

Investigation of Psychological Counselling and Guidance Department Students' Attitudes towards Homosexuality and Disability

Yağmur Çerkez¹, Tara Yektaoğlu² & Cemaliye Direktçi³

¹ Near East University, Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance, North Cyprus.

² Near East University, Department of Special Education, North Cyprus.

³ European University of Lefke, Department of Psychological Counselling and Guidance, North Cyprus, Nicosia

Correspondence: Yağmur Çerkez, Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance, Near East University, Nicosia, North Cyprus.

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Abstract

The study investigates the difference in the attitudes of Turkish psychological counseling and guidance students towards homosexuality and people with disability in terms of educational level and gender. 161 Turkish students studying in North Cyprus have participated in the study. The findings show there is a significant difference in the attitudes towards people with disability favoring females. In addition, it was also found that, there is a significant difference in the attitudes towards homosexuality.

Keywords: homosexuality, disability, counseling, university students, Turkish

1. Introduction

There are individual differences among humans just as there are differences among all other species. Indeed, when individuals in the community are researched, it can be said that it is impossible to come across two individuals who have the same needs, interests, skills, personality traits, attitudes or values. Because of these differences, some people have difficulties or are unable to act and behave in accord of the society's expectations and norms. This situation makes it difficult for those people to adapt to society's norms, expectations, rules and roles and thereby make their acceptance by society harder. Two examples for these kinds of people are people with disabilities and homosexuals. People with disabilities are "those who up to different extents lost their physical, mental, sensorial, social abilities at birth or due to an illness or accident occurring after birth and unable to meet daily life requirements." (Saygın, 2009, p. 202). On the other hand, homosexual men and women are also exposed to stereotypical attitudes because of their sexual orientations and attitudes. These two groups of people are usually exposed to discrimination and prejudices within the society (Dökmen, 2000).

Ethical codes and standards always lead the people working in the area of psychology to work in favour of clients (Welfel, 2013). APA ethical standards clearly suggest that 'in their work-related activities, psychologists do not engage in unfair discrimination based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity culture national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or any basis proscribed by law' (APA Ethical Standard, 2002, p. 2). Therefore in order to preserve the positive atmosphere of the therapeutic process and be helpful to the clients, people working in the area of psychology have to have high awareness and acceptance towards individual differences. Carl Rogers, who put forward one of the most important and popular humanistic approaches, say that in order to create a positive relationship with the client and make the therapeutic process work, the psychological counsellor needs to show empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence (Thorne, Sanders & Carl, 2013). He even suggested that then these skills are used by the therapist, they are by their own therapeutic and have a healing effect (Denizli, 2009).

In this respect, attitudes of psychological counsellors are important for the wellbeing of clients. Attitudes can be defined in many different ways such as "an inner and neural state of readiness developing as a result of experiences that shape or dynamically affect the individual's behaviours on every object or situation it is involved"; "a covered and stimulating reaction considered to be important in society where the individual lives"; "a quite permanent system with behavioral tendencies containing experience or feeling associated factors towards a certain object, idea or person" (Freedman,

1993). Some studies have shown that different educational levels and educational institutions create significant differences in attitudes towards homosexuals (Mohr, 2013) and people with disabilities (Robinson, Martin & Thompson, 2013 ; Stachura & Garven, 2007) Moreover, studies also show that gender is an important factor creating a significant difference in the attitudes towards homosexuality (Hui, Peng & Yuanyuan, 2010; Collier, Bos & Standfort, 2012). Specifically, previous research findings indicate that that studying in science or social or administration faculties of universities creates a difference, and those who study psychology or social departments have more positive attitudes than students of other departments [Saygin, 2009; Alghazo, Dodeen & Algaryouti, 2003; Stachura, & Garven, 2007). Unfortunately, it can be said that many counsellors and counselling psychologists receive little training with regard to lesbian and gay issues (Buhrke & Douce, 1991). Moreover, some studies done with the Turkish culture show that psychological counselling and guidance department students need to engage in more in-service training to be able to deal with more different problems (Özy ürek, 2010).

In this regard, the main aim of the present study is to investigate the psychological counselling and guidance department students' attitudes towards homosexuality and disability. In this respect, this study will try to find whether there is a significant difference in the attitudes towards;

1. homosexuality in terms of gender
2. people with disability in terms of gender
3. people with disability in terms of year level
4. homosexuality in terms of year level

2. Method

2.1 Research Design and Data Analysis

Observational cross-sectional study was used in the present study. The data were analyzed using SPSS program. T-test analysis was used to determine the differences in the attitudes in terms of gender. For this reason homogeneity of variance and normality of the data requirements were fulfilled. In addition ANOVA analysis was used to find the differences in the attitudes in terms of year level.

