GENERAL PUBLIC ATTITUDE TOWARDS PERSON WITH DISABILITIES (PWDS) IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Society’s negative attitude towards persons with disabilities (PWDS) has been occurring since ancient times due to society’s misunderstanding and lack of knowledge on disabilities. There is a need to understand Malaysian’s general public attitude towards PWDS to implement strategies to reduce the negative attitude towards PWDS. This study aimed to investigate the Malaysian’s general public attitude toward PWDS and to determine the different levels of contact in attitude towards PWDS. Three hundred and eighty-five (n=385) general public participated in this cross-sectional study design. The online questionnaire was used to collect the participant’s demographic data and attitude in terms of affect, behaviour and cognitive subscales by using Multidimensional Attitudes Scale toward Persons with Disabilities (MAS) assessment. The sociodemographic data and the attitude of participants towards PWDS were analysed descriptively. Meanwhile, Mann-Whitney U Test was used to determine the difference between the MAS score with the level of contact. The findings of this study showed that Malaysian have a positive attitude in terms of affect, behaviour and cognitive towards PWDS. Further, there was no significant difference (p>0.05) found between levels of contact with the attitude (affect and behaviour) towards PWDS except in cognitive subscales (p<0.05). In conclusion, this study found that Malaysian have a positive attitude towards PWDS. However, the Government and NGOs should develop strategies to strengthen the Malaysian attitude towards PWDS by making them more inclusive in society.

Keywords

Attitude, Person with Disabilities (PWDS), General Public, Multidimensional Attitudes Scale toward Persons with Disabilities (MAS)

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), over a billion people which are about 15% of the world’s population have some form of disability (1). Between 110 million and 190 million adults have significant difficulties in functioning. According to the statistics obtained from the Malaysian Department of Social Welfare report in 2018, there were 488,948 persons were registered as Person with Disabilities (PWDS) which translates to 1.53% of the Malaysian population (2). Despite the Malaysian government had implemented Acts and Policies (PWD Act 2008) to secure PWDS, most of them still facing difficulties or challenges from the general public negative attitudes (3). Attitude is defined as the combination of three components: behaviour, cognitive and emotion (4). It can be divided into two groups, positive attitude and negative attitude. A positive attitude indicates indulgence or acceptance towards a person or an object while a negative attitude indicates avoidance or rejection towards a person or an object (5).
By having a negative attitude towards PWDs in the community, the general public did not consider the facilities or privileges given by the government to PWDs, which led to the misuse of facilities and unequal job opportunities (3). The employers were lacked knowledge on how to deal with PWDs, and are worried about the conflict when hiring disabled workers by having a thought of PWDs not being able to perform the task effectively compared to a worker without disabilities (6). Furthermore, the development of social model of disability were intended to highlight the social barriers faced by PWDs in the community (7). These include inaccessible education, few sign language interpreters, lack of job opportunities, inadequate disability benefits, discriminatory health and social support services, inaccessible transport, no parking places, unfriendly designed buildings for PWDs, and the devaluing of PWDs through social media such as films, television and newspapers (3). Previous study conducted found that the respondents living in Johor Bahru, Malaysia have slightly negative attitudes towards PWDs in terms of affect, cognitive and behaviour (8). However, this study just focuses on general public stay at Johor Bahru not to all states in Malaysia. It is important to understand the Malaysian’s general public attitude towards PWDs to minimise the negative attitude in the community and to raise awareness.

Thus, this study aimed to investigate attitudes towards PWDs among the Malaysian’s general public. In addition, this study intended to determine the difference between the levels of contact in attitude towards PWDs among Malaysians in subscales of affect, behaviour and cognitive. Two hypotheses postulate for this study; Malaysians have a positive level of attitude towards PWDs and there is a significant difference between the levels of contact in attitude towards PWDs. This study allows the community to understand the Malaysian’s attitude toward PWDs and the factor (level of contact) associated with their level of attitude level. Throughout this study, it raises awareness to all Malaysian’s general public about disabilities. Besides, the findings enable the government and non-government organizations (NGOs) to develop strategies to minimize the negative attitude of the general public toward PWDs. Hence, the PWD Act 2008 was able to be implemented ideally based on the current issues with its findings.

II. METHODOLOGY

Data Collection Procedure

After obtaining ethical approval (PU-IRB/ MKV/0245/510) from the Perdana University Institutional Board (PU-IRB), 385 general publics (n=385) that fulfilled inclusion and exclusion criteria were recruited for the study via purposive sampling in this cross-sectional study. The inclusion criteria include: (a) general public who doesn’t classify as PWD or hold PWD card (b) age above 18 years old; and (c) able to read and understand English, whereas the exclusion criteria include: (a) a person with a disability; (b) age below 18 years old; and (c) illiterate and does not understand English. A set of online questionnaires was disseminated via an online survey using social media (Facebook and WhatsApp) as its platform.

