

Evaluation of Preclinical Dentistry Students' Perspectives Towards Disabled Individuals Before Clinical Internship Training

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to evaluate the perspectives of preclinical dentistry students (1st, 2nd and 3rd year) towards disabled individuals before the inception of their clinical internship training. **Methods:** Our study was planned to be conducted with the participation of 217 preclinical dentistry students studying at a dentistry faculty in Turkey. The Survey form which was used in the study consisted of 26 questions in total, including 6 questions which introduce students and 20 questions which constitute the Attitude Scale towards People Affected by Disabilities. The questions were directed to students in the Fall semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. Regarding the analysis of the study; Power analysis, Frequency analysis, Normality test (Shapiro-Wilk), Independent T test, One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Tukey test were used. The significance level was accepted as $\alpha=0.05$. **Results:** 179 students participated in the study whom 111 of them were females and the rest 68 of them were males. The participation rate was found to be 82.49%. With regards to the perspectives of preclinical dentistry students towards disabled individuals; there wasn't a significant difference in terms of their sex ($p>0.05$), education level ($p>0.05$), attendance at any training/seminar on disabled individuals ($p>0.05$), in terms of the presence of a disabled individual among their acquaintances ($p>0.05$) and of living in the same house with a disabled individual ($p>0.05$). However, a statistical difference was detected in terms of the frequency of meeting with disabled individuals ($p<0.01$). **Conclusion:** It was determined that students generally had a positive attitude towards disabled individuals. We think that it would be beneficial to conduct this research in the future by reaching a larger number of preclinical dentistry students who study at various dental faculties.

Key words: Attitude, Dentistry, Disabled individual, Student.

Klinik Staj Eğitimi Öncesinde Preklinik Diş Hekimliği Öğrencilerinin Engelli Bireylere Yönelik Bakış Açılarının Değerlendirilmesi

öz

Amaç: Bu çalışma, preklinik diş hekimliği öğrencilerinin (1., 2. ve 3. sınıf) klinik staj eğitimlerine başlamadan önce engelli bireylere yönelik bakış açılarını değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. **Yöntem:** Çalışmamız, Türkiye'deki bir diş hekimliği fakültesinde öğrenim görmekte olan 217 preklinik diş hekimliği öğrencisi üzerinde planlandı. Anket formu; öğrencileri tanıttıcı 6 soru ve Yetersizlikten Etkilenmiş Kişilere Yönelik Tutum Ölçeği'ni oluşturan 20 soru olmak üzere toplamda 26 sorudan meydana gelmektedir. Sorular, 2023-2024 eğitim öğretim yılı güz döneminde öğrencilere yönlendirildi. Çalışmanın analizi için; Güç (Power) analizi, Frekans analizi, Normallik testi (Shapiro-Wilk), Bağımsız T testi, Tek Yönlü Varyans Analizi (ANOVA) ve Tukey testi kullanıldı. Anlamlılık düzeyi $\alpha=0,05$ olarak kabul edildi. **Bulgular:** Çalışmaya, 111'i kadın ve 68'i erkek olmak üzere 179 öğrenci katıldı. Katılım oranı %82,49 olarak bulundu. Preklinik diş hekimliği öğrencilerinin engelli bireylere yönelik bakış açıları ile; cinsiyetleri ($p>0,05$), eğitim düzeyleri ($p>0,05$), engelli bireylerle ilgili herhangi bir eğitime/derse katılma durumları ($p>0,05$), tanıdıkları arasında engelli birey bulunma durumu ($p>0,05$) ve engelli birey ile aynı evde yaşama durumu ($p>0,05$) bakımından anlamlı bir farklılık bulunmadı. Ancak, engelli bireyler ile görüşme sıklığı açısından ($p<0,01$) istatistiksel bir farklılık saptandı. **Sonuç:** Öğrencilerin genel olarak engelli bireylere karşı olumlu bir tutum içerisinde oldukları tespit edildi. Bu araştırmanın, ilerleyen zamanda farklı diş hekimliği fakültelerinin de katılımıyla birlikte daha fazla sayıda preklinik diş hekimliği öğrencisine ulaşarak yapılmasının faydalı olacağını düşünmekteyiz.