2.2 Sample

In total the sample consisted of 161 Turkish university students studying in north Cyprus within the educational 2012-2013 spring term. 77 (%47.8) of them were females and 84 (%52.2) of them were males. The sample consisted of %15.5 first year, %37.3 second year, %28.6 third year and %18.6 fourth year university students (See Table 1).

Table 1. Demographics of Participants

		N	%
Gender	Female	77	47.8
	Male	84	52.2
Grade/Class	First	25	15.5
	Second	60	37.3
	Third	46	28.6
	Fourth	30	18.8

2.3 Research Instruments

2.3.1 Attitudes towards Persons with Disabilities Inventory (APDI): This scale was developed by Dökmen (2000) in order to determine society's attitudes towards the disabled people. This is validated scale to measure attitudes of Turkish people towards disabled people. This inventory is a five-point likert scale. The respondents answer picking one of the options provided, namely, "strongly agree" (5), "agree" (4), "undecided" (3), "disagree" (2) "strongly disagree" (1), in order to specify to what extent they agree or disagree to the statement included in each item. The Attitudes towards Persons with Disabilities Inventory consists of six factors and 43 items. The factors are educational environment,

interpersonal relationships, working life, family life, personal characteristics and competency-independent living. In the Attitudes towards Persons with Disabilities Inventory, consists of 19 negative items (1, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 28, 33, 37, 39, 40, 42, 43). Negative items in the inventory are rated by inverting them. Some of the items in this inventory are 'I do not feel any uneasiness to be on the same table with a disabled person during meal', 'Persons with disabilities are able to make decision on the way of their lives as non-disabled persons', 'I do not allow my child to play with a child with disability', 'I feel sad when persons are staring at persons with disabilities'. A high score in the APDI means positive attitudes towards persons with disabilities. In the APDI, a score for both each subscale and the whole inventory can be obtained. The lowest and the highest scores obtainable from APDI is 43 and 215. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency factors calculated to determine the reliability of the inventory are 0.56 to 0.83.

2.3.2 Attitudes towards Homosexuality Scale (AHS): Although there are other scales which measure the attitudes of heterosexuals towards gay and lesbian people (Herek, 1988), the reason for choosing this specific scale is that there is no scale which is developed or validated scale for Turkish culture. For this reason, Attitudes Towards Homosexuality and Disability Scale developed by Doğan, Doğan, Beştepe and Eker (2008) was used to determine the attitudes and knowledge of Turkish students about homosexuality. This is a 5 point Likert scale consisting of 56 items. Items 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 35, 37, 39, 41, 43, 45, 47, 52 and 56 are reverse scored. The Cronbach alpha score for the whole scale was found to be 0.92.

3. Results

Findings based on the mean scores obtained from the scales are as follows: Regarding the APDI, the observed mean score was found to be about 164. Since this mean score is closer to the positive end of the scale, this indicates that overall the participants in this study have quite positive attitudes towards disabled people. On the other hand, regarding the AHS, the observed mean score was found to be 157. This shows that overall participants in this study have neutral to negative attitudes towards homosexual people.

To see whether there is a difference between the scores of attitudes towards homosexuality and disability in terms of gender, independent sample t-test was performed (See Table 2). The findings revealed that although there was no significant difference in the attitudes towards homosexuality in terms of gender, there was a significant difference in the attitudes towards people with disability in terms of gender, $t(161) = 4.059$, $p < .01$. The Cohen's d value was found to be 0.6 which shows a medium effect size. In this respect, findings showed that females had more positive attitudes towards people with disabilities with a mean of 171.65 ± 23.66 when compared to males with a mean of 155.20 ± 27.40 .

As stated before, the attitudes towards homosexuality did not differ significantly in terms of gender, $t(161) = 1.249$, $p > .05$. The Cohen's d value was found to be 0.2 which shows a small effect size. Although the difference was not significant, females (160.40 ± 37.22) had more positive attitudes towards homosexuality than males (153.86 ± 29.05).

Table 2. T-test results of the differences in the attitudes towards homosexuality and people with disability in terms of gender

	Female (n=77)	Male (n=84)	t	p
Homosexuality	160.40±37.22	153.86±29.05	1.249	.213
Disability	171.65±23.66	155.20±27.40	4.059	.000**

** $p < .01$

In order to see whether scores of attitudes towards homosexuality and disability show difference in terms of year level, one way analysis of variance was performed. It was found that there was a significant difference in the attitudes towards homosexuality $F(3,157) = 2.786$, $p < 0.05$ (See Table 3).

