The effect of disability awareness educational program of university students in the department of physical therapy on reducing prejudices against people with disabilities and increasing positive attitudes toward people with disabilities

Yung Keun Park, PhD1), Je Ho Kim, PhD, PT2)*

1) Department of Special Education, Sehan University, Republic of Korea
2) Department of Physical Therapy, Sehan University: 1113 Noksaek-ro, Samho-eup, Yeongam-gun, Jeollanam-do, Korea

Abstract. [Purpose] The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of disability awareness educational program of university students in the department of physical therapy on reducing prejudice against people with disabilities and increasing positive attitudes toward people with disabilities. [Participants and Methods] Students who participated in the disability awareness educational program were selected as experiment group and 15 students who did not take program were selected as control group. [Results] First, in the comparisons between the control and experimental group, there was no difference in the overall prejudice on people with disabilities and positive attitudes toward people with disabilities before the disability awareness educational program. However, there was a significant difference in the overall prejudice and positive attitudes between two groups after the disability awareness educational program. Second, in the comparisons between pretest and posttest, there was no significant difference in the overall prejudice on people with disabilities in control group. However, in the comparisons between pretest and posttest, there was a significant difference in the overall prejudice in experimental group. [Conclusion] It is necessary to provide disability awareness educational program for the university students in the department of physical therapy to reduce the overall prejudices against people with disabilities and increase positive toward people with disabilities.

Key words: Disability awareness educational program, Prejudices against people with disabilities and positive attitudes toward people with disabilities, University students in the department of physical therapy

INTRODUCTION

Prejudice against people with disabilities is widespread among professionals working in fields related to people with disabilities. Occasionally, based on their unreasonable perception toward other individuals or groups, people could have a biased emotional feeling or evaluation1). Many people misunderstand that people with disabilities have a negative self-image or devalue their abilities2). These negative social perception is understood as social prejudice and social distance, which is restraining the social integration of the people with and without disabilities. Ironically, general people officially agree that people with disabilities need to be integrated into our society, however they are hesitant to establish personal relationships with people with disabilities as colleagues, neighbors, or friends3).
As these prejudices and negative attitudes may have a negative influence in professionals working in related fields, appropriate strategies or educational program to change their perception need to be implemented\(^5\). When Students in the department of physical therapy enter their job field after graduation from university, they often meet people with disabilities as their patients. Prejudice and negative attitude toward people with disabilities is likely to have an undesirable influence on not only patients with disabilities but also physical therapists who treat them practically. Thus, in order to improve job satisfaction and quality of treatment, it is required to help students in the department of physical therapy decrease prejudices against people with disabilities and improve positive attitudes before working as professionals in the job field.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of disability awareness educational program for 16 weeks for reducing physical therapy department students’ prejudice against persons with disabilities. Through disability awareness educational program for 16 weeks, students have learned the definitions, causes, characteristics, and educational strategy of all disabilities types. The detailed purpose of this study were as follows.

1. What is the effect of disability awareness educational program for reducing physical therapy department students’ prejudice against people with disabilities?
2. What is the effect of disability awareness educational program for increasing physical therapy students’ positive attitudes toward people with disabilities?

**PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS**

In this study, 30 students of physical therapy department at S University were selected as research participants. Fifteen students who participated in the disability awareness educational program were selected as experiment group and 15 students who did not take disability awareness educational program were selected as control group. During the first class of disability awareness educational program, the researcher explained to the students about the overall 16 weeks lesson plan and the purpose of this study in relation to this disability awareness educational program. The general characteristics of the research participants participating in this study are as follows (Table 1).

In order to investigate the effect of disability awareness educational program to reduce prejudices and improve positive attitude that students in the department of physical therapy hold towards people with disabilities, the questionnaire by Yang Jieun designed to examine prejudices and attitudes towards mental disorders was modified for this purpose\(^3\).