Anahtar kelimeler: Diş hekimliği, Engelli birey, Öğrenci, Tutum.

INTRODUCTION

Any disorder in the body structure or the inability of the body to fully perform its normal daily functions is defined as "disability" by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Korkmaz 2023; Çakır 2021). The population rate of disabled individuals corresponds to approximately 15% of the world population (Kürkçüoğlu et al. 2021; WHO 2015). Considering the sum of the disabled individuals and their families, it can be said that this situation affects a large part of the society (Ünal and Yıldız 2017).

Although disabled individuals hold an important percentage within the population, they continue to be excluded from some segments of the society (Akça et al. 2022; Karahan and Kuru 2015). The unconscious and negative attitudes exhibited by society towards disabled individuals are shown as the main reason for this situation. The term Attitude refers to the perspective that the individual doesn't have at birth but he/she later gains through learning processes and interacting with family, friends, the environment and through the person's other experiences (Sezer 2012).

Disabled individuals apply to various health institutions due to the health problems they experience and they are faced with different attitudes shown by health professionals in the relevant institutions (Kürkçüoğlu et al. 2021). The possibility of disabled individuals to receive efficient service in the field of health is directly related to the attitudes and behaviors of healthcare professionals towards disabled individuals. In this context, positive attitudes and behaviors shown towards disabled individuals significantly increase the quality of health care received by these individuals (Aydoğan and Çetin 2018; Çömez and Altan Sarıkaya 2017).

Oral and dental health problems, also affect the quality of life of disabled individuals. The inability to sufficiently perform daily oral hygiene habits (brushing teeth, using dental floss, etc.) affects the oral and dental health of disabled individuals (Kürkçüoğlu et al. 2021). Additionally, the individuals' various limitations in their daily lives; such as movement and mobility restrictions, difficulty in communication, inadequate economic conditions and resistance to treatment procedures create difficulties in terms of the treatment of oral and dental

problems (Morgan et al. 2012). Overcoming such problems is possible if dentists have positive attitudes towards disabled individuals. Therefore, it is important for dentists and dental students, who will be the dentists of the future, to have a positive attitude towards disabled individuals (Şahin and Gedik 2022).

This study aims to evaluate the perspectives and attitudes of preclinical dentistry students (1st, 2nd and 3rd year) studying at the faculty of dentistry towards disabled individuals before the inception of their clinical internship training. The H0 hypotheses of the study are stated below.

H0.1: There isn't a statistically significant difference between the sex of preclinical dentistry students and their perspectives towards disabled individuals.

H0.2: There isn't a statistically significant difference between the education levels of preclinical dentistry students (which grade they are in) and their perspectives towards disabled individuals.

H0.3: There isn't a statistically significant difference between preclinical dentistry students' participation in any training/ seminar sessions regarding disabled individuals and their perspectives towards disabled individuals.

H0.4: There isn't a statistically significant difference between the existence of a disabled individual among the acquaintances of preclinical dentistry students and their perspectives towards disabled individuals.

H0.5: There isn't a statistically significant difference between preclinical dentistry students' accommodation status of living in the same house with a disabled individual and their perspectives towards disabled individuals.

H0.6: There isn't a statistically significant difference between the frequency of meeting with a disabled individual among preclinical dentistry students and their perspectives towards disabled individuals.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

For this cross-sectional research, approval was received from the Ethics Committee of Çankırı Karatekin University

(10.11.2023, meeting no: 10). The study was conducted with the consideration of the Principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and "Informed consent" was obtained from the dentistry students prior to the application of the questionnaire. The population of the research consisted of preclinical dentistry students (1st, 2nd and 3rd grade) studying at Çankırı Karatekin University, Faculty of Dentistry and was conducted in the Fall semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. Power analysis was performed for sample selection and the sample size was determined to be 140 individuals. Our study was carried out in accordance with the Research and Publication Ethics.

Following the approval of the ethics committee, data collection was carried out between 13-17 November 2023 at the Faculty of Dentistry of Çankırı Karatekin University. Following the end of the lesson, the survey forms were directed to preclinical dentistry students under the supervision of the faculty member in the Department of Restorative Dentistry. Regarding the question forms, the first 6 questions consisted of questions that were formulated in order to collect introductory data with regards to the students, and the next 20 questions consisted of questions from the Attitude Scale towards Persons Affected by Disability. The necessary permission was obtained from the author for the use of the scale.

