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Exploring Community Attitudes to People with Learning Disabilities: Using a Micro-Neighbourhood Design

Margaret Denny, Suzanne Denieffe and
Majda Pajnkihar

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Abstract

People with learning disabilities living in the community strive for meaningful social inclusion and integration. The attitudes of society to such individuals living in communities continues to be the catalyst that will enable them to achieve genuine social inclusion and integration. Identified barriers to social inclusion are a lack of change in societal attitudes towards people with learning disabilities. People with learning disabilities should live in a socially, not just functionally, integrated manner in community settings. Hence, attitudes of the community are extremely influential in achieving social integration and inclusion. It is important therefore to plan how best to capture attitudes in fact. An exemplar of a completed comparative study in Ireland, which used a micro-neighbourhood design combined with a random survey, illustrates how attitudes can be researched effectively. Study findings show that while attitudes were generally positive towards people with learning disabilities, there was no evidence of social integration, only functional integration. These findings reflect the challenges of achieving authentic social inclusion and integration and warrant further exploration by government agencies and service providers for people with learning disabilities. The study design outlined can contribute to gaining a true insight of societal attitudes.

Keywords: attitudes, community, learning disabilities, social inclusion, micro-neighbourhood

1. Introduction

Today, people with learning disabilities live in the community and strive for meaningful social inclusion [1]. The attitudes of society to such individuals living in communities continue to be the catalyst that will enable them to achieve genuine social inclusion

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