Table 3. ANOVA results showing the differences in the scores of attitudes towards homosexuality and disability in terms of year level

Year Level	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	F	P
First	25	154.840	33.90	2.786	.04*
Second	60	150.616	22.37		
Third	46	156.978	42.94		
Fourth	30	171.533	31.12		

$p < .05^*$

In order to see which year levels' attitudes differed significantly, a post-hoc test was carried out. Tukey post-hoc test revealed that participants in the fourth grade showed more positive attitude towards homosexuality than second grades. The Cohen's d value for these two groups was found to be 0.7 which shows medium-large effect size. There were no significant differences between the first, third and fourth grade participants.

Attitudes towards people with disabilities did not significantly differ according to grade level, $F(3,157) = 0.609$, $p > 0.05$ (See Table 4).

Table 4. Results of the post-hoc test showing the difference in the attitudes towards homosexuality in terms of year level

	Year level	p
First	Second	.94
	Third	.99
	Fourth	.23
Second	First	.94
	Third	.75
	Fourth	.02*
Third	First	.99
	Second	.75
	Fourth	.23
Fourth	First	.23
	Second	.02*
	Third	.23

$p < .05^*$

4. Discussion

Ethical codes and standards always lead the people working in the area of psychology to work in favour of clients (Welfel, 2013). APA ethical standards clearly suggest that 'in their work-related activities, psychologists do not engage in unfair discrimination based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity culture national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or any basis proscribed by law' (APA Ethical Standard 3.01, 2002, p.2). Therefore in order to preserve the positive atmosphere of the therapeutic process and be helpful to the clients, people working in the area of psychology have to have high awareness and acceptance towards individual differences. Psychological counsellors must not approach their clients with bias and they have to show an unconditional respect to the individual differences. Within their educational processes they need to be educated to get away from prejudice and have an empathic ability along with this unconditional regard. The aim of the present study was to investigate the attitudes of psychological counselling and guidance department students towards homosexuality and people with disability.

When disability was investigated, it was found that there is a significant difference in the attitudes towards people with disability in terms of gender. It was seen that female participants have more positive attitude towards people with disabilities than males. This situation can be explained with the sociocultural differences. In the Turkish culture, women are given cultural roles requiring more sensitivity and devotion. As a result, it can be thought that women have a more positive attitude towards the people with disabilities. The attitudes towards homosexuality did not differ in terms of gender. Moreover, studies also show that gender is an important factor creating a significant difference in the attitudes towards homosexuality [Hui, Peng, Yuanyuan, 2010; Collier, Bos, Standfort 2012]. It can be discussed that this

difference is created because of the cultural roles given to women in the Turkish culture.

When year levels were compared in terms of the attitudes towards homosexuality and people with disability, it was found that there is a significant difference in the attitudes towards homosexuality. Participants of the fourth year had more positive attitudes towards homosexuality than second grade participants. This finding is consistent with the previous studies which indicate that different year levels can create difference in attitudes towards homosexuality and disability (Mohr, Chopp, Wong & 2013; Robinson, Martin & Thompson, 2007; Stachura & Garven, 2007) The result that this difference is between the second years and the fourth years may be because the first year students have just started to take the basic courses but the second year students start to take the courses about psychology. In line with this, the reason for this result can be because this group is the closest to the graduation and starting the profession therefore, they may have a lot more awareness about these issues. In this situation, the second year students can be thought as the group having their own attitudes strongly. However, the fourth year students combine their own attitudes with the professional knowledge and practical experiences; therefore they have a more flexible attitude being ready for the professional practice. However, although the fourth year students have significantly more positive attitudes than other year levels towards homosexuality, a total mean of 172 is not very high since the total score can be 280. Therefore, it can be said that fourth year students also do need to have more positive attitudes towards homosexuality. As a result, it can be said that psychological counseling and guidance department students need to engage in more in- service training to be able to deal with more different problems.

For further research, it is recommended that the studies should look at the differences in the attitudes of students between different departments. Especially, the studies done on the differences in the attitudes of education and healthcare departments will contribute to the literature because they are the closest professions to work with people with disabilities and homosexuals. Studies done in this respect will show whether the differences found in the present study are due to their cultural characteristics or to the skills they gain during their education.

The findings of the present study are limited to the psychological counselling and guidance students from Turkish culture. Since psychological counselling and guidance department receives students from all over Turkey, these findings can be generalized to the students whose mainland is Turkey, however the results cannot be generalized to the students of other cultures. In addition, the study is limited with the student sample and therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the psychological counsellors working as a practitioner.

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