice team or college students, the proportion of subjects who understand special children exceeds 50%, but nearly 50% of the respondents are not clear or have never known about special children, indicating that the attention paid by college students (including members of the practice team) to special children is still not high enough.

3.2. Low Degree of Contact with Special Children

Result shows that most of the respondents indicated that they had only seen special children on TV or on the street, or had never seen them at all, while only a few had participated in related volunteer activities. This indicates that the contact situation of society with special children is not very good, and there is still a long way to go in this regard. Social support is extremely important for the development of special children, and college students, as an important social group, will also play an important role in this. The possible loneliness, discrimination and exclusion that special children may face may lead to their mental health problems, and undermine their self-esteem and self-confidence. Therefore, increasing college students' understanding of special children and their acceptance of them is crucial.

3.3. Direct Contact Can Improve Understanding and Attitude towards Special Children

According to the processing view of attitude, attitude is considered to be composed of three elements or response types: affect, cognition, and behavioral intention (or "behavior") [2]. It can be

found that after a period of contact with special children, the p-value of the practice team members in the dimensions of acceptance, understanding, and behavior has significantly improved. The above can indicate that contact with special children can promote attention and understanding of them.

In conclusion, special children still face many challenges in life. To promote their all-round development and full integration into society, we should call on society to enhance its inclusiveness towards special children, increase social attention to them, treat them equally, strengthen their social integration capabilities, and provide them with equal employment opportunities and social spaces.

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