Social Work Students’ Knowledge and Attitudes toward Autism

Hannah Buckner
Jenna Kutz

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/source

https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/source/SOURCE_2020/allpresentationsandperformances/201
Social Work Students’ Knowledge and Attitudes Towards Autism
Hannah Buckner and Jenna Kutz, Winthrop University BSW Candidates
(Faculty Mentor: Dr. Monique Constance-Huggins)

Abstract
The number of children with autism is on the rise, which means that increasingly social workers must be prepared to practice with this population. In fact, it is reported that 75% of social workers work with clients who have developmental disability including autism (Haney 2018). The attitudes they hold towards people with autism will invariably shape their approaches and practice to them. Accordingly, social worker students need to build an awareness of the needs and struggles that people with autism face in society, so that they can be equipped to serve them at all levels of social work practice. Despite the significance, little is known about social workers’ knowledge, perception and attitudes toward this population. The current study seeks to address this gap by exploring the attitudes that Bachelor’s of Social Work (BSW) and Master’s of Social Work (MSW) students hold towards people with autism. These students, who are enrolled at a liberal arts university in the Spring 2020 semester, are being assessed using the Societal Attitudes towards Autism Scale (SATA). Preliminary results show variation in attitudes based on demographic and education factors. These results hold implications for social work practice.

Key Results
- Overall, social work students had positive attitudes towards people with autism.
- Attitudes varied along several factors:
  - Younger social work students (age 18-21), compared to older age groups, were more likely to strongly agree that people with autism should have the opportunity to go to college (0.029, p<0.05).
  - Older students, compared to those in a younger age group were less likely to agree that persons with autism can demonstrate negative behaviors repetitively (0.025, p<0.05).
  - Social work students who were related to persons with autism, compared to those students who were not related to persons with autism, saw that they are capable of forming relationships and being affectionate (0.007, p<0.05).

Practice Implication
There is a need for social work students to engage in general disability coursework.
- There is a need for cultural competence training on working with people who have disabilities; acceptance of social model of disability, and neurodiversity.