Introductory Feature Form

This form was for the preclinical dentistry students to fill; It questions their sex, what grade they are in, whether they have attended any training/seminar on disabled individuals, whether there is a disabled individual among their acquaintances, whether they live in the same house with a disabled individual, and the frequency of them meeting with a disabled individual.

Attitude Scale towards Persons Affected by Disability

This scale was developed by Yuker et al. in 1970 in order to evaluate attitudes towards disabled individuals, and the Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale was conducted by Özyürek in 1977 (Alptekin and Batık 2013). This scale, prepared as a six-point Likert type, consists of 20 questions. The possible answers to the questions were designed as "Totally agree (+3), Agree (+2), Slightly agree (+1),

Slightly disagree (-1), Disagree (-2) and Strongly disagree (-3)". Reverse scoring is performed on questions 2, 5, 6, 11 and 12 in the scale. At the end of the survey, the points obtained from all questions are added up and after being collected, + points are changed to - and - points are changed to +. Afterwards, +60 points are added to these points to calculate the survey score. Survey scores range from 0-120 points. High scores indicate positive attitudes towards disabled individuals, and low scores indicate negative attitudes (Özyürek 2010).

Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Çankırı Karatekin University (10.11.2023, meeting no: 10).

Statistical analysis

The analysis of the data was performed through the IBM-SPSS 25.0 (Statistics for Windows Version 25.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp. USA) package program. Firstly, Frequency analysis and Normality test (Shapiro-Wilk) were applied to the data. According to the test results, it was determined that the data showed a normal distribution. Afterwards, appropriate statistical parametric tests were determined according to the number of groups in the independent variables. For this purpose, independent T test was performed for variables with 2 independent groups, and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was performed for independent variables with more than 2 groups. Tukey test was performed for variables with statistically significant differences between groups. The α value was accepted as 0.05 for the significance level.

RESULTS

A total of 179 preclinical dentistry students, 111 (62.01%) females and 68 (37.99%) males, participated in the study. Among those who participated; 60 (33.52%) were first year, 66 (36.87%) were second year and 53 (29.61%) were third year preclinical dentistry students. The data distribution obtained as a result of the study is presented in Table 1.

Although there wasn't a statistically significant difference between preclinical dentistry students' perspectives on disabled individuals and their sex ($p > 0.05$), it was determined that female students (63.47 ± 12.31) had a more positive attitude than male students overall (61.76 ± 12.51). A significant

Table 1. The relationship between the data distribution of the study and the Attitude Scale towards People Affected by Disability

| | | N | % | $\bar{x}\pm SS$ | p |
|--|-----------------------|-----|-------|-----------------|---------------|
| Sex | Female | 111 | 62.01 | 63.47±12.31 | 0.951 |
| | Male | 68 | 37.99 | 61.76±12.51 | |
| Grade | 1st year | 60 | 33.52 | 64.60±12.23 | 0.310 |
| | 2nd year | 66 | 36.87 | 61.98±12.74 | |
| | 3rd year | 53 | 29.61 | 61.85±12.12 | |
| Participation in any training/ seminar regarding disabled individuals | I did participate | 24 | 13.41 | 64.25±14.48 | 0.159 |
| | I did not participate | 155 | 86.59 | 62.60±12.06 | |
| Presence situation of a disabled individual among acquaintances | No | 90 | 50.28 | 60.70±11.77 | 0.247 |
| | In my family | 10 | 5.59 | 61.70±15.59 | |
| | In my relatives | 53 | 29.61 | 65.02±12.45 | |
| | In my friends | 14 | 7.82 | 63.50±12.57 | |
| | In my neighbors | 12 | 6.70 | 69.17±11.61 | |
| Living situation with disabled individuals | I have never lived | 166 | 92.74 | 63.01±12.11 | 0.623 |
| | 1-3 years | 4 | 2.23 | 50.50±15.46 | |
| | 3-5 years | 1 | 0.56 | 57.00±00.00 | |
| | 5 years and more | 8 | 4.47 | 65.75±15.31 | |
| Frequency of meeting with disabled individuals | I have never meet | 87 | 48.60 | 60.83±11.34 | 0.008* |
| | Once two weeks | 11 | 6.15 | 63.18±15.80 | |
| | Once a month | 13 | 7.26 | 72.08±12.22 | |
| | Once six months | 27 | 15.08 | 64.44±13.74 | |
| | Once a year | 41 | 22.91 | 62.95±11.74 | |