Instruments

A set of online questionnaires consist of 2 sections were used in this study. Section 1 involved sociodemographic data (age gender, state, education level, and level of contact). Meanwhile in Section 2 was a questionnaire from the Multidimensional Attitudes Scale toward Persons with Disabilities (MAS) with the reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of the affect is .83, the behaviour is .88 and cognition is .88 (9). The MAS assessment evaluates attitudes in a three-component construct, specifically affect, behaviour and cognitive. The affect component refers to the positive or negative emotions of an individual toward PWDs whereas; the behavioural component defines an individual's behavioural reaction toward an object or situation. The cognitive component refers to an individual's values, principles and thoughts concerning an object. The MAS is a self-report questionnaire with a vignette and a total of 34 items that needed to be answered. The 34 items were divided into three sections, Section A: affect, Section B: behaviour and Section C: cognition. The affective section consists of 16 items, the behavioural section consists of 8 items and the cognitive section consists of 10 items. The participants were asked to read the vignette before reacting to each item. All subscales were based on the Likert Scale with items answered on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). The participants needed to rate each item showing the extent to which they thought the item closely matched the way the person (Joseph) who is mentioned in the vignette, would feel, think, and act in that situation. Higher scores in each section (affect and, behaviour), indicate more negative attitudes toward PWDs. Meanwhile for the cognitive section, the higher the score indicates positive toward PWD. The self-report technique was used as the primary method of collecting data, whereby the questionnaire was provided by soft copy to the participants for them to answer the questions. Consent form would be completed by the participants who agree to participate in the study before answering the questionnaire.
Data Analysis

All the data obtained from the self-report (questionnaire) was analysed by using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). The data were analysed using descriptive and inferential analysis. The outcome from the Section 1 questionnaire which was sociodemographic data (age gender, state, education level, and level of contact) was analysed by using descriptive analysis in the form of percentage and frequency. Whereas, the result of the attitude of participants by using MAS questionnaire also be analysed by using descriptive analysis and portrayed in the table for MAS scoring section A (Affect), B (Behaviour) and C (Cognitive). Meanwhile, the Mann Whitney U test was used to test the hypothesis of this study to determine whether there is a difference between independent variables (level of contact) and dependent variables (MAS Score).

III. RESULTS

Based on Table 1, it is clear that the majority of the participants who took part in this study were participants aged 18 – 35 years old. As a percentage, it stands at 80.8% (n=311). Whereas only 15.8% (n=61) of participants aged 36 -55 and 3.4% (n=13) of participants aged 56 and above took part in this study. Females had a higher participation rate than males, 73.8% (n=284) and 26.2% (n=101) respectively. Among the 13 states and 3 federal territories of Malaysia, 30.1% (n=116) of the participants are from Johor and Selangor. On the other hand, only 17.4% (n=67) of the participants are from Kuala Lumpur. In contrast, 11 states had less than 10% of participants. For instance, there were 7.0% (n=27) of the participants from Perak, 4.4% (n=17) from Penang, 2.9% (n=11) from Sarawak, 2.1% (n=8) from Putrajaya and 1.6% (n=6) from Kelantan. Kedah, Melaka and Sabah shared the similar percentage, 1.0% (n=4) followed by Negeri Sembilan and Terengganu, 0.5% (n=2). Pahang had the least percentage with only 0.3% (n=1) of the participant. Most of the participants were employed. It stands as high as 47.0% (n=146). 37.9% (n=47) of the participants were students while 12.2% (n=181) of them were unemployed. Only 2.9% (n=11) of the participants were retired. Of the total, 42.9% (n= 165) of them have contact with PWDs, whereas 57.1% (n=220) of participants do not have physical interaction with PWDs. Of the total, 42.9% (n= 165) of them have contact with PWDs, whereas 57.1% (n=220) of participants do not have physical interaction with PWDs as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic data of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Number of participants (n)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-35</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>80.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-55</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 and above</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>73.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putrajaya</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johor</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kedah</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelantan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negeri Sembilan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 showed that 68.3%, (n=263) of participants scored less than 40 in the affect section which indicated a positive attitude. Only 31.7% of participants (n= 122) scored more than 40 which indicated a negative attitude in the affected section. Therefore, a higher number of Malaysian showing a positive attitude towards PWD in the affected category. Meanwhile, 62.3% of participants (n=240) scored less than 20 in the behaviour section which indicated a positive attitude. Only 37.6% of participants (n=145) showed a negative attitude as they scored more than 20 in the behaviour section. Hence, a higher number of Malaysian showing a positive attitude towards PWD in the behaviour category. Moreover, the majority of the participants showed a positive attitude as compared to those who showed a negative attitude in the cognitive section, with 85.5%, (n=329) and 14.6% (n=56) respectively. Therefore, a higher number of Malaysian showing a positive attitude towards PWDs in cognitive subscales.