The questionnaires was comprised of three parts: (a) demographics (b) prejudice against people with disabilities (c) attitudes toward people with disabilities. Part I of the survey include questionnaires regarding demographic data about the respondents. Part II of the survey included questionnaires regarding participants’ prejudice against people with disabilities on six prejudice variables (appearance, symptoms of disability and treatment, marital life and nurture of children, job and relationship with colleagues, performance of daily tasks, social right, NIMBY syndrome, social service and government support). The questionnaire consists of 5-point Likert scale’s questionnaires that can predict the prejudice of students against people with disabilities. Students get a high score if they have a positive acceptance response to the people with disabilities. Part III of the survey include questionnaires regarding participants’ attitudes toward people with disabilities.

In order to investigate the effects of the 16 weeks disability awareness educational program on the prejudice and positive attitudes toward the people with disabilities, students who took ‘foundation of special education class’ were selected as experiment group and students who did not take ‘foundation of special education class’ were selected as control group. Then, the pre and post questionnaire surveys were implemented to examine prejudices and attitudes toward the people with disabilities.

For this study, the researcher lectured ‘foundation of special education class’ for 3 hours a week from March to July 2017. The contents of the lesson were about the definition, causes, characteristics, and educational strategies of all disabilities types. Before the beginning of the first lecture in March, the survey for investigating the prejudices and attitudes of people with disabilities was implemented during the class orientation and the same questionnaire survey was conducted again after the 16 weeks disability awareness educational program, and then the survey results were compared. The contents of this program are as follows (Table 2). This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Sehan University (SH-IRB 2017–18) with a waiver for informed consent because the survey data were obtained anonymously.

**RESULTS**

First, in the comparisons between the experimental group and the control group, there was no difference in the overall prejudice against people with disabilities before experiment. However, after 16 weeks of foundation of special education lectures, there was a statistically significant difference in the overall prejudice against people with disabilities between the experimental group and the control group (p<0.001). Specifically, there was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of prejudice on symptom of disability and treatment, Job and relationship with colleagues, performance of daily tasks, social rights, and NIMBY syndrome before the experiment, however there was a significant difference in those variables between the two groups after the experiment.

Also, there was no significance difference in the positive attitudes of students toward people with disabilities between the experimental group and the control group before experiment. However, after taking 16 weeks of special education lectures,
there was a statistically significant difference in the positive attitudes of the students toward people with disabilities between the experimental group and the control group (p<0.05).

Second, according to the results of the comparison between the pretest and posttest, there was no significance difference in the overall prejudice against people with disabilities between the pretest and posttest in the control group. However, after 16 weeks of foundation of special education lectures, there was a statistically significant difference in the overall prejudice against people with disabilities between the pretest and posttest in the experimental group (p<0.001). Specifically, there was no significant difference between the pretest and posttest in terms of prejudice on symptom of disability and treatment and performance of daily tasks in the control group, however there was a significant difference in those variables between the pretest and posttest after the experiment.

Specific results comparing the sub-variable of prejudice between the pretest and posttest within the groups are presented in the Table 3.

### DISCUSSION

According to the results of the study, there was a difference in the degree of prejudice against people with disabilities and positive attitude between physical therapy department students who were educated about the definitions, causes, character-
istics and educational strategies of all disability types for 16 weeks and students were not educated through ‘foundation of special education’ lecture. There was no difference in the overall prejudice of physical therapy department students before beginning the education related to the understanding of disability, but the students who took 16 weeks of classes for 3 hours per week differed in the degree of prejudice compared to the students who did not take the lecture. The students who took the lecture showed differences in the prejudices about the symptoms such as the personality and the characteristics of people with disabilities, and also the prejudices related to independent living skills, social adaptation, passive attitude, responsibilities of people with disabilities\(^5\). Also, there were differences in the prejudices about the social rights of people with disabilities as well as in the prejudices about the NIMBY syndrome associated with the construction of special education school or welfare facilities\(^6\). In addition, there was difference in the positive attitudes toward people with disabilities between students who have taken lectures of foundation of special education and those who have not. Students who have taken lectures are likely to feel being able to be friends with people with disabilities, to work together, or to spend time together\(^7,8\). In conclusion, it is necessary to provide disability awareness educational program including the theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge about the definitions, causes, characteristics, and educational strategy of all disabilities types for the university students in the department of physical therapy to reduce the overall prejudices against people with disabilities and increase positive attitudes of students toward people with disabilities.

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**Conflict of interest**

None.

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