(* A statistically significant difference was found.)

difference between the students' perspectives on disabled individuals and their education level (what grade they were in) was not observed ($p>0.05$). When perspectives towards disabled individuals were evaluated, it was determined that 1st grade students (64.60 ± 12.23) had more positive attitudes than 2nd grade students (61.98 ± 12.74), and 2nd grade students (61.98 ± 12.74) had more positive attitudes than 3rd grade students (61.85 ± 12.12).

Although there was not a statistical difference between the students' perspectives toward disabled individuals with students who did and didn't attend any training/seminar about disabled individuals ($p>0.05$), it was determined that the perspectives of the students who attended the training/seminar regarding this issue (64.25 ± 14.48) tended to have more positive attitudes towards disabled individuals than those who didn't participate (62.6 ± 12.06).

A significant difference between the presence of a disabled individual among the people that the students know and the students' perspectives towards disabled individuals was not observed ($p>0.05$). However, when the evaluation was made in terms of positive perspective towards disabled individuals, it was determined that the highest positive perspective belonged to the students who had a disabled person among their neighbors/acquaintances (69.17 ± 11.61) and the lowest positive perspective belonged to the students who didn't have a disabled person among their acquaintances (60.7 ± 11.77).

There wasn't a statistical difference between sharing the same accommodation/household with disabled individuals and the students' perspectives on disabled individuals ($p>0.05$). It was determined that the highest positive perspectives and attitudes towards disabled individuals belonged to students who live in the same house with disabled individuals for 5 years or more (65.75 ± 15.31), and the lowest positive perspectives and attitudes belonged to students who lived in the same house with disabled individuals for 1-3 years (50.5 ± 15.46).

When the perspectives of preclinical dentistry students towards disabled individuals were evaluated in terms of the frequency of their meetings with disabled individuals, a statistically significant difference was found ($p<0.01$). This difference was found between those who never meet with disabled individuals (60.83 ± 11.34) and those who meet with them once a month (72.08 ± 12.22) ($p<0.01$), and additionally between those who meet once a year with disabled individuals (62.95 ± 11.74) ($p<0.05$) is due to the perspectives not being the same.

DISCUSSION

Dentistry students take both theoretical and preclinical practice lessons before their clinical internship training (Acartürk 2023). After the preclinical period and during their clinical internship training, they encounter different patient profiles, including disabled individuals (Uğurlu and Erdem 2017). Disabled individuals can receive efficient service in the field of oral and dental health only if dentists and dental students have a positive attitude towards them (Aydoğan and Çetin 2018; Çömez and Altan Sarıkaya 2017). This research evaluates the perspectives of preclinical dentistry students towards disabled individuals.

Altıparmak and Sarı (2012) stated that the attitudes of individuals aged 18 and over in the city center of Manisa, Çelik et al. (2017) stated that the attitudes of nurses, and Kürkçüoğlu et al. (2021) stated that the attitudes of dentistry students towards disabled individuals weren't affected by sex. However, Şahin and Bekir (2016) stated that male university students had a more positive attitude than female students towards disabled individuals ($p<0.01$). As a result of our study and unlike Şahin and Bekir's (2016) findings, but similar to the other aforementioned studies, it can be said that there was no significant difference between preclinical dentistry students' perspectives towards disabled individuals and their sex ($p>0.05$), and therefore, the H0.1 hypothesis was confirmed.

