

Relationship between undergraduates' disability model orientation, contact with, and attitudes toward people with disabilities

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TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: Any public health professional, specifically those who work with, serve, or encounter people with disabilities

ABSTRACT: Background: Disability models are frameworks of conceptualizing the causes, nature, and treatment of disability that are thought to affect attitudes toward people with disabilities (PWD). The medical model views disability as inherently pathological with a goal to “cure” or fix the disability. In contrast, the social model views disability as socially-constructed with a goal of removing disabling barriers rather than changing the person. A well-established factor affecting attitudes toward PWD is frequency of contact, with higher contact associated with decreased prejudice. Purpose: To examine the relationship between undergraduates- model orientation, contact with, and attitudes toward PWD. Method: Approximately 1800 university students completed a survey consisting of the Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons scale, a single item assessing frequency of contact, and the Darling social and medical model scales. Results: Supporting our hypothesis, medical ($b=0.25$, $p<0.001$) and social ($b=-0.18$, $p<0.001$) model scales partially mediated the relationship between contact and attitudes, even after controlling for demographic variables. Conclusion: Medical and social model scales were stronger predictors of attitudes toward PWD than contact. A more medical and social orientation predicted negative and positive attitudes toward PWD, respectively. Results suggest that targeting disability model orientation may be a strategy to improve attitudes toward PWD.

OBJECTIVE(S):

- Explain the distinction between the medical and social models of disability
- Describe the relationship amongst undergraduates' disability model orientation, contact with, and attitudes toward people with disabilities

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