Table 2: Attitude towards PWD by using Multidimensional Attitude Scale (MAS) level of attitude toward PWDs.
As shown in Table 3, there is no significant difference in level of attitudes (affect) between level of contact, where yes contact (Median = 2.25, n = 165) and no contact (Median = 2.13, n = 220), U = 16156.50, z = -1.85, p = 0.07, r = 0.09. Similarly, there is no significant difference in level of attitudes (behaviour) between level of contact, where yes contact (Median = 2.38, n = 165) and no contact (Median = 2.25, n = 220), U = 16397, z = -1.63, p = 0.10, r = 0.08. However, findings shown that there is significant difference in level of attitudes (cognitive) between level of contact, where yes contact (Median = 3.60, n = 165) and no contact (Median = 3.30, n = 220), U = 15278, z = -2.66, p = 0.01, r = 0.14.

Table 3: Difference between the level of contact and attitude towards PWDs score (Affect, Behaviour, Cognitive)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic variables</th>
<th>Median (Md)</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Z-score</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>r-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of contact (Affect)</td>
<td>Yes 2.25</td>
<td>205.08</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>-1.85</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No 2.13</td>
<td>183.94</td>
<td>220</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of contact (Behaviour)</td>
<td>Yes 2.28</td>
<td>203.62</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>-1.63</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No 2.25</td>
<td>185.03</td>
<td>220</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of contact (Cognitive)</td>
<td>Yes 3.60</td>
<td>210.41</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>-2.66</td>
<td>0.01*</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No 3.30</td>
<td>179.95</td>
<td>220</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mann Whitney U Test

QR=Interquartile range, n=number of participants

*significant p-value < 0.05

IV. DISCUSSION

The general findings of this study show that Malaysian have a positive attitude toward PWDs in affect, behaviour and cognitive. This finding was supported in terms of the employment scenario among PWD in Malaysia. Nowadays, many local companies, cafeterias and restaurants started to employ PWDs as their workers. For instance, Malaysia Starbucks was the first outlet in the world to hire the hearing disabled in the workplace (10). Moreover, an online system called “Sistem Penempatan Orang Kurang Upaya” or SPOKU was design based on PWD Act 2008. This system serves as a database that matches the working skills of PWDs enrolled under the system with organizations that intend to employ them. These could be actions that indicate the improvement level of awareness towards the employability and wellbeing of PWDs at the workplace. By this action, a positive message on how PWDs can live independently can be shared in the community to build a positive environment for organisations to employ PWDs (11).

Nowadays, social media is undoubtedly an important and valuable tool used to advocate and bring light to important issues such as perceptions and realities of PWDs (12). Media messages have the potential of influencing audiences in terms of their perception and behaviour (13). Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or YouTube provides a platform for public figures and influencers such as Nick Vujicic, Special Book by Special Kids to educate the public on the issues faced by PWDs. Moreover, it can break barriers faced by people with disabilities, making society more inclusive and everyday life more accessible for everyone (14). With this platform, PWDs were able to share their life, stories and thoughts through this channel. Not only that, it
brings awareness and knowledge to the public on different types of disability, how the disability affects their life (14).

The results also show there was no significant difference found between levels of contact with the attitude towards PWDs except in cognitive subscales. It indicates the general public have a positive perception and thought towards PWDs when they are exposed more to the PWDs. The results were in line with a previous study that stated people who have interaction with PWDs tend to have a more positive attitude towards PWDs as compared to those people with no interaction with PWDs (8). The level of contact will influence some individual levels of attitude towards PWDs. The general public who has no contact with PWDs tends to view PWDs as less intelligent and troublesome, whereas Malaysians with prior contact with PWDs are more likely to display positive attitudes towards PWDs (15). Individuals who have experience in contact with PWDs feel less stressed and present greater empathy when interacting with PWDs again. In other words, the more interaction with PWDs, the more understandable towards PWDs, resulting in individuals showing a positive attitude towards PWDs (16 -18).

V. CONCLUSION

The findings show that Malaysian have a positive attitude towards PWDs in terms of affect, behaviour and cognitive. Similarly, there was no significant difference found between the level of contact with the attitude towards PWDs in terms of affect and behaviour. In both affect and behaviour, participants who have physical contact with PWDs and participants who do not have physical contact with PWDs present a similar positive attitude towards PWDs. However, there was a significant difference found between levels of contact with the attitude towards PWDs in the cognitive context. The more exposed the general public with PWDs, the lesser their stigma and negative perception about PWDs. Thus, the Government and NGOs could develop strategies to strengthen the Malaysian attitude towards PWDs by making them more inclusive in society. Examples include educating the public about different types of disability and how PWDs live independently in the community through social media to change the cognitive in terms of general public stigma towards PWDs. Throughout the strategies, more Malaysians acquire knowledge about disability, know the rights of people with disabilities and accept PWDs as part of the community. The recommendation for further study perhaps able to investigate the attitude of the general public toward PWDs on the other factors in terms of age, gender, status, education level, occupation and physical conduct.

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