As the results of the studies conducted by Ducworth (1988) on medical faculty students, Kürkçüoğlu et al. (2021) on dentistry students, Şahin and Bekir (2016) on university students, it was stated that there wasn't a significant difference between the attitudes towards disabled individuals and the grades (1st, 2nd, 3rd 4th, also 5th or 6th grades for the medical faculty students) which were the students studying at the time. Paris (1993) stated that fourth-year medical faculty students had a more positive attitude than first-year students, Lee et al. (2015) stated that fourth-year dentistry students had a more positive attitude than first, second and third year students. As a result of our study, like the studies of Ducworth (1988), Kürkçüoğlu et al. (2021), Şahin and Bekir (2016), it can be said that there wasn't a significant difference between preclinical dentistry students' perspectives on disabled individuals and their education levels ($p>0.05$) and therefore, the H0.2 hypothesis was confirmed.

When the attitudes of the university students towards disabled individuals before receiving training and their attitudes after receiving training are evaluated, studies have shown that they exhibit significantly more positive attitudes after training (Özyürek 2010; Şahin and Bekir 2016; Hodge 1998; Tait and Purdie 2000). However, our studies' findings opposed the findings of the relevant literature and thereby, a significant difference was not found in our study with regards to the perspectives of preclinical dentistry students towards disabled individuals; who attended and didn't participate in any training/seminar about disabled individuals ($p>0.05$) and therefore, the H0.3 hypothesis was validated.

When the literature is examined, Akça et al. (2022) conducted a study on adolescents, Altıparmak and Sarı (2012) conducted a study on the society in Manisa, Kürkçüoğlu et al. (2021) conducted a study on dentistry students, and all of these studies did not find a significant difference between the attitudes towards disabled individuals and their recognition situations as disabled individuals. As a result of our study and in line with the available literature, a significant difference between preclinical dentistry students' perspectives on disabled individuals and the presence situation of a disabled individual among their acquaintances was not found ($p>0.05$), and hence, the H0.4 hypothesis was confirmed.

In the study conducted both on adolescents (Akça et al. 2022) and on the society in Manisa (Altıparmak and Sarı 2012), it was stated that there wasn't a significant difference between sharing the same household with disabled individuals and the attitudes which were directed towards disabled individuals. As a result of our study, like the literature, there wasn't any significant difference between preclinical dentistry students' perspectives on disabled individuals and their living situation with a disabled individual ($p>0.05$), and thus, the H0.5 hypothesis was accepted.

A study regarding the effect of the frequency of meeting with disabled individuals over the attitudes towards disabled individuals was not found in the existing literature. As a result of our study, a statistically significant difference was found between preclinical dentistry students' perspectives towards disabled individuals and the frequency of their interactions with disabled individuals ($p<0.01$), and therefore, the H0.6 hypothesis was negated. This is due to the difference between those who never meet disabled individuals and those who meet them once in a month ($p<0.01$) and between those who meet disabled individuals once a year and those who meet them once a month ($p<0.05$). It has been determined that preclinical dentistry students who interact with disabled individuals once a month have a more positive attitude towards disabled individuals.

Disabled individuals have an important place among the patient profiles encountered by dentists. It is an important issue to evaluate the perspectives of preclinical dentistry students, who will become dentists in the future, towards

disabled individuals before they start their careers. In this regard, we evaluated the perspectives of preclinical dentistry students towards disabled individuals before moving on to their clinical internship training, within the scope of our study.

Limitations

Students who had any psychological diagnosis and were under the age of 18 weren't included in the study. This study is limited to the answers given to the survey questions by 179 preclinical dentistry students studying at Çankırı Karatekin University Faculty of Dentistry in the Fall semester of the 2023-2024 academic year.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the research, a statistically significant difference was not found between the perspectives of preclinical dentistry students towards disabled individuals and their sex, education level (what grade they are in), whether they have attended any training/seminar about disabled individuals, whether there is a disabled individual among their acquaintances, whether they live in the same house with disabled individuals. However, there was a difference in terms of the frequency of meeting with disabled individuals, and it was determined that this was due to the difference in perspectives between those who never meet with disabled individuals and those who meet with them once a month, and between those who meet disabled individuals once a year and those who meet with them once a month. This study helped us determine the perspectives of preclinical dentistry students towards disabled individuals before their clinical internship training began. We think that it would be beneficial to conduct future studies on this subject by reaching a larger number of preclinical dentistry students with the participation of different dental faculties.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

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ETHICAL STATEMENT

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Çankırı Karatekin University (10.11.2023, meeting no: